



2

Using a
Past Life to
Keep a Joyful
Wife

THE REINCARNATOR
AND THE GOBLIN MAIDEN'S
HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Author
Shinten-Shinchi

Illustrator
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In order to **cure** Ana's illness,
Gino **went** to a ruin
to **search** for crystal balls
which had medical documents
stored on them.


**Ginorious
Adolni**


2

THE REINCARNATOR
AND THE GOBLIN MAIDEN'S
HAPPILY EVER AFTER


Using a
Past Life to
Keep a Joyful
Wife





"Lady Anastasia
Sevensworth!"

Kate

Anastasia

"I hereby call off
our engagement!"



I didn't care if I lived out
the rest of my days entirely
by myself.

I was much happier
than I'd ever been in
my past life.

I'd found someone
more important than
anything to me.

I'd found someone
I truly treasured.

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Chapter 1: Discovering the Truth of this World

During a Date at the Museum

Ginorious

A wise man once said that we are never so happy nor so unhappy as we imagine, but as someone who's lived two different lives, I don't think that's true. My past life was one of loneliness, reaching old age without ever being able to marry, whereas my current life was one where I'd found a kind and splendid girl to be by my side. *It's a no-brainer. My current life is far better than my past one.*

One's happiness and unhappiness weren't nearly so hard to determine as that wise man had thought. It was almost cruel how black-and-white this was. Having someone you love by your side was obviously the happier life. Or at least, this was what I felt as someone who'd experienced living both ways.

Today, I'd be going with the person I loved, Ana, to the museum. As I sat in the carriage on the way to her family's estate, I couldn't help but remember how we met. Lady Anastasia Sevensworth and I had been introduced through an arranged marriage between our families.

There were two reasons why the premier duke, with all his power and influence, had come to me, Ginorious Adolni, who was nothing more than the fourth son of a destitute viscount. The first had to do with my business, which had grown rapidly and whose success qualified me as worthy of succeeding to the Sevensworth household. However, the other reason had to do with their daughter and only child, Ana, who was under a curse.

Ana had a difficult time finding a suitor because of her looks, which were affected by her curse. Because of it, though she'd met many potential suitors, none of the meetings had resulted in an engagement—which was strange because when I finally met her, I found her to be a truly wonderful girl. But despite how elated I was about the match, she immediately suggested we call it

off. She believed that being married to her would only bring unhappiness.

When she told me this, I saw in her my past self, who'd endured all manner of hardships in my previous life due to my ugly looks. It struck me so intensely that I couldn't hold myself back and I burst out with a plea, begging her not to give up on her happiness simply because of the way she looked. I told her it was okay to be happy and that she should never give up on that goal. She didn't need to smile so sadly as if she'd given up on everything. After all, her life was only just getting started. Then, in the heat of the moment, I proposed to her, and just like that, we became engaged.

However, due to the status difference of our families, I couldn't simply marry her as the son of a viscount. I first had to be adopted into the Marquess Valvalier household, after which I moved into their estate in the royal capital.

It was at this point that I began going to school with Ana. Though the country was very status-focused, the school had become merit-based due to a power struggle between the crown prince and the first prince that had occurred while they were students not too long ago.

Despite the school being a meritocracy, grades alone didn't determine one's place in the hierarchy. Though grades were a base from which to build, one's looks, charisma, and proactiveness were all taken into account. All of this was naturally determined by the students.

In order to enforce a fair system, the school made sure that family intervention was kept to the absolute minimum. As a result, from a young age, meritocracy was drilled into these kids. The classroom they were taught in essentially became a bubble, separating them from the real world where one's value came from their status and nobility.

For someone as reserved as Ana, her standing in school wasn't very high at all, and that infuriated me to no end. After all, how could such a wonderful girl be so undervalued? So, I decided to try and change that. In the end, she rose to have the second-highest grades in our class, and was even selected as an in-school research assistant.

As her standing improved, the treatment from others did as well, and now she was surrounded by more people. Ana also changed during this time.

Despite having barely ever spoken during class, she began participating more and even asking for more important roles in our group projects.

Though most everyone had begun to treat her better, there were some exceptions, like Lady Florro and her group. Even so, Ana wasn't the same girl she'd been before. She'd grown and was able to solve her bullying problem on her own.

One time, when they messed with her embroidery tools, Ana had said that there was no helping it because of the way she looked. All I'd wanted to do was make her happy, but after seeing that resigned smile of hers, I realized I hadn't solved the fundamental problem at all. I had to lift her curse. I realized I had to work even harder than I had been.

I had an idea about the nature of Ana's curse. Most likely she suffered from severe hypermana syndrome, which was something that people who possessed a wealth of mana could be afflicted with. It caused sections of the skin to turn green and form rocklike lumps. I looked into it and confirmed that Ana had a vast amount of mana, on the same level as what my past world called Magic Monarchs.

I began gathering information on lifting curses by using the huge fortune I'd amassed by selling my rejuvenation lotion, and finally I got a lead—rumors about a legendary elixir that could supposedly cure any affliction.

This world had dungeons, and in them were mysterious magic tools known as Artifacts. This elixir was one such Artifact. As I researched the dungeons, I came across something that I couldn't believe. The shapes of these "dungeons" were similar to tall buildings from my previous world.

I'd always thought that I'd reincarnated into a different world, but now I was wondering if I'd actually reincarnated into the future. I was now heading to the museum in order to confirm this. I hadn't been able to check out any museums before because the Adolni territory didn't have any, but now that I was in the royal capital, I could visit theirs.

Ana had changed a lot. Before, she'd absolutely hated going anywhere public because of the way she was treated due to her looks. She'd especially avoided going out with her mother, who was beauty incarnate and received frequent

compliments because of it. But recently, as if to make up for lost time, Ana had been asking her mother to go out with her often. Now that she was more confident, I felt okay inviting her to the museum, and of course, she said yes. *Well then, I should be reaching the Sevensworth estate now. I'll finally be able to see Ana again! Oh, I can't wait!*

Anastasia

Sir Gino had invited me to accompany him to the museum today. Because of the curse I'd been born with, I had stonelike bumps across my body and my skin was mostly green. Even my ears had turned sharp. Due to these physical features, I'd been given the epithet "the Goblin Maiden." Because of how sad I always felt being in front of others, I'd rarely left the mansion ever since I was young.

However, that was no longer the case. Sir Gino had very sincerely told me that I should believe his words when he called me cute, and that I should begin to think of myself as cute too. He'd promised to tell me as many times as I needed until I regained my confidence.

After that, I vowed to no longer put myself down for my appearance. I would trust his words and continue to think I was cute. So long as Sir Gino thought of me as such, being bad-mouthed as the Goblin Maiden didn't bother me one bit. *Come to think of it, I've changed quite a bit thanks to Sir Gino. I remember what I was like when we first met.* Up until him, I'd received nothing but horrible words from all my potential suitors.

I'd heard cruel words over and over again. They'd all made it clear that they were not happy at the prospect of having a monster like myself as their wife. At a certain point, I'd entirely given up on achieving happiness through marriage. Even during my marriage talks with Sir Gino, I'd had no hope of it ending happily. Not only was he talented enough to earn my parents' approval, he also possessed a captivating beauty that had earned him the name of the Black-Ice Flower Prince. He had everything, and I couldn't imagine him wanting anything to do with me.

Despite that, he proposed to me. He promised to bring me happiness and

begged me not to give up. It hadn't felt real at all. Now, I was using his words as a way to move forward, endeavoring to change myself little by little. Since he treasured me so much, I was able to muster up the courage to change myself. Even now, he continued to change me little by little.

He even swore on his family name that he'd be my ally no matter what—even if I became a mass murderer, of all things. Thanks to him, I was no longer afraid of being alone, and I could even act confidently. I'd become able to make the type of embroidery I wanted to, without having to worry about what others might think. Thanks to that, I won the school embroidery contest and became an in-school research assistant. I'd also become more proactive in class and was even able to make a friend.

My once-gray world was now brilliant and sparkling, all because of Sir Gino. As I drifted through my thoughts of the past, I received notice that he had arrived. I made my way to the entrance hall to meet him while doing my best to contain my excitement.

"Ana!" Sir Gino's voice had the same lovely ring to it as always. He had the beauty of an ice sculpture and his gentle eyes were filled with sincerity. "That red coat looks great on you! Your waistcoat and dress are also very cute, and the colors make your necklace and ribbons stand out. Everything suits you so well!"

Yay! My outfit coordination earned me a compliment from Sir Gino! I couldn't help but smile. I'd tried my best to dress up because I wanted him to call me cute. The me of the past had always tried to wear plain-looking clothes and never did anything special with her hair. I'd worried that doing so, as ugly as I was, would cause displeasure to those around me. However, recently I'd been trying my best to change that habit, since Sir Gino said he liked to see me dressed up.

After arriving in the shopping district of the royal capital, we got out of our plain, unmarked carriage and went for a walk around town. I'd begun going out with my mother recently as well, but we always went to either art galleries or botanical gardens. I'd never really come to the shopping district before, so it was fun to gaze at this novel scenery with Sir Gino.

As expected, Sir Gino's beauty attracted many looks, and many of the girls we passed had their eyes fixed on him. It really made me aware of how unsuited I was for him, so I couldn't help but look down. But as soon as I realized what I was doing, I immediately straightened my back and raised my head. I'd resolved to trust in Sir Gino's words and believe that I was cute. I wouldn't look down anymore. I wouldn't let myself lose to a sense of inferiority over my looks any longer.

"Oh my, what are they doing over there?" I asked.

"Oh, that's a street performer. This is where a lot of them gather to perform. That one specifically is juggling."

Though we had people perform on our estate's stage, we'd only ever had orchestras or opera troupes. Street performers were said to be entertainment for commoners, so none of them were ever invited to the estates of nobles. This was my first time seeing them.

"So that's what it's called. This is very nostalgic. I used to do that same thing a lot."

"You juggled?"

"Yes, Bridgette and I would do that with knives."

I'd promised Sir Gino I wouldn't keep any secrets from him. Playing with knives wasn't something a proper lady would do, so I wouldn't disclose this to just anyone. However, this was Sir Gino, so I didn't mind telling him the truth.

"O-Oh, wow, with knives?"

"I was simply trying to mimic her, though, as a way of playing."

Though he seemed fairly surprised, he didn't seem genuinely disturbed whatsoever. If anything, he seemed far more concerned about the danger of it than about any of my past unladylike behavior. *Sir Gino truly is wonderful. He has such a big heart to be able to accept everything about me.*

"It's almost lunchtime. Anything you'd like to eat?"

"How about goby at the Moonflower restaurant?"

"Fish? Sounds good. But why there specifically?"

“The book *Bhairn the Assassin* takes place around here and the main character eats goby there.”

“You really do love your books. What genre is it?”

The two of us continued to talk as we made our way to the restaurant. Though there might not have been much substance to our conversation, it was incredibly fun and unforgettable.

I couldn't help but pull back slightly after seeing the dish we were served. Though I'd asked for goby, I hadn't expected to be served the fish whole, not even cut or anything. It looked exactly as it did when it was alive, and it wasn't exactly cute.

“Oh, right. This is your first time eating at a commoner restaurant. With nobles, it's normal to cut up the fish so as to not show the shape of it, but this is how it is with commoner dishes. After all, it's pretty normal for the fish you catch yourself to be small like this. For small fish you can't easily fillet, they leave them whole.”

“I'm very sorry. I had no idea this was what it would look like.”

“It's not a problem. I don't mind the way it looks at all. I love seafood.”

“Though it may be seafood, isn't its appearance quite...grotesque?”

“It doesn't bother me at all. Besides, looks don't necessarily speak to how good it tastes. There are plenty of fish, goby included, that might look ugly but their insides are very tasty. You can't go judging a fish's taste by its outsides.”

To help put me at ease, Sir Gino took the first bite. From his reaction, it must have tasted good. If anything, he even seemed surprised by how good it was, which helped reassure me.

After eating, we went to the museum. There were so many relics that had strange shapes. I had no idea what they'd been used for. There was a thrill to imagining the people from the past using these mysterious items. Just thinking about it was fun; however, Sir Gino didn't seem to feel the same. If anything, he was acting differently from usual. His expressions varied from surprise to sorrow, and he was overall much more expressive than normal. Unlike me who

was fascinated with the fantasy of these ancient objects, the emotions he regarded them with were different.

Glorious

When I arrived at the Sevensworth estate to pick up Ana so we could go to the museum together, I got out of the carriage and entered the mansion, where I waited for a bit. Soon, Ana appeared at the top of the staircase. Her face lit up as soon as she saw me.

Today, she was wearing a dress designed for walking around in. It wasn't one of her usual poofy, lavish dresses that would hide even her feet. The skirt was less wide, but it was woven with many different layers of white lace. She'd paired it with a black waistcoat and a coat with red ribbons. Her necklace was made of pearls connected by purple spinel.

Purple was a rare color, but despite that, the spinels she wore were not only high-quality but large in size as well. I had no doubt they'd cost quite the pretty penny, but the design was incredibly cute.

The entire outfit really accented Ana's adorableness. More elegant clothes looked great on her, but these kinds of charming outfits also suited her amazingly. A look of joy filled her face when she heard my compliment. *She's so cute! I can't handle it!*

I took in her outfit one more time and realized that the purple of her necklace was meant to be the color of my eyes while the black of her waistcoat was like the black of my hair. She was wearing my colors.

"Listen closely, Ana, you make sure to come home before sunset, all right? Don't be swayed by this brat! Think of every man as a ravenous wolf. *Never* let your guard down, you hear me?!" the duke was saying.

Usually Ana and I would spend time together inside the mansion, but today, we were going into the city. Perhaps worried about us being away from where he could see, the duke himself had come down to the entrance hall to give Ana a long-winded speech about what to be cautious of. Even Ana seemed annoyed by how overbearing he was being.

“If there’s any store there you find yourself interested in, let me know immediately. I’ll buy it!”

“Father! I won’t do anything shameful like that! How could you say that in front of Sir Gino?!”

After saying that, Ana and I left for the carriage to go to the shopping district, leaving her father shriveled like a plant from the shock of making Ana angry. Though she’d been going out with her mother recently, she’d never been to the shopping district. She’d only ever been to art museums and what we’d have called botanical gardens in my past life. In other words, she’d only ever been to places for nobles. She’d never been to a district for commoners like this one.

There were many street performers along the main road. In this country, there was no restriction on the type of performance one could do in the streets. Though most citizens could be arrested if they criticized the royal family in a public place like a tavern, troubadours were allowed to mock them as much as they liked. It was one of the very few ways of openly criticizing nobles, so it was a very common theme in troubadour songs.

I heard a few of them singing about Ana, so I immediately took her hand and led her away from there. Though it was a song about her earning the position of in-school research assistant, they’d used her epithet, the Goblin Maiden, so I didn’t want her to hear that.

“Oh wow! It’s a bear mask!”

An outdoor stall that sold masks had drawn Ana in. She really liked the stylized, cartoony bears. She was so cute with her love for them that I couldn’t help but smile.

“I’ll take one of those,” I said to the stall owner.

At first, Ana was hesitant to accept it, but in the end, she happily held it against her chest. She’d also been surprised by my taking out my wallet. Nobles didn’t typically pay for things themselves. They’d have their servants do it for them or their retainers would show the family crest and forward payment later. Either way, payment was a servant’s job. Ana had never seen any coin lesser than a silver, so she very curiously peeked into my wallet. *She’s so cute. Truly, so cute.*

For lunch, we went to a seafood restaurant at Ana's request. Apparently, it was the same restaurant that was in a book she'd read not too long ago, and the description of the food was so good that she'd wanted to give it a try. Unfortunately, it was a restaurant geared toward commoners.

For noble dining, it was extremely rare for a fish to be served without being cut. In fact, it'd often come in such a way that you wouldn't even know what kind of fish it was. They'd also typically eat bigger fish, while commoners ate smaller ones. So, in typical fashion for a commoner's restaurant, the fish we ordered came not cut at all.

Though Ana was put off by the fish, I wasn't bothered whatsoever. I'd eaten plenty of grilled fish in my past life, so in order to show Ana that there was nothing to be worried about, I took the lead and ate it.

After lunch, it was finally time for the museum. After stepping out of the carriage, Ana and I gazed at the building for a few minutes. It was located outside the shopping district in a quiet area. It had two floors and was built with bricks, and had been here for quite some time. On the outer walls, they had wooden trellises with morning glories growing through. These purple flowers were in bloom and reached all the way to the upper walls.

"I think the morning glories are a wonderful choice. Having an historical building like this paired with a fresh and youthful annual flower really evokes a harmonious feeling. Having an old building paired with vines is also a great way to feel the flow of time, but I do so enjoy this combination as well."

Ana liked the flowers, and so did I. The old building paired with the vibrant morning glories might have seemed like it would clash, but it was strangely balanced. In my previous life when I was in my older years, I never thought that my sentiments would match someone in their teens, but it seemed that our thoughts unexpectedly aligned, and it was all thanks to Ana.

In wanting to be closer to Ana, I'd learned about the kinds of paintings and embroidery she liked, and even the kinds of books that touched her heart the most. I experienced and appreciated all of the things that Ana loved. Interestingly enough, even the things I'd been indifferent about became things I liked if Ana said she liked them. Everything she said was good became good in

my eyes as well. Despite having the mentality and entrenched opinions of an old person, just being near Ana let me find the fun in so many things.

I was right! I was so close to screaming this out loud. Everything in this museum was a gadget I'd known from my past life.

"The people of old were quite amazing for developing technology this small that could seal monsters away," Ana said, admiring what had been known in my world as a "magic rice cooker."

In this world, its use had been debated for many years, but finally, in year 288 of this country's history, they'd come to a consensus after discovering documents in the "dual towers." The documents depicted a monster with green skin that understood human speech, being sealed by this magic tool. Because of that, it became clear that this magic tool was a device used to seal away powerful monsters.

In modern times, the magic tool was named the Pikkell Sealing Magic Tool after the man who'd discovered it, Professor Robert Pikkell. The monster depicted in the ancient documents had also been dubbed Pikkell's Great Demon Lord.

I'm...so confused. What "documents" were they looking at? This is just a normal magic tool that cooks rice. How could it seal away monsters? That being said, I couldn't fault scholars for misunderstanding. In the age I'd lived in, all the operation manuals were on our phones. There weren't any paper ones anymore. In general, paper was only really used by enthusiasts. Manga, books, and virtually everything else had migrated to digital platforms. However, in present times, they didn't have phones like we'd had, so reading the manual that came with this rice cooker would be impossible.

Oh, and this is a phone made by Sharck. Sheesh, that's nostalgic. My mom had owned the same model. I couldn't even count how many times I had to tell her the same things over and over again because she didn't know how to use it. She was helpless when it came to her camera. Whenever she'd try to take a selfie, she'd always flip her phone around to use the camera on the back. Because of that, whenever she'd send pictures, her face would always be in the corner of

the shot. When she passed away, I asked for her phone. Sometimes I'd turn it on and remember her.

The museum was filled with many such nostalgic items. The memories of people I could no longer see kept vividly popping up in my head, so I had trouble maintaining a conversation with Ana. Even so, Ana didn't seem displeased at all. She simply continued to smile beside me. She was truly as gentle as the spring breeze.

"Oh, look at all the boats, Sir Gino," Ana gasped with wonder, smiling from ear to ear.

After finishing with the museum, we decided to go to the royal capital's central market, and we'd stopped on a bridge over the river that cut through the commoner's area. The river was the lifeblood of the flow of goods to the royal capital since it went all the way to the central market. It was no wonder there were so many boats traveling down it.

In general, if one were going to the central market, taking a boat was the fastest way to get there. Ana seemed very interested in riding in one, so we got out of the carriage to do so. We rented a small boat for two from a shop. Boat services like these had drop-off facilities, which came in handy for when you had a lot of things, making it a service that commoners used a lot.

In contrast, nobles rarely used boats and primarily traveled by carriage throughout the city. This was also my first time riding a boat in the royal capital. This part of the city was filled with people, so every last bit of space was used as efficiently as possible. Seeing buildings right on the river reminded me of Venice from my past life. Ana seemed to be having a good time and was looking all around, possibly because seeing the townscape from the river was new for her. She was acting incredibly cute.

As we began to pass under the bridge, the eyes of the large crowd atop it watched us. If this were the Ana of the past, she'd immediately look down and try to hide her face, but now she gracefully straightened her back and gently smiled, not letting herself be affected by the stares. *Seriously, is there no end to how wonderful she is?*

Suddenly, she giggled as I rowed. “This really reminds me of the last time we were on a boat together. You took me out to the lake on a boat ride just like this.”

“Oh yeah, that was fun and is a very precious memory of mine.”

“Mine too. I’ll always remember what happened at the lake...forever.” She gently touched the ring on her left hand as if it was very precious.

It was the very same ring I’d given her that day at the lake. Bridgette had told me that when giving a ring, one’s feelings must also be conveyed. But even so, I hadn’t had the confidence that I could actually put into words my feelings for her. So that’s why instead, I put my feelings into a shape, forming the design of the ring—the white-violet Gemini starflower she liked so much. In the language of flowers, it meant eternal love. I could feel my face getting warm thinking about it. I glanced at Ana, and she’d also gone red and was looking down. I continued rowing the boat in silence.

“Oh, my. I’ve never seen this fruit before,” Ana said with surprise as we browsed the candied fruits displayed in the central market.

“That one’s mountain hawthorn, and over there’s a mayflower.”

“Oh my, candy can be made from mayflower fruit?”

“Yeah, there’s a candy called tanghulu. My sister actually likes it too. When I was still a part of the Adolni family, she’d always tell me to buy her some on my way home from my company.”

Mountain hawthorn berries looked somewhat similar to apples but were the size of cherry tomatoes. Ana was looking at a skewer with about six bright red hawthorn berries on it. But it also had been coated in candied syrup.

To nobles, mountain hawthorn was nothing more than an ingredient for medicine or alcohol, but to commoners, it was a dessert. That being said, it was as sour as lemon, so eating it by itself wasn’t too tasty. That was why usually you’d coat it in syrup like this, almost like a candied apple.

“Hm...” Ana tilted her head very cutely as she fretted over something. “I’m wondering if I should try the tanghulu or the blini we saw earlier.”

Despite being the daughter of the Sevensworths with their unfathomable wealth, she was worrying over what dessert to buy. However, this was just how Ana was. She would only buy expensive jewelry when she needed to fit her family's image. She wouldn't spend excessively if she didn't need to. Thus, in this situation, she also wouldn't waste money on food she wouldn't be able to finish.

"How about this? I'll get the tanghulu, and you get the blini. We can share them so we can try both."

Blini were similar to crepes. What Ana was planning on buying used fish eggs, mushrooms, and smoked meats as its filling. We were told by somebody at the stall that it was the specialty dish of this marketplace.

Ultimately, Ana agreed to my idea to each order one thing and then split them. Walking while eating was still too much of a departure from proper etiquette for the daughter of a duke like Ana, so we stopped to sit on a bench at a resting area to eat. The very act of eating with her hands instead of cutlery was a huge leap for her.

The tanghulu had the same kind of juicy texture as the berry of the mountain hawthorn, plus the same nice crunch of the candy coating. It was a match made in heaven. It had a unique taste similar to an apple but much more sour. Since the syrup was a lot sweeter than most things, the pairing was simply sublime. *It's really good. No wonder it's so popular with commoner ladies.*

"Oh, tasty!" Ana said, amazed after taking a bite of the blini.

It was living up to its name as a specialty. The finely sliced mushrooms and smoked meats paired with the fish eggs and topped with cultured cream did look pretty good.



After eating about half of the tanghulu, I gave the other half to Ana while she gave me the remaining half of her blini. As I looked at it, something dawned on me. *W-Wait, is this...an indirect k-k-kiss?!* When I was still a part of the Adolni family, I used to go to the market with my sister a lot. She'd do things like bite the candy I was holding or give me the leftovers of her snack. Sharing food was second nature to us, so I hadn't even thought of the huge problem until now.

"Sorry, Ana, I almost made a blunder and let you eat something my mouth has touched. I'll buy you a new one."

"I-I-It's okay." Ana looked flustered and had gone red to her ears.

"You don't need to push yourself."

"Y-You d-did this with your sister, right? Exchanging food..."

Ana had been corresponding with my sister through letters and they'd gotten very close in what felt like the blink of an eye.

"Well, yeah, we'd do that when we were kids."

"Th-Th-Then I will as well!"

Since Ana rejected my offer to buy her a new one, we ate the half-eaten portions we'd exchanged. In my past life, I'd been so ugly that girls hated just the mere sight of me. Before I realized it, I'd actively tried to avoid women altogether. I'd done that for decades in my past life, so it became a habit even in this world to avoid women other than my family.

Despite that, here I was, having my first indirect kiss. Then again, we *had* actually kissed... I began remembering my first kiss with Ana. I could feel my face burning, and I fought the urge to scream and roll around on the ground in embarrassment. Even now I couldn't figure out how I'd accomplished that. It didn't feel real at all. Part of me couldn't help but think that it'd all been just a hallucination.

Before I knew it, I'd finished the blini. We hadn't exchanged any further words as we sat on the bench. I had no clue what kind of face Ana was making because I was too embarrassed to look her way.

After I returned to my room at the Valvalier estate, I began thinking about how all the items that I'd seen at the museum were the same ones I'd known in my past life. *There's a very high possibility that this is indeed the future and not a different world entirely.*

Thinking about it, the pronunciation of words wasn't too different from my past life. They measured length in metres and kilrometres, which was very similar to meters and kilometers, and equivalent lengths as well. Judging by the location of where the Skytree was found, the Cantoll region of the Liebeh Kingdom was probably the Kanto region of my past world. Though the languages here were different, there were many words that sounded similar to Japanese.

There were other similarities. For example, a day was twenty-four hours and a year was twelve months. Though their shapes were a little different, the cutlery of this world resembled that of my past life. There were also parallels between our cultures that I could cite.

If this was truly the future and not a different world, the chances of me lifting Ana's curse rose dramatically. In my past life, there were established treatments for almost all of the mana disorders, and among all the buried relics, there surely had to be medical documents detailing the diagnosis and treatment of severe hypermana syndrome. The most likely places to find something like that would be in one of the larger hospitals, a medical or pharmacy school, a medical research facility, or a large library.

Though I wasn't very familiar with the neighboring countries, I knew about the Cantoll region in the Liebeh Kingdom, and I knew the location of the Skytree and other landmarks. Using those, I could probably figure out the approximate locations of the buried medical schools. If I could dig them up, I might possibly find documents that would help me cure Ana.

But even so, it was too early to definitively say that this was the world of the future. There were some glaring differences, making me unable to fully discount the possibility of this being a different world after all.

If this wasn't the future, then it'd be a waste of time to go to the Cantoll region. It'd also mean that I'd have to search for a different way to lift Ana's

curse.

There were many signs still pointing to this being a different world, the first of which having to do with the location of the Skytree. Japan had been an island country, but the Skytree was currently surrounded by nothing but land.

In my past life, the movement of the tectonic plates had been predicted to eventually render Japan landlocked. That being said, it was hard to believe that the current state of the land was due to that.

Japan had a lot of earthquakes, so it had been a law that any tall buildings had to have powerful preservation magic cast on them. Thinking about it logically, the strongest preservation magic could last tens of thousands of years. But for Japan to have become landlocked due to the movement of tectonic plates, it would've had to occur over the course of hundreds of millions of years.

All the paintings I'd seen of these buildings showed that there hadn't been any degradation at all. They looked exactly like I remembered them. I wasn't sure if that was because of the preservation magic or because not much time had passed since the magic had worn off. Either way, a hundred million years had not passed.

Hm... Maybe this was the work of the Earth Monarch. If it was them, then they could easily have made Japan landlocked. They could've even buried the entire country if they so felt like it. Things would make sense if this had all been due to the Earth Monarch. It'd even explain why most of the dungeons were underground.

Up until now, I'd thought that dungeons were underground facilities to begin with, but if the Earth Monarch had buried entire cities, then it'd make sense why the dungeons, which were actually tall buildings, had many floors extending down, with only the top of them protruding from the ground. The Skytree had been over six hundred meters tall in my past life, but it was only about half that height in this world.

There was also the question of race. Back in my past life, everyone who lived in this area had been East Asian, but the people here looked closer to Western European. Lady Hiller, the girl who'd been coerced into bullying Ana in school, had East Asian features, but she was one of the very few who did.

Hm. Now that I think about it, even in my past life's history, there were records of a great migration that occurred over the course of at least two millennia. If enough time had passed, then it'd be more unnatural for there not to have been another similar migration at some point. This world had records of many migrations, more frequent and on a larger scale than anything recorded in my past life, due to people trying to escape from monsters. Through those, it was possible that the Western Europeans had moved to the East.

However, aside from those things, there was one much more glaring difference that pointed toward this world being a different one entirely—monsters. The reason I'd never even considered the possibility that this was merely the future was because of the monsters. Those hadn't existed at all in my past world. Humans had been at the top of the food chain. But in this world, there were many areas that humans did not control, and even in the ones they did, monsters still posed a threat.

I had very little information on monsters, and not nearly enough to start forming any theories. My company had branches in all the major cities in the country, and there was always the risk of attacks on the road when transferring products or money, though it was significantly lower around the royal capital or along the roads connecting the major cities. Since these trade routes greatly affected the economy, knights would periodically travel the routes and clear any dangers.

Though my company's carriages had been attacked on multiple occasions, it happened once every few months at most. Running into monsters on these roads was just a stroke of bad luck. The only time I'd ever personally come into contact with a monster was in the mountains when I was trying to find a black-ice flower.

It was obvious that I was lacking knowledge about monsters. The best way to get more information was from the experts—in this case, the adventurers' guild. *I'll stop by tomorrow. If I learn more about them, I might be able to determine whether this really is a different world or just the future. I'll base my strategy for curing Ana on that.*

The following day, I made a visit to the adventurers' guild in the royal capital.

Most would picture the guild being filled with rough types, but all the employees I saw were in business attire and working silently at their desks. Judging by the hush over the room, I could tell that they were all pretty straitlaced people here.

When I told the guild clerk that I wanted to take a look at their documents relating to monsters, she took me to their documents room and even prepared tea and snacks for me. Most likely, she was treating me well due to my merchant attire. Merchants and nobles were considered customers of the guild.

“Hey, aren’t ya treatin’ him better than me?” a guy who looked like an adventurer asked the clerks with a wry smile.

They hadn’t given him any refreshments, but that was just how they treated adventurers. To the guild, they were subcontractors.

“Have you looked in a mirror?”

“Seriously. Have some self-awareness.”

Two of the clerks responded to the man in joking, friendly tones. Then the three of them laughed as they proceeded to lightly poke fun at each other. I’d thought from their quiet demeanor that they were all very businesslike here, but there seemed to be some good-humored people as well.

I began selecting several volumes of records at random, finding documents regarding goblins and dragons, the various habitats and materials of monsters like orcs and ogres, and even different strategies for defeating a variety of monsters. Most of the creature descriptions came with illustrations, but as expected, I didn’t recognize any of them from my past life.

No matter how I thought about it, even when taking the Skytree’s preservation magic into account, there was no way twenty thousand years had passed. It was hard to believe that in less than twenty thousand years, so many different types of monsters had come into existence. It was starting to seem more likely that this was a different world entirely.

“Hey, what’s with the long face?”

As I leaned back in my chair and folded my arms to think, I heard a voice call out to me. When I looked up, I saw that it was the same adventurer who’d been

talking to the guild clerks. *He looks to be in his thirties.* He had a crew cut and was very muscular, with a collection of scars on his face. He looked like a veteran adventurer.

“I was thinking about monsters and what they even are in the first place.”

“Hm... You’re thinkin’ about some difficult things. Wanna ask me some questions? I’m gonna ace the exam for gold-class tomorrow. But just remember, you’re askin’ an expert for his opinion. It’s gonna cost you.”

He rubbed his middle and index fingers against his thumb in the gesture for money while winking at me. *He must have come to the royal capital to take the advancement exam for adventurers. If he’s hanging around here, I’m guessing he’s doing some studying before his test tomorrow.* If he was in arms reach of gold-class, he must’ve been quite skilled. And if he was using his break from studying as an opportunity to make a little coin, he must be fairly business-savvy as well.

Hm, this might be a good chance to speak with someone who’s actually taken on monsters. Plus, I might get another clue about what exactly they are if I hear it directly from a veteran like him. Besides, regardless of whether this is the future or a different world, in the end, I’m still looking for an Artifact to help lift Ana’s curse. One way or another, I’d have to face a monster or two, so there was no harm in getting more information about them.

“Okay then, you have a deal. Tell me everything you know about monsters,” I said, flicking a gold coin to the guy.

If I were dealing with a noble, I would never flick a coin like this, but since I was among commoners, I decided to act like one.

“Wh-Whoa, a gold coin? Usually the going price for information’s at most a bronze.”

“I know. But I also know that adventurers deal in trust. The more I pay, the harder you’ll try to make it worth my while, right?”

I knew this much from the times I’d contracted adventurers to serve as guards for my company’s carriages.

“Ya got me there,” the man said, scratching his head. “Well, where do I start?”

You're wonderin' about what monsters are, right? Well, do you know the difference between monsters and animals?"

"Monsters are violent and much more dangerous than animals."

That was about the extent of what I'd learned in school. It wasn't a topic we usually needed to know too much about since most of the students there would go on to serve in the royal court. There, knights were pretty much the only people who encountered monsters. Outside of that, if anyone had an encounter with a monster, it would only involve them watching from the sidelines as their security detail dealt with them. In order to learn about monsters at our school, one would have to take a practical class, and I hadn't.

"Do you know what makes them violent and dangerous?"

"Not specifically."

"Then I'll start there. When a monster catches sight of a human, no hesitation, they go to attack them immediately. Though animals might also attack humans, their motives are completely different. For predators, they're only doing it for a meal—to feed themselves. But see, monsters aren't attacking people for food. Regardless of whether they're full, in the middle of a meal, or injured, they'll immediately attack a human on sight. That's not all, though. Animals also only attack within their own territory. If we run outside the boundary, they'll give up because it'd mean entering a different animal's territory. It'd risk putting themselves in danger, so they avoid that. But monsters are different. They'll chase humans over any barrier, just to kill them."

"Just for that?"

"Yep. There are monsters that eat humans, and others that don't. Herbivore monsters won't eat us, but even they'll attack on sight. Even if the human runs far out of their territory, they'll keep chasing 'em. The fact that they hunt humans is the major difference between them and animals."

It sounds familiar somehow. In my past life there'd been animals bred specifically for battle that were called war beasts. There were also war golems, but those were expensive to purchase and maintain, and training military mages to make them was even more costly.

If a nation wasn't wealthy, they wouldn't have the funds for such expensive equipment, which was where the war beasts came into play. As long as they had the food and time to breed them, it was a cheap investment for a huge boost in power.

The war beasts came with many problems, though. Just using standard war beasts without any modifications carried the risk of them indiscriminately attacking anyone who didn't have the allied transmission signal. But if your objective was to simply eradicate the enemy regardless of if there were civilians or not, then the beasts were very cost-effective. It was a popular method in developing countries that had a lot of ethnic wars.

They'd be no use to their masters if they weren't solely focused on killing enemy soldiers, so the war beasts were bred with biomagic technology to increase their bloodlust.

The monsters in this world were exactly like the standard war beasts I knew of in regard to their nature, but different in terms of appearance. Lindwurm, marchosias, werewolf, gozu, bodkin... The war beasts I remembered were all similar to the creatures of old legends. However, the monsters in this world didn't look anything like them.

There was another difference regarding how they fought. In my past life, magic had been greatly developed and even the war beasts were able to wield it. For example, the wings of a marchosias could shoot fire bullets with enough heat to burn holes through rock. In comparison, the monsters here only used physical attacks.

In my past life where magic use was common, by using body fortification magic, even high school girls could run faster than horses. Long-range attacks with magic were also possible. Despite having more muscles than humans, the lack of magic made the monsters of this world a great deal weaker than the average high school girl of my past life. It was probably that and the huge difference in appearance that had prevented me until now from making the connection to them possibly being the same military beasts from my previous life.

"Well, I don't think you got your money's worth from that information, so I'll

give you an extra tip,” he said, moving his chair closer to me so he could whisper in my ear. “I know someone who’s come back alive from the Winged Wolf Forest.”

“Really?!”

“Shh! Keep it down!” he urged me.

The Winged Wolf Forest was a remote location that had a zero percent chance of survival. It was rare for anybody, even adventurers, to go there. Most adventurers would stick to the areas around major cities with fewer monsters.

High-level adventurers might begin going to areas with more monster activity, because while there was a higher risk of being attacked by a pack of them, the potential reward was also much greater. It was worth noting that a country’s remote areas weren’t determined by their proximity to the border, but by how possible it was for humans to survive there. The Winged Wolf Forest was a little west of the country’s center and was known as a remote area.

Even the high-level adventurers didn’t venture into the Winged Wolf Forest. If anyone did dare to go into this extremely dangerous place, they’d be people who wanted to try taking on the dungeon. It was also one of the dungeons that I thought the elixir might be in. *I’d love to hear from this survivor! Paying this adventurer a gold coin really was the right call!*

“But anything further about this guy’s gonna cost you more than just one gold coin. You good with that?”

Of course I’ll pay more. This kind of firsthand information isn’t something you just give out; otherwise, other people might use it to clear the dungeon before you. I can only assume this will cost a good amount of money. Even the books in the Sevensworth library at most said that the forest housed powerful monsters, but nothing beyond that. There was no information about the types of monsters, or the scale of the environment they inhabited, or the layout of the ruins. This kind of valuable information usually wasn’t shared.

“I’ll pay them a great platinum coin for that information, and a platinum coin to you for introducing me.”

“A-A great platinum?!”

“Shh! Keep it down!”

“Whoops. My bad.”

It was my turn to shush him. A great platinum coin was enough to buy a mansion on the same scale as a wealthy baron or viscount. It wasn't something I could pay out of the profits of my company, but with all the money I was getting each month from my lotion sales through my mother-in-law, I had enough money to rival a country's GDP.

The adventurer accepted my offer and then hesitantly spoke. “Um...are you perhaps a noble?” His tone had changed, becoming more nervous and obsequious.

“Yes, I am, but I'm here as a merchant. No need to treat me any differently.”

Despite me saying that, he still insisted on being polite to me, unable to shake his nerves. Eventually I requested directly that he stop speaking so formally and he reluctantly ceased.

Thanks to the adventurer, I was able to meet with the survivor of the Winged Wolf Forest. He lived in the royal capital and used a cane to get around. He'd retired from adventuring and was currently helping with his family's blacksmithing business. He guided me to a room with a plain, uneven table where we sat while the adventurer I'd paid to introduce us waited outside since this would be a private conversation.

“I don't think I can give you any information worth a great platinum coin...” he said with an apologetic smile.

He was a veteran adventurer who'd specialized in dungeons, and it seemed that he was still an adventurer at his core since he wanted to give me information worth the price I paid. He did his best to start from the beginning and went into as much detail as he could. As expected, the Winged Wolf Forest was filled with winged wolves. He even described the place where his party had been wiped out.

“Right before we could get to the dungeon, *it* appeared. Winged wolves are usually gray, but this one was black and had white feathers. As soon as it spread

its wings, it shot out fireballs.”

“What?!”

Before I knew it, I’d leaped to my feet. Winged wolves got their name not because they had wings, but because they had protuberances on either side that stretched down their backs. The ones I’d seen in the mountains near the royal capital were just like that. However, the winged wolf he described actually had wings, *and* it was able to shoot out fireballs from them. *That’s a marchosias!*

Not just any beast could use magic. If anything else tried to produce the same fireball as a marchosias, it’d have to be able to produce the exact same kind of mana and chi combination. But even then, that wouldn’t be enough. Most creatures didn’t have high intelligence, so trying to form a complicated magic circuit on their own, with the appropriate mix of chi and mana to form the spell, was impossible.

If someone wanted to alter a creature to use magic, they’d have to alter their magic circuits and make a special organ that could produce both chi and mana of specific wavelengths that were exactly like that of a marchosias. They didn’t use their wings to fly but specifically as an organ to produce and shoot fireballs. The odds were incredibly slim that a similar creature with the exact same wings and the exact same magic as a marchosias from my past life had organically come to exist here. *Could the winged wolves really have just evolved from the same marchosias war beasts I knew? Are the winged wolves with actual wings returning to the form that their ancestors had?*

“Yeah, it’s pretty unbelievable, isn’t it? But I’m telling the truth. It was an aberration that could not only use extremely rare magic, but had abnormal strength too.”

It wasn’t exactly common knowledge, but in the remote areas where monsters roamed free, there were creatures that were aberrations. More specifically, these places were uninhabitable because of these powerful aberrations. The man showed me the burns he’d gotten from the fireballs. He had a keloid scar close to his knee, which had made a cane necessary due to the muscle damage and cramping it caused.

I began thinking about how a marchosias's fireball was powerful enough to burn through rock. If the human body came into contact with it, their blood would boil and they'd die. There was no way one could simply get lucky and escape with just a keloid scar.

Oh, wait. Maintenance. War beasts needed maintenance. I could remember the news talking often about the high costs of it. Then I suddenly recalled a conversation I'd had with one of my colleagues, a guy very much into all things military.

All war beasts had been made to look similar to the legendary creatures they were based off of. When I'd asked him why that was, he'd told me they were easier to market that way. As a marketing strategy, they'd paid special attention to the beasts' appearances, sometimes even to the detriment of functionality. They pushed what was logistically feasible in order to feed consumer desire by making them look a certain way, which made maintenance essential, otherwise the looks of the war beasts might start to change significantly.

The majority of people in the engineering field were enthusiasts of some kind or another, and once you got them talking about that one special topic, they'd eagerly talk your ear off in excruciating detail. My coworker was no different and would always happily chatter on and on. In my past life I'd gotten fed up with it, but now, I felt grateful for his rants because they were coming in handy. *You really never know what'll become useful to you in life.*

"I'd also like to show you this."

He put a leather bag on the table. Inside it were relics from the dungeon, which included documents relating to the dungeon's layout. His party's plan had been to bring back what they could and then use these as references for the next time they explored it. Unfortunately, there was no next time for them.

He took out relic after relic and laid them on the table, which turned out to be figures of some kind of anime character and acrylic key holders. *Does that mean that the dungeon was some kind of shop for that stuff? Or was it the room of some kind of collector?*

"Wait, that's—!"

I found myself shooting to my feet again because of a book he'd pulled out. I

could read the title of the book. *Still Human*. I picked it up and looked at the publication information. It was published by the Marukawa company. I'd heard of them in my past life. It'd also been published in Tokyo's Chiyoda district, which I knew too. I scanned my eyes over the opening passages and I became absolutely certain this was the same book I'd known about in my past life.

The novel followed the life of an unlucky protagonist who gains an overpowered skill called "Trickster" and becomes invincible. It was one of those power fantasy series. When it was first released, it hadn't been very well regarded, but as time passed, it became a classic.

There were also more traditional books like *The Shining Tale of Genji* that used a classical Japanese poetry style, which had been looked down upon at the time for being lowbrow. Then there were novels from the times when it was more mainstream to write about historical figures by using fake names and simple language, like *I Am a Bat*. It was another title that hadn't been well received initially but in later years became revered as a refined form of entertainment. Just like *Still Human*, I only knew about this book through the textbooks I'd read.

Either way, there was no doubt in my mind anymore as I gazed at the books I knew from my past life. This was the future. Still, it was hard to fathom that the true identity of the monsters was the military beasts. The people in this world couldn't even live peacefully with the threat of monsters. Humans had erected large walls around their cities, and villagers dug wide trenches to protect their farms. There was nobody in this world who didn't hold a fear of the monsters.

Every year, there were people who died from monster attacks outside the cities, and the knights and adventurers put their lives on the line every day to fight them. It was ironic that the very thing that threatened the humans of this age had been created by humans of the past. The chickens were coming home to roost.

At any rate, if this was truly the future, then the elixir was most likely nothing more than a tall tale. Even if it were possible for buildings to last tens of thousands of years thanks to the progress of magic technology, in the Japan of the past, most buildings were updated or rebuilt every few decades. Since the construction industry had been strong supporters of the political party in

power, their jobs were guaranteed through laws that forced buildings to be reconstructed periodically. The fact that the Skytree looked exactly the same as I remembered must've meant that the world fell to ruin several decades after I'd passed.

In my past life there'd been no such thing as a panacea. There'd only been various treatment methods and drugs specific to different ailments. It was doubtful that in the few decades I'd been dead, they suddenly discovered some kind of miracle drug.

Though the prospects of the elixir existing were grim, there was something else to be hopeful for now. In my past life, there was an established treatment method for hypermana syndrome, and the documents detailing it were most likely hidden in one of these dungeons.

There were probably more aberrations near the dungeons, but they wouldn't be a problem, especially not with my body fortification magic. The people of this time couldn't use it, which was why they feared the monsters, but with all the magic I had access to, aberrations didn't scare me at all. After all, I'd worked as a golem engineer for many years. I could easily make a security golem to fight against any monster. Now that I had a clear path forward toward lifting Ana's curse, I felt reinvigorated.

Anastasia

I'd arrived at the classroom with Sir Gino, but he soon went with Sir Anthony to the faculty office. He'd been in the middle of moving the books from his bag into his desk, so his bag was open and I could see inside. Recently, books had started having their titles printed on their spines, and I could see several in his bag that were like that. Though snooping like this was not very ladylike, I couldn't help myself. The titles were *Stunningly Easy Conversation: How to Easily Speak with Women*, *Twenty Lessons on How to Wisen Up Your Conversations with Women*, and *Tips and Tricks on How to Speak with Women from a Charismatic Gentleman*.

Was he perhaps worried about conversing with women? It was true that he rarely initiated conversation with them. If they initiated, he'd speak with them,

but the topic of discussion would never go past social pleasantries. In this class, we'd call those of the opposite sex by their given names; however, Sir Gino was the only one who called the ladies by their family names.

The only ladies that Sir Gino would speak with outside of social contexts were his family members, Bridgette, myself, and maybe my mother. Granted, I was aware that he was interacting with her as a family member too. I wasn't fond of the idea of Sir Gino getting closer with other ladies, but if his inability to interact with them was truly a worry of his, then I wanted to assist him in any way I could.

"Sir Gino, is there something you're perhaps worried about?" I asked when we were alone, traveling home by carriage.

"I'm all right. There's nothing you have to worry about."

Sir Gino was an extremely capable person. He'd scored full points on the transfer exam, and he'd even solved a mathematical problem that was thought to have no solution. Despite having started late at the school, he'd immediately earned the Sun Lion brooch, which signified him as the top student in our class. He'd even started his own company at the young age of ten. He'd used his excellence to quickly grow his company and now had a branch location in every major city in the country.

I didn't hold a candle to him. He could do anything, so he probably didn't need help from the likes of me. Even so, I was a little sad that he didn't at least tell me what was troubling him. *I need to polish myself even more so that he can trust me. I want to become someone he confides in, but what can I do...?*

Chapter 2: Clearing a Dungeon and a Visit from Viviana

Ginorious

Five months had passed since I'd discovered that I'd been reincarnated into the future, and Ana and I were now in our third and final year of school. These days I couldn't seem to shake my fatigue at all. I was still undergoing education from the Valvaliers regarding proper etiquette befitting a greater noble, along with studying territory management with Ana's father, having regular tea dates with Ana, and maintaining my company by listening to employee reports and issuing instructions. That was how thinly stretched I was these days, but on top of it all, I'd been building golems too.

I was using a sleep compression magic called *sleep of Cerberus*. Though it helped the user feel rested with fewer hours of sleep, extended use of it would eventually cause fatigue. It was rough, but this was all for Ana's sake, so I resolved to persevere.

I'd bought myself a mansion on the outskirts of the royal capital as a place to work. Since golems required a lot of materials and equipment to manufacture, the first laboratory I'd built was now too small and didn't have enough room for all the extra equipment. Unlike when I'd purchased that first lab, this time I had the profits from the rejuvenation lotion sales, so I was able to buy a proper mansion in full. I used magic to expand the basement and began using it as my base of operations.

In order to keep my work there a secret, I made sure the basement had vents for air, but no entrance or exit aside from a teleporter. The security was much better than in my first lab, so I also moved all my lotion operations there as well. The first lab now served as nothing more than the location of the teleporter that connected to this basement facility.

It went without saying that the golems I was making were for the sake of

finding medical documents regarding Ana's condition. I spared no expense and put everything I could into moving this plan forward. Rather than making each golem from scratch, I started by making the tools to mass-manufacture the parts I needed. I was thinking of the off chance that even if something went wrong, I wouldn't have to start all over again with building the golems.

I was also trying to discern which locations were most likely to have the documents I needed. Simply knowing the locations of the medical facilities wasn't enough; the campuses of major hospitals and medical schools were massive. I didn't have enough time to dig up every building, so I needed to be smart about which facilities I chose to pursue. Places that were buried too deep were also out of the question. For a Magic Monarch, a few hundred metres of earth was a breeze to deal with, but not for a normal person. I referenced a picture I'd taken of the Sevensworth family's private map of the country and surrounding territories, trying to narrow down where to begin excavating.



"Okay, I'll be off, then, Ana. Take care of yourself."

Today, I'd be using the school's long break to travel to the Cantoll region of the Liebeh Kingdom under the guise of a business trip to a remote region. The dungeon I wanted to visit was indeed in a remote region, albeit one past the one I made it seem like I was going to, so I wasn't technically lying. I couldn't say much more beyond that, though. If I'd instead told them I was going to a safe city, the Sevensworths would've been able to keep an eye on me, which meant if I slipped out to go to the dungeon, there'd no doubt be a huge commotion since it would look like I'd disappeared. Because of how dangerous these remote areas were, the Sevensworths didn't have many ways of surveilling them, so the excuse of having to do business there was perfect.

I didn't tell Ana in advance about my plans. When I'd told her in the past that I was going to the slums, she'd tried to stop me because of how dangerous it was, and where I was heading now was in a different league entirely. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that she'd try to stop me, so I only told her shortly before leaving, claiming that this had been decided in a staff meeting. Though her sad face weighed heavy on my heart, I couldn't let myself lose my nerve. I had to do this in order to find a cure for her condition. This was all for

the sake of her happiness.

“Please take care of yourself as well, Sir Gino,” she said, fighting back tears.

Though I’d told her I’d be hiring many high-level adventurers for protection when I arrived, she still seemed very worried. Usually she’d see me off at the entrance hall, but this time she’d followed me all the way to my carriage.

“Thank you. I’ll try to be back as soon as possible. I’ll bring back gifts for you too.”

After saying goodbye, I began to climb into the carriage that was parked in front of the estate’s main entrance. As I glanced back at her, with her moist eyes, she seemed so precious that I couldn’t help but want to stop and hug her, but I somehow fought back that desire. I was still at the Sevensworth estate; I had to continue acting like a proper noble.

“Sir Gino, please take this,” Ana said, giving me a handkerchief she’d embroidered.

This country had a custom of giving the knights embroidery before they headed off to battle as a way of wishing them safety. Ana was most likely imitating that custom. She felt even more precious to me than usual, and I was truly on the brink of losing all self-control. But I threw myself into the carriage before I could.

As the carriage rocked into motion, I unfolded the handkerchief and was amazed by how it was somehow even more impressive than the last one she’d given me. It was obvious that she’d grown even more skilled. I could tell how much effort she’d put into this from the intricate and complicated threading. My love for her welled up inside me. *I promise I will make you happy. I swear it from the bottom of my heart.*

Though I was currently in a carriage, I wasn’t planning on using one for the entire journey because if I did, a one-way trip would take two to three months, seeing as there weren’t any asphalt roads in this world. At best, there were stone-laid roads, but those were only used for the major routes between large cities. The roads between towns were more akin to footpaths that went over grass and dirt. Riding on these poorly maintained roads was very arduous and slow. Right now, I was in a two-horse-drawn carriage with a decent amount of

luggage, so if we ran into something like a tree root, there was a good chance we'd get stuck. Everyone would need to get out and push or use stones to make a ramp next to the root, and somehow get the wheels past it.

It was the same for quagmires. You'd have to lay down some kind of surface for the wheels to travel over to prevent them from getting stuck in the mud. Essentially, we'd have to stop every time we encountered an obstacle, so it was generally much faster to walk these paths instead. The only advantage of a carriage was that you could carry more things all at once. That was why I planned to take it only up until a little way past the royal capital, and after that, I'd leave it in the town I was stopping at and use magic and golems to travel on to my true destination. It'd be fastest to fly, but I decided against that because of how conspicuous it'd be for long-distance travel.

When I reached the town about three days later, I found a place to stay and asked them to keep my carriage and horses for the time being. After that, I went into the mountains, making sure to use stealth magic when I left my lodgings because there was a chance that either the Valvaliers or the Sevensworths had sent a security detail after me.

Once I entered the mountains, I summoned four arachne-type golems, which had human tops and spiderlike bottoms. I used one to ride on while keeping the other three for protection.

The monsters I encountered as I traveled ended up being a lot weaker than I'd expected. Even I would've been able to easily take them out by myself. But even so, there were many times when I would've been in danger if I hadn't had my golems. The monsters didn't behave the way they did in games, where they'd brazenly show up in front of you; most would hide, concealing even their breathing, and then attack from a blind spot. They'd even wait for me to sleep, when I was defenseless. If I hadn't had golems to prevent these surprise attacks, I'd have had a much harder time.

When I'd climbed the mountain to find the black-ice flower, the adventurers I'd hired were never taken by surprise. They'd all been able to tell if monsters were nearby by looking for their tracks, droppings, or even their fur. This allowed them to immediately put up their guard. *It makes sense, given that they do this professionally.*

Twenty-one days after I'd left the royal capital, I finally arrived at my destination: the ruins of the Saint Marylin School of Medicine. I'd actually been hospitalized here once because of a back injury. I'd go out to the quad for walks when I got bored, so I more or less knew the layout of the place.

Plus, this was deep in the area that humans avoided, so there were no other people around at all. I could use my heavy-machinery golems as much as I wanted. This was why I'd chosen this location; it made things a lot easier for me. I summoned another golem to tighten up my defenses, and began work on the area.

On the way here, I'd seen the ruins of several military facilities, but all of them had become huge craters, most likely from the spell *meteor*. It was the strongest spell of the Earth Monarch, and was even said to be able to change the tilt of the earth if fired at full strength, consequently eradicating all life.

The school I'd come to wasn't too different from the state I'd expected it to be in. The facility was located at the top of a hill, which had once been about a few hundred meters up from the nearest train station. I remembered the hill being so steep that I ended up taking the bus there. But now, that station was buried by earth, and despite how tall of a building it had been, you could only see the very top of it.

The school itself had once been busy with students and patients, but now there was no trace of any of that. It was just an abandoned building. The overgrown green around it told the story of just how long it'd been sitting here. Seeing this in person really drove home how I'd been reincarnated into a future where the world I'd known had been destroyed.

But *why* had it been destroyed? Why would anyone bury human civilization under the earth with how technologically advanced the world had been? Had my sister's children or her grandchildren died natural deaths? I couldn't help but have these thoughts.

The excavation work continued for about three days, but after that, I finally unearthed the library. As expected of a university library, I was able to find a good number of crystal balls—over two thousand. Each one was said to be able to hold about a thousand books, which meant I'd essentially found over two

million books.

In my past life, paper books were basically never used; instead, everything was stored on these crystal balls. They were even imbued with powerful preservation magic to preserve them for a long time. Most likely, I'd have no problems viewing their contents.

I even found crystal ball readers. Since so many people would come to use this library, I wasn't too surprised to find that all the equipment had been imbued with the same preservation magic. Though the readers wouldn't turn on now, I could still use them for parts to make my own.

As I was excavating the building, I was doing something else at the same time—creating a transportation circle. With that, I was able to take the crystal balls back to my basement lab. Before I returned to my lab, I made sure the worker golems I left behind would send back any relics they found.

But first, since I hadn't taken a bath in about a month, that was my first priority. After that, I immediately began trying to get the data from the crystal balls. As a former engineer, I knew at the very least what parts I needed. Even though I'd never made a crystal ball reader before, I was confident I could build one, since they weren't too complicated. After I finished making it, I began sorting through the medical documents. I looked at titles and tables of contents to figure out what each book was about, and copied the potentially useful ones into an empty crystal ball. I made another two crystal ball readers and had my worker golems help with this.

Anastasia

Today I'd come to the art museum with Lady Ekatarina to observe the embroidery exhibition. Since I was going out more often these days after years of being reluctant due to my looks, Lady Ekatarina had graciously invited me to join her.

"It's no surprise your piece won the Outstanding Submission Award. As expected of my friend!" Lady Ekatarina said proudly as people gathered around the embroidery piece I made.

This exhibition was held every year around this time and attracted many renowned embroiderer families from across our country to participate. Usually, someone like me who hadn't won any formal contests wouldn't be allowed to submit a piece, but my embroidery professors had made a special arrangement. They wanted to show everyone a new innovative technique that applied pointillism to embroidery. Because of how unprecedented the technique was, I won the Outstanding Submission Award, along with everyone's interest.

"Oh, I'm truly blessed," Lady Ekatarina giggled. "I'm being taught by the inventor of a new technique. I'll be sure to ask for further instruction in the future."

"If you don't mind it, I certainly don't."

In response, Lady Ekatarina smiled like an innocent child. *She truly loves embroidery with all her heart.*

"Would you like to join me for tea at a café? It's the newest trendy place. If possible, I'd like to discuss the exhibition further," Lady Ekatarina said as we left the art museum.

Of course, I agreed. The exhibition had truly lived up to its reputation as the country's most prestigious embroidery event, and every last piece displayed had been absolutely stunning. However, we hadn't had a chance to discuss each one at length yet. I was dying to talk about them with another embroidery lover.

The café Lady Ekatarina took me to had white walls and a floor of brown wooden panels. It was a very adorable interior that was tailored to lesser nobles. Cafés for greater nobles typically had private rooms, but this café seemed to have semiprivate tables. There were some missing floorboards where trees were growing through, which effectively served as partitions between the tables. There was ivy across the ceiling that hung down, and there was overall so much green that it felt as if we were outside. It was a very unique café.

We were seated at a table circled by pink flowers called cyclamens. *Oh, how lovely. No wonder it's such a popular destination.* Lady Ekatarina and I launched

into our discussion immediately, too giddy to even wait for the tea to arrive. Since we were both so excited, it was a very lively conversation.

Lady Ekatarina was a regular at the exhibition and attended each year. Her current goal was to be able to submit her own piece, so for the time being, she was joining other small competitions and gathering achievements so she'd one day be invited to have one of her works displayed.

I could only imagine the ire I'd earned from those who were trying to get their own works into the exhibition, since I'd been able to submit mine thanks to special treatment from my professors. Despite that, I didn't sense any of those negative emotions from Lady Ekatarina. Instead, I sensed a very passionate fire in her heart in the pursuit of improving her own embroidery.

She wasn't like this solely with embroidery, though. Even prior to exams, she'd announce her intention of getting the top score. However, even when she lost, she didn't express any jealousy and instead would congratulate the winner sincerely. She wasn't one to dwell on the results.

The only thing she was interested in was her own self-improvement, not how she compared to others. She was constantly engaged in a battle with herself, desperately trying to improve. She was a very noble, praiseworthy person.

"Your mood seems to have improved a bit," Lady Ekatarina giggled.

"Huh?"

"You've been down ever since Sir Valvalier left for his business trip."

I was worried about Sir Gino to the extent that it'd put me in low spirits lately. Lady Ekatarina must have invited me out with her as a way to cheer me up. *She's truly such a precious friend of mine.*

"Hm? What a surprise to see you two here."

Sir Anthony stood at the opening of our semiprivate space. Due to all the students being on winter vacation, I hadn't expected to see any of them in the city.

"We're having some tea after viewing the embroidery exhibition. What about you?" Lady Ekatarina replied.

“Me and Justin were just at the blacksmith to have our swords checked. We always come here after. Mind if we join?” Sir Anthony asked.

And so, we ended up having tea with Sir Anthony and Sir Justin. We began with small talk before moving to the topic of our plans for after graduation. We had only a little less than a year before then. Both Sir Justin and Sir Anthony had a myriad of paths they could walk after leaving the school, so they were having trouble deciding.

“I’m thinking about trying to join the country’s knight troupe instead of my family’s,” Sir Justin said.

He was the third son of House Ryan, and since he wasn’t in line to succeed it, he had no choice but to find his own way to gain status. Entering his family’s order of knights would’ve guaranteed promotion to a higher level, and it’d be easy for him to even become a vassal to a great person in the country. However, despite that, Sir Justin seemed to desire joining the country’s knight troupe instead. He explained that it was his wish to join the strongest order of knights in the country because he valued that more than status.

“Have you received approval from your fiancée about this?” Lady Ekatarina asked.

One couldn’t expect to gain status from joining the national order of knights. They’d have to work at it on their own, meaning their future was uncertain, which meant their wife would be affected as well.

“Of course. We’ve been talking about it for a while,” he responded, chuckling sheepishly.

“Um, so you’ve been discussing this with your fiancée...Lady Elenora?”

Before I knew it, I’d asked this question. I hadn’t been able to speak with Sir Gino at all about his troubles. I’d also been blindsided by the books he had regarding how to better speak with women, and then his business trip had come out of absolutely nowhere without any warning. Going out to a remote region for business was dangerous, and there was even a possibility that he could lose his life. He might not have had a choice because it was his company, but even so, I wished he would’ve spoken with me about it sooner. I might have been able to stop him from going if we’d been able to properly discuss it.

“Hm? Oh yeah, we’ve been talking about it for the better part of the year.”

“What made you decide to discuss it with her?” I asked.

“Well, ’cause I can trust her.”

Trust... I see. The reason Sir Gino chose not to confide in me is because he doesn't trust me. Though I wanted to inquire more about trust, I decided to hold myself back. Sir Anthony was yet to be betrothed, so it wasn't appropriate to continue this topic any longer.

The reason he'd yet to be engaged was because he was a member of House Treves, who chose their successor based on the most capable son, not the eldest. They needed to wait until all the sons were of age to judge their strengths and then decide on a successor. Since the succession was up in the air, it was difficult to market oneself for a political marriage when it was dubious whether or not he'd end up succeeding the family. There were a lot of inconvenient aspects to this tradition, especially in a country where political marriages were so prevalent, but this was a tradition that they couldn't simply ignore since it served to unite their house.

“Come on, Justin, you can be a little more specific. How's Lady Anastasia supposed to understand what you mean if you withhold all the details?” Sir Anthony said, most likely out of consideration for me after sensing that I didn't plan to press any further. He was always very perceptive of the smallest details.

“It's kinda embarrassing, though...”

Sir Justin proceeded to explain the process in which he learned to trust Lady Elenora. When he'd been in middle school, he'd lost to someone in a very important swordsmanship tournament. At that age, he'd been very confident in his skills, so losing had come as a great shock to him. When he'd been at his lowest, Lady Elenora had stayed by his side. There'd even been times when he verbally lashed out at her, but she'd always returned to his side before long.

“I really said all sorts of horrible things to her, but El didn't stop offering me her helping hands. It was from then on that I trusted her with my very being.”

Helping hands? But Sir Gino can do anything. He's always calm and collected. I can't even imagine him in despair.

“You have quite a lovely fiancée who loves you deeply,” Lady Ekatarina said.

Sir Justin burst out laughing. “Yeah, well, she says it was just her stubbornness that kept her coming back.”

His laughter was to cover his embarrassment. *Oh, I see! She didn't give up! It's because of her determination that she earned his trust!* I'd promised not to give up on my happiness, so I couldn't let myself falter so easily. *I'll do my best!*

“If you're askin' about this, does that mean that something's goin' on with Ginorious?”

Sir Anthony's astute as usual. “Well...I'd like to become a person that Sir Gino can confide in.”

“Ah, that might be hard. He doesn't even come to us for help. I think that might just be the kinda guy he is.”

“He's always there to give us advice, but he's never come to any of us for it.”

So he doesn't confide in these two either? Does he go to anyone for advice? Then I realized something. I was asking for advice from boys in my class. This didn't feel real. I couldn't believe that I, of all people, had been able to do this.

“Somethin' wrong? You look surprised about something,” Sir Anthony asked.

“It's just that...I never thought I'd be able to ask the boys from my class for advice. I'm just surprised by how much my situation has changed,” I said.

My entire world had truly changed since I met Sir Gino, and I was feeling it strongly in this moment.

“The reason your situation changed is because you yourself changed,” Lady Ekatarina explained. “It's because you've gained confidence.”

“I...have?”

“Indeed. If you didn't have confidence in yourself, you'd think it perfectly natural that everyone around you look down on you, and you'd be unable to ask anyone for advice. The fact that you can come to us shows that you've grown to have self-confidence.”

Her words settled like a rock inside of me. I never would've tried to rely on

others in the past because I would've thought it'd be a bother to them. But now, before I knew it, I'd developed confidence. This was also all thanks to Sir Gino. Ever since he came into my life, I'd been able to change.

"Now that I think about it, have you ever gone to anyone for advice, Lady Ekatarina? We've been together since elementary school, but I don't think I've ever seen you go to anyone and be all 'Pardon me, may I perhaps ask for you to lend an ear?' And I think you have ten times as much confidence as anyone."

I couldn't help but giggle at the mismatch of a tall, burly guy imitating the stereotypical voice of a lady.

"I certainly do ask for help, but only for important matters. I'm still lacking in many areas. There's no way I can be a perfect person on my own. However, I do strive to refrain from asking others for advice for mere peace of mind." Lady Ekatarina straightened her back and answered in a dignified voice. "Smiling without a word of complaint while overcoming even the most difficult situations is the mark of a true noble lady. Though I may listen to others' grumblings, I abstain to the best of my abilities from airing any grievances of my own."

I already knew Lady Ekatarina was impressive, but she's so dignified. House Byron was famous for being very strict with the women of the household. Lady Ekatarina had once told me that she'd been made to climb a mountain on which even one wrong step would have sent her falling to her death. Even so, she had to maintain her gallant smile and keep climbing. Once she reached the top, she wasn't allowed one word of complaint, despite being exhausted and shaking from the exertion. Instead, she had to gallantly recite a poem. Having someone who'd undergone that kind of training say she was reluctant to confide in others had a lot of weight to it compared to if it had come from someone else.

Ginorious

After days upon days of searching through the medical texts, I finally found a book called *Severe Hypermana Syndrome and Its Treatment Methods*. I immediately went to read it, but it was a specialist book meant for experts in healing magic.

It defined severe hypermana syndrome as a condition where stonelike bumps would appear across the body, the skin would turn green, and a part of the body would turn into a hornlike protuberance, such as sharp ears. It also said that only those with mana levels of Magic Monarchs could be afflicted; however, there was a similar disease called chronic irregular mana circulation that normal people could get. Those afflicted with the disease would develop hard bumps like large beans around their ribs and other places, and green rashes roughly a celchimetre in diameter would appear across their body. Given the average mana levels of normal people, that was probably why they didn't experience any symptoms beyond that, but overall it wasn't too different from the severe hypermana syndrome.

The most important thing—the cure—was to use light magic, which would treat the syndrome quickly, but would also put a lot of strain on the patient's body. It seemed that if the condition was severe, then using this method could induce death by shock, so for more serious cases, they would administer magic pharmaceuticals instead.

Severe hypermana syndrome was overall a much worse case of chronic irregular mana circulation. Even in severe cases of the latter, regular people could die from shock, so it seemed almost certain that someone with severe hypermana syndrome would die from this treatment. In that case, the only option left to me was magic pharmaceuticals.

I'd finally found my way forward, and as much as I wanted to immediately begin work, I had to get back to the royal capital. I instructed my worker golems to continue locating relevant titles and contents to copy over to new crystal balls, and then left to go to the Sevensworths mansion with the "souvenirs" I'd prepared in advance.

But first, I needed to retrieve my horse and carriage. Since it took several days to make a teleportation magic circle that was safe to use, it was more efficient to use a horse and carriage when my current location was only a few days' ride from the town I'd initially stopped in.

Since I wasn't too far from the town, I used my centaur golem to go straight through areas that didn't have paths. Unlike horses, golems didn't need breaks, so what would've been a three-day trip by carriage was over in a few hours. I

waited for a bit in the forest until morning came and the gates to the town opened. Nobles didn't typically lie, and since I'd said that I'd gone out on a business trip, I did some business in the town for about two hours before getting back in my carriage and returning to the royal capital.



"Sir Gino!"

Ana wasn't waiting in the entrance hall, but right at the door. When she saw my carriage approaching, she began rushing toward it. From where I was sitting, she seemed frantic. As soon as I got out of the carriage, I found myself running to her as well. Running was very bad manners for a noble, but I couldn't help it. After all, this was my first time seeing her in two months.

"I'm so glad...you're safe!"

Tears began streaming down her face. My heart was filled with love for her, and before I knew it, I was hugging her. The warmth I could feel from her soft, delicate body brought me so much happiness.

I knew her tears were because she thought that I'd been doing business in a remote region. Her reaction really spoke to how dangerous these areas usually were. A good percentage of merchants died during these kinds of trips.

If I had been following proper etiquette, I would have first gone to either my company or the Valvaliers and then had them announce my return to the Sevensworths, and only after receiving their approval would I go to their estate. However, I came straight here after returning to the royal capital. This was pretty poor manners, but I wanted to give Ana peace of mind as soon as possible. As much as I'd wanted that to be the only taboo I broke, seeing her all frantic from my sudden visit made me get a little emotional and commit another noble faux pas by embracing her.

"Please accept these gifts from my travels," I said, placing the gifts on the table.

We were currently in the forty-third drawing room, called the Red Agate. The servants had all been dismissed, leaving just four people—the duke and my

mother-in-law, who were sitting on the sofa, and Ana and myself, who sat across from them.

“What’s this?” my mother-in-law asked, holding one of the anklets.

“Hm. What is this indeed?” the duke wondered, examining one of the bracelets.

“They’re Artifacts,” I answered.

“What?!”

“Oh, my!”

“Huh?!”

The duke, my mother-in-law, and Ana all reacted in this order. Different from relics, which were simply ancient items with no value, Artifacts that could still be used in modern day were priceless. That being said, as an engineer, I was able to create Artifacts. As long as their qualities were related to the work I was already doing, I was able to make them without much trouble.

“What kind of uses do they have?”

In order to answer the duke’s question, I stood up, taking the bracelet with me, and began explaining from a short distance away.

“I’ll start with this bracelet. If you twist the jewel while wearing it...” I demonstrated the activation mechanism, and there was a metallic clink before I was bathed in a thin veil of light. “It’s a barrier. It should be able to stop arrows and some weak spells. Even if several knights attacked you at once, their swords wouldn’t be able to penetrate the barrier.” The three of them gaped at me, but I continued the explanation of the Artifacts. “Though the bracelet is for defense, this dagger is for attacking. If you press here and say ‘protect me’...” I abruptly let go of the dagger, and it remained floating in the air in front of me. “Would you mind trying to throw something at me?”

“S-Sure,” the duke said hesitantly. He picked up a pastry from the table and threw it lightly.

The floating blade swiftly moved and cut it down.

“As you can see, it’s fully automated. If you command it to protect you, it will

focus solely on defense; however, if you command it to attack, then it will attack your enemies. That's a little dangerous to demonstrate, though, so please just take my word for it."

I continued on to explain the rest of the Artifacts. Next was the anklet equipped with automatic defense magic. Putting it on would create a detection veil around the body, which would react to whatever came into contact with it, whether it was physical or magical. It would measure the strength of the attack breaching the veil and then create a barrier of equal force or stronger to counter it. In my past life, it'd been used primarily as a way to test golem collision safety. It was intended to be used in conjunction with the bracelet because if the wearer was hit out of the blue, the barrier from the bracelet had a chance of not deploying in time. The anklet was made to make up for that flaw.

The pendant was an item that neutralized poison. Activating it would begin an analysis of the poison and then it'd automatically use the appropriate magic to neutralize it. I'd made something similar in my past life. It was an item for people who were outdoors, an emergency response for being bitten by a snake or stung by a bug. The magic stored inside the pendant would switch to an appropriate detoxification magic based on whatever toxin it detected.

When I'd been looking through the data in the crystal balls, detoxification magic was one of the first texts I'd found. That's when I came up with the idea for this item. It was coincidentally the item out of all these gifts that had taken me the longest to make and the one I was most proud of. Since I couldn't very well drink poison to demonstrate its efficacy, I only explained how it worked.

Then I went on to explain the gifts for my mother and Ana. The anklets they got were designed to be more fashionable for women while still possessing the same automatic defense systems. The dagger was the same too, just designed slightly differently. The only thing I'd changed were the Artifacts' appearances, not their functions. For example, I'd converted the pendants into brooches and the bracelets into hair ornaments. Really, I'd wanted to make them into rings, but I couldn't make them that small. Hair ornaments were popular with noblewomen, so it was the next best thing. I assumed they'd wear them alongside other ornaments, so I made sure to make the colors match their

respective hair colors. Naturally, I'd also used a mana-resistant coating for the magic tools I'd given Ana so her Magic Monarch's mana wouldn't break them.

After my thorough explanations, the three of them seemed in a daze, but my mother-in-law was the first to snap out of it and speak.

"I'm...astonished. All of these are country-level Artifacts."

"Indeed. We can't take these," the duke said.

"Oh, no, it's okay. Please accept them. I'd really appreciate it. All of you are so irreplaceable to me." I got on my knees and bowed my head low. Just like in my past life, this was the highest form of begging.

"If you presented even one of these to the royal family you'd surely gain a higher status. Are you sure you'd throw that opportunity to the wayside?"

"I know this might not be a very noble-like way of thinking, but my family is far more important to me than status or honor. Ana would surely be devastated if anything were to happen to the two of you, and I don't think I could bear to watch that."

"But surely we aren't your only family. You have House Adolni and House Valvalier, do you not?" my mother-in-law questioned.

She really is a trustworthy person. Even though there were country-level Artifacts in front of her, she was still thinking about my position before anything else.

"There's nothing to worry about in that regard. After all, I have enough for all of them."

"What?!"

"Huh?!"

Ana silently stood from her seat and moved next to me before lowering herself until we were eye level.

"Sir Gino, did you truly go on a business trip?"

"I did...business."

I couldn't take Ana's gaze of scrutiny, so I looked away.

“You didn’t, did you. Artifacts are only found in dungeons, and to have brought back so many means you must have gone to one. Conducting business was not your primary objective, was it?” As she continued to stare right at me, her eyes welled up until tears began streaming down her face. “Why?! Why would you do something so dangerous?!” she exclaimed through her tears while grabbing the shoulder of my shirt and shaking me.

Dungeons were known as places one could get rich quick, but most people didn’t even dare to go to them because the chances of making it out alive were so slim. Ana was so mad that I’d done this, she’d broken down into tears.

“I’m sorry. There was something I wanted to get you no matter what, and I got a report saying it was in a dungeon.”

“I don’t need anything but you! If anything happened to you, I... I’d...” Ana became choked up, unable to complete her sentence. She buried her face in my shoulder, wailing into it.

“I’m sorry. I promise I won’t do anything dangerous again.”

I was careful not to say that I wouldn’t go to a dungeon again. The medical documents I’d read had said that if the chronic irregular mana circulation wasn’t treated, it could result in a shortening of the afflicted person’s life due to developing an organ disease. They also said that the more serious the affliction, the higher the possibility of organ damage would be as the condition progressed.

If this was truly the affliction that Ana had, then it was very possible that she’d have a shorter lifespan. I still hadn’t found enough information about the magic pharmaceutical treatment in the books I’d found, so I’d have to try a different place. That was why I only said that I wouldn’t do anything dangerous. There shouldn’t be a problem going to these ruins if they weren’t dangerous to me.

“Very well. We’ll accept these gifts, so please stand. When we pass on, you two will inherit our household anyway,” my mother-in-law said.

“Indeed. I don’t mind accepting these gifts, on one condition: never do anything like this again. I won’t forgive you if you make Ana cry again. Do you accept?”

“Yes. Thank you very much.”

I stood up and guided Ana back to the sofa. She continued to sniffle a bit next to me. None of them had questioned what I so desperately wanted to give Ana—most likely because they already had a good idea.

The elixir was known as a legendary liquid panacea, but nobody here knew that there was little to no chance that it actually existed. But I wasn’t going to go out of my way to correct their assumption because at its core, it wasn’t wrong. I was still looking for a cure for Ana.

“You know, dear, Gino considers us his family. Shouldn’t you allow him to address you as his father-in-law?”

“No! What will you do if he gets a big head and goes after Ana’s chastity?!”

“F-Father!” Ana protested, going bright red from having her father speak about such a lewd topic with her fiancé being right next to her.



“Your sister’s come to the royal capital,” Ana told me as the two of us had tea.

By “sister,” she was referring to my older sister from the Adolni household. However, this was the first I was hearing of her coming up here. She’d gotten quite close to Ana through their letter correspondence. Though I wrote my sister too, she exchanged letters much more frequently with Ana.

“Based on how curious a person she is, I bet she’s here to take in the sights,” I said.

“Well...her purpose isn’t related to sightseeing. It has to do with searching for a fiancé.”

“Huh? But she has one already.”

“Um... Well... They are no longer engaged.”

“Huh?”

Apparently their engagement had just fallen through not too long ago. Though I asked Ana for the reason it didn’t work out, she preferred I ask my sister myself.

“Heh, long time no see, Gino. Did you get taller?” my sister asked when she saw me at the entrance of the Sevensworths mansion after she stepped out of the carriage.

“Why are you getting out of a Sevensworth carriage instead of an Adolni one?”

“I met it in a town on the way and they said they’d give me a lift.”

“How did you get to that town?”

“Sharing carriages.”

“Without any security?”

This caused her to laugh and wave her hand as if I were making a joke. *What even goes through this girl’s head? Why is a noble lady sharing carriages?*

“I quickly arranged for a carriage after reading her letter. It’s dangerous for women to travel alone,” Ana said, a guilty look on her face.

“Oh, it was you? Aw, thanks, Ana!” My sister didn’t look repentant in the slightest and instead grinned innocently at her.

We invited my sister inside so she could take a load off and talk to us there instead of standing outside. Right now, only Ana and I were around to greet my sister. The duke was working at the palace and my mother-in-law was out on business.

“So, what’s this I hear about your marriage getting called off?” I asked as we relaxed, drinking tea.

The three of us were currently in the thirty-fourth drawing room, called the Tiger’s Eye.

“I-It’s not my fault,” my sister said in a huff, folding her arms and looking away.

“Meaning it was your fault. What’d you do?” After living with her most of my life, I knew the face of when she knew she was to blame.

“Well...I kinda went off to hunt some monsters with adventurers...and they found out.”

Seriously. What is wrong with this girl? This wasn't something noble ladies did. Why would she do something so dangerous?

“What's with that look?! You went monster hunting to get the black-ice flower! I wanted to try hunting them too!”

Ana had written in a letter that she wanted to see a black-ice flower in person one day, so I'd chosen it as my oath flower. To do that, I'd gone to the top of a mountain not too far from the royal capital. Never in my wildest dreams had I expected my sister to copy me and try to go fight monsters.

“Are you...mad?” my sister asked, pouting while flashing me a glance.

It might not have seemed like it on the outside, but on the inside, she was truly worried whether or not I was angry with her. If anything, I felt it was a good thing that her engagement didn't go through. The family she'd been going to marry into had a very long, proud history of being barons. It was customary for those joining their household to assimilate to their rules. For someone like my sister who marched to the beat of her own drum, I knew from the start that she'd have difficulties living like that.

In the first place, they'd only gotten engaged because my sister had pushed very hard for the most handsome of the suitors, so there was already a problem with their relationship there. That being said, I wasn't very happy that she'd gone hunting monsters. If she'd paid the adventurers out of her own pocket, then there was no way she'd had enough money to get strong ones. Since Ana and I were both on the same page about this, we both gave her an earful.

Ultimately, we settled things by agreeing that she'd talk to one of us first before ever going out to hunt monsters again. The next time she went, I would make sure that higher-ranked adventurers would be with her, and Ana would get the best guards in the Sevensworths' employ to accompany her as well. It was the best compromise since we wouldn't be able to stop her from ever going again. I knew better than anyone that she wasn't the type to stop doing something just because someone told her to. But now that the conversation was settled, we went to the next topic—her fiancé.

“I’m still surprised that our father decided to ask the Sevensworths for help,” I said.

Due to my engagement to Ana, House Adolni had a good relationship with the Sevensworths, so it wasn’t too strange for them to ask a favor, but still, the difference in status between the premier duke and a destitute viscount was day and night. It was even bigger than the difference between the president of a parent company and a regular employee at one of its subsidiaries. Usually it’d be far too extreme a gap for someone of that much lower status to even think about asking for a favor.

“I...I didn’t notify father until just a little bit ago.”

“Huh?”

I couldn’t contain my reaction. *By “a little bit ago,” do you mean you didn’t send a letter to him until you reached the royal capital?! In that case, wouldn’t that mean that father doesn’t even know you’re here yet?!* Nobody would ever expect this situation where someone’s daughter ran to the premier duke’s house for help finding a fiancé without even the permission of her own father! Marriages for nobles were often political, but despite that, she’d come here to someone else’s family without our father’s permission or knowing what political goals he had.

Given how my sister was, I highly doubted she’d paid the high cost necessary to expedite the letter to my father. Most likely, she’d chosen the slowest mailing method possible to delay his finding out about her plans. If my estimate was right, then he’d get the letter in about a week. The duke and my mother-in-law were more than capable of finding her a fiancé in that time.

“Oh, here you are,” my mother-in-law said, walking into the room. “I heard about your requirements for a partner from Ana, but I thought you might like to meet them first before sitting down for formal marriage talks,” she said as she sat down to join us.

After my mother-in-law explained things, I finally understood the situation.

Apparently Ana had gotten a letter from my sister asking for help finding a fiancé, and she’d accepted. That being the case, they’d already begun their search. *There’s no turning back now.* Once you got a greater noble house

involved like this, it meant you'd consequently gotten a lot of people involved as well. Things were no longer at the point where House Adolni could cancel the request and pretend as if it'd never happened. Our father no longer had any choice but to stand behind this request.

"You'd like someone with status or who will be succeeding a title, but you'd like that status to be no lower than a knight but no higher than a count. You'd like them to be between the ages of twenty and twenty-three, and their height to be a hundred eighty-five centimetres or more. They should be similarly handsome to the actor Tron Sivan, be fit, not be from a family that is particular about manners and customs, be good at dancing, enjoy the outdoors, and must absolutely not have any chest hair. Did I get everything?"

"Yes! Perfectly!"

I felt dizzy. What horrible requirements. There's absolutely no mention of any kind of political compatibility. If anything, every last one of those is completely meaningless. These aren't things you'd bring up to another family.

"I'm glad this isn't any different from the preliminary information we got. We've found someone who matches your requirements."

"Huh?! Already?!" My sister's eyes widened.

Even I was surprised. *How did you find someone who perfectly matches these crazy requirements in such a short amount of time?* Although, perhaps this was perfectly on brand for the Sevensworths, a house lauded as having the best intelligence-gathering ability in the country.

"Indeed. He's a viscount currently working at the palace. The reason I went out today was to meet with him. Everything's settled. He told me that as long as it's not today or tomorrow, he can meet with you at any time. That being said, when would be best for you?"

"The day after next! As soon as possible!"

She already discussed that much with him? My mother-in-law's scary efficient. For official marriage talks, the family of both parties had to be present, but if they were just unofficially meeting in advance to check their compatibility, then there was no problem with it just being the two of them. This was definitely

what my sister had been aiming for.

After she'd given such an insane list of requirements, there was no option left to refuse meeting him. If during their meeting, the guy says he's interested, then the consequent marriage talks were practically guaranteed.

I had no doubt that my sister's letter wasn't going to make it to our father by the day after tomorrow. Even if I chose the fastest method of communication, there was no way for him to come all the way to the royal capital to make it in time. *It seems that he'll only find out about all of this when it's already too late to do anything.*

The next day after my sister had arrived, she and Ana went out sightseeing in the royal capital. *"Ana's mine for today, so give us some space,"* she'd said before leaving with my fiancée. My sister was very unconventional, so it was a strange sight to see her and the very well-behaved Ana getting along so well. I could only hope she wasn't causing Ana any trouble.



With Ana gone, I resumed my usual routine of lessons related to succeeding the Sevensworth household. But during that time, a visitor arrived.

“It’s a pleasure to see you again, Sir Valvalier.”

I was greeted by Eric, the son of Viscount Jones. The Jones family had a long relationship with House Adolni thanks to their trade in medicinal herbs. I’d known him since I was a child, but he’d never really spoken formally like this to me until now since I’d become a part of House Valvalier. Due to the new difference in status, he defaulted to speaking formally, but I preferred he didn’t, so I asked him to go back to the way he’d always spoken to me. It’d been a while since we’d last seen each other, so I wanted to catch up with him as well.

Apparently, he’d joined the national knight troupe as a member. This was different from joining the regular way, as most everyone in the national knight troupe was from a knight family, but members like Eric didn’t have such backgrounds and were essentially considered to have commoner status within the troupe.

Though he used to be pale and plump, he was now fit and slightly tan; he’d changed quite a bit after joining the knights. However, I couldn’t help but be slightly confused when I heard that he’d been assigned to the fourth knight troupe. They were tasked with patrolling the country’s remote areas. Essentially, they fought monsters daily. Due to the amount of danger involved, it also meant that they were in a prime position to gain status as well.

Since Eric was the second son of House Jones, he couldn’t succeed his family. It wasn’t unusual for people like him to try avoiding falling to commoner status by electing to take on more dangerous missions. Thinking about it, it wasn’t all too surprising after all. What *was* confusing was the fact that Eric was here in the royal capital. Usually his troupe would be deployed to a remote area.

“I’ve been in communication with Viviana for a while and I heard she was coming here to look for a new suitor, so I asked for time off and rushed over.”

He came all the way here from where he was stationed to console my sister? Wow, as her little brother, it makes me so happy to know that she has someone that cares about her that much. But also, I don’t think she’s especially sad about this outcome. If anything, she seems over the moon that she might have found

someone who matches her requirements exactly.

“Yeah...I can imagine her not being too down in the dumps,” he said. “I could practically see her jumping for joy when she said that she’d be getting the Sevensworths’ help to find a fiancé.”

So then why did you come all the way here? You could’ve waited until your long vacation to go home and visit her at the Adolni estate.

“Don’t tell her this, but... Uh... I... I plan to confess my feelings to her.”

Wait, what?! You’re in love with my sister?! No way... I didn’t realize at all...

“I’m not surprised that you’re shocked. You’re not the most astute when it comes to these things.” Eric smiled at me with a pitying gaze.

“You know that she’ll be meeting with the man she plans to marry tomorrow, right? Are you still planning on telling her how you feel despite that?”

“I...am,” he said with a determined smile. “I’ve been in love with her for so long. But I’m the second son, so I don’t have the prospects of an heir. That’s why I wanted to profess my feelings for her after I attained status as a knight, but she got engaged before I could tell her. I missed my chance, and I know I’m still not a knight just yet, but still, I can’t let myself lose this chance again. That’s why I did everything I could to get here.”

“You...think there’s a chance?”

I didn’t want to be too blunt, but the person my mother-in-law had found for my sister apparently fit her requirements perfectly. He also had status. I couldn’t really see this as a chance for Eric when that guy had everything he didn’t.

“By ‘chance,’ I don’t mean a chance of her choosing me.”

Eric explained that he didn’t want to tell her his feelings when she was engaged to someone else. Right now, when she wasn’t engaged to anyone, it was his chance to tell her. The chance he spoke of was merely to get it off his chest. This serious approach was just like him. I had absolutely no clue how someone so straitlaced was so drawn to my wild sister.

“She’s...very kind,” Eric said as he stared at the sky through the window of the

thirty-sixth drawing room, called the Aquamarine.

I understood what he meant. Even her leaving me behind to go out with Ana was her own sort of consideration of me. She knew I was pretty busy with my succession lessons, so she'd left with Ana to give me some space. *Wow, I feel so happy that there's someone in this world that recognizes my sister's kindness.*

Anastasia

"Whoa! What is that?! It's huge!"

My sister-in-law's eyes widened as she gazed upon the royal capital's great cathedral, which was by far the most famous sightseeing destination in the city. I found her childlike excitement despite her age very adorable. The great cathedral had a domed roof and was eighty-two metres in length, seventy-three metres in width, and fifty-five metres in height. Taking into consideration its adjacent structures, the entire complex was closer to a hundred metres across.

"I bet the view from up top would be incredible. Oh, I want to see it so bad."

"P-Please don't. The great cathedral is a symbol of faith. You will get in serious trouble if you try to climb up there."

"Don't worry, I don't plan on climbing anywhere in a skirt anymore. It's part of why my engagement fell apart in the first place."

Surprisingly, she said this with a very refreshed smile. The reason her engagement had ended wasn't solely due to her going out to hunt monsters; that had just been the last in a series of incidents where she'd behaved in an inappropriate way. Her devil-may-care personality was not a good fit for the culture of the house she would've been marrying into.

Customs varied between the different noble houses, but in general, it was expected for the one marrying into the family to adopt that family's customs. In my opinion, it was a very difficult tradition to abide by. In my case, I didn't have anything to worry about personally since it was Sir Gino marrying into our family, but he had a lot on his shoulders. That was why it was up to me to do anything I could to lessen that burden, even by just a small amount. Though Sir Gino might not be able to voice his true thoughts to my parents, I could speak

my mind freely, which made me the perfect go-between.

But first, I needed to become someone that Sir Gino actually wanted to confide in. Thus, I had to be able to ask if anything was troubling him. If I couldn't do that, then I wouldn't know what was weighing him down and be able to support him as his wife. *I need to do my best! Oh my, how embarrassing. I'm getting ahead of myself thinking about being his wife even though we're not even married yet.*

After visiting the various big tourist spots, we decided to take a break at a café my mother had told me about. This was one of the many cafés in the area that were catered toward greater nobles.

"Whoa! I've never seen this kind of cake before! It looks so good! Wow, this certainly is the kind of quality I'd expect from the royal capital. I'll take this, this, and this!" my sister-in-law said.

She was very enthusiastic as she looked at the array of cakes that the server had brought on a cart. Ultimately, she'd picked out a morkovnyi, a Kyiv cake, and syrniki. It might have been strange to describe someone older than me as cute, but her excitement over the cakes surely was. She was already in heaven before even taking a bite.

"Oh, right. I brought you a gift and I wanted to give it to you without Gino knowing, so now's the perfect time."

She signaled for a servant to bring her bag over. In the next moment, she pulled out something wrapped in cloth and gave it to me.

My eyes widened as I unraveled the cloth. "Oh my, is this—"

"It's a copy of a painting we have at home. I think Gino's about five or so years old in it."

"Thank you very much! I'm so, so very happy!"

I carefully looked at the painting as we had our tea. It depicted Sir Gino and his mother standing next to one another. *His purple eyes are so big! He's so adorable!* The way he had to lift his hand higher than his head in order to hold his mother's hand was so cute, I could pass out. Though I wanted to squeal, I

did my best to control myself since we were in public.

“Oh right, I’ve been meaning to ask, but you mentioned in your letters that you wanted to know more about when Gino started his company. Want me to tell you now?”

“Oh, yes! Yes, please! I’d love to hear everything about it!”

She then began to recount her memory of the time. Even at his young age, Sir Gino had been a very responsible young boy, to the point where it’d been difficult to tell who was the older sibling when he and his sister were together. I couldn’t help but giggle imagining that.

“Even as a kid, he never relied on me for anything. If anything, he helped me more often than not. I would’ve been completely okay if he wanted to be doted on more. I always wanted to snap at him and tell him that *I’m* supposed to be the older sibling.”

I could tell how much she loved Sir Gino from her words and how she folded her arms as she pouted. They truly were wonderfully close.

“Given how he is, I bet he’s never shown any weakness to our older brother Davy or even our father. It feels kinda sad as his sister...”

It seems Sir Gino doesn’t show weakness even to his family members. This entire time I’d thought the reason Sir Gino didn’t show me his vulnerable side was because I lacked his trust. However, if he didn’t show any weakness to anyone at school or to his family, especially his older sister with whom he was so close, then there must have been a different reason.

After meeting Sir Gino, I’d slowly opened up until I’d become able to tell him—and only him—everything on my mind. But now, thanks to him, I was even able to be vulnerable with my mother. *Somehow he reminds me of how I used to be when my complex about my looks had crushed my self-confidence and I’d retreated into my shell.*

“That being said, he’s only ever started taking my advice when it came to you. He must’ve really been at his wit’s end. He used to be a blockhead who didn’t react even when the most beautiful girls talked to him, but he’s changed after meeting you, and it’s really surprised me just how much. He must really love

you, Ana,” she said with a teasing grin.

Unprepared for this statement, I was caught off guard and felt my face growing red.

Ginorious

“Oh yeah, and the café was so great! There were so many types of cake! The tea even smelled like roses!”

After returning from their day out touring the royal capital, my sister excitedly told me about everything they’d seen. With her strong sense of curiosity, she seemed to have come back thoroughly satisfied with all the places and things she couldn’t experience in the rural Adolni territory. Ana also seemed happy, clutching something wrapped in cloth that she wouldn’t even let a servant hold for her. All in all, it seemed they’d both had a good time.

After listening to them talk, I told my sister about Eric, who was currently waiting for her in the Sevensworths’ greenhouse, and asked a servant to guide her there.

“Someone’s waiting for your sister? Who are they?” Ana asked, likely curious why my sister, a visitor herself, had received a visitor of her own. “Oh my, a confession of love?!” Her eyes sparkled with excitement after hearing about Eric and why he’d come. Since she seemed very interested, I explained everything I knew about the relationship between the two of them.

“But isn’t she meeting with the suitor my mother found tomorrow? Will she need to cancel?”

“It’ll be okay. Eric’s ready to be completely turned down.”

It seemed the hopelessness of his situation had tugged at Ana’s heartstrings because I heard her mumble, “Oh, how wonderful. Just like a romance novel,” with stars in her eyes.

Today was the day my sister would be meeting her new suitor. The only ones there would be the two of them and my mother-in-law. As usual, I had my lessons for succeeding the duke.

Not too long ago, their meeting had ended. When he was about to leave, I went to the entrance hall to greet him. He was tall, bore a resemblance to Tron Sivan, and looked exactly like the kind of guy my sister would like.

Though the man she'd been engaged to before had also been good-looking, this guy was in a different league entirely. I was sure she'd find nothing to complain about. Though we all saw him to the entrance hall, only my sister walked him to his carriage.

"Hm? What's that?" I asked my sister when she returned.

She'd come back with a woven basket. "A present! They're apparently storybook cake rolls from L'Onega! I've wanted to try these!"

Storybook cake rolls were a type of alcohol-infused cake roll topped with buttercream. Ana had told me before that it was a very popular dessert with noble girls in the royal capital right now, and L'Onega was a store that was famous for them. The fact that he'd gotten such a popular dessert as a present showed that he knew how to best treat the women he met for marriage talks.

"I wanna eat it now! Let's have tea!" my sister said, excitedly holding up the bag.

Anastasia

"Are you excited for our slumber party tonight, Ana?"

My sister-in-law had come to my room holding a pillow and wearing a wide grin.

"What exactly is a slumber party?"

"We eat snacks, talk until we get tired, and then sleep!"

"Oh my! That certainly does sound fun!"

"I know, right? Nobles don't usually do this too much, but commoners do it all the time."

And that's how I ended up having a slumber party with her. Since neither of us were immediately tired, we chatted while eating snacks, and of course the

topics of our conversation were Sir Gino as well as Viviana's meeting with her suitor. I felt relieved knowing that the suitor had met every last one of her requirements. Occasionally, she seemed to fall deep into thought, which made sense since choosing a marriage partner was a major, life-altering decision. It was only natural for her to worry about it.

"You haven't thought about anyone but Gino, right? You're absolutely sure it's Gino and nobody else, right? Is it 'cause he's hot?"

"He certainly is beautiful; however, the reason I treasure him so much has nothing to do with the way he looks. It's because...b-because he t-treasures me greatly."

Saying this was extremely embarrassing, but I knew she was having difficulty making a decision about her marriage partner. Thus, it was best for me to be completely honest with her.

"Aw, you're so cute! Look at how red you've gotten!"

I squealed as she embraced me. The force with which she'd come at me was too great for me to endure, making us fall on the bed.

"Do you think the most important thing is someone who treasures you more than anything?"

"Yes... Yes, I do."

"Why?"

"Well, life is long, meaning there's ample opportunity for trouble to find you. However, if you are with someone who treasures you and who you treasure as well, then no matter what troubles you face, you'll be able to overcome them. I believe that's the key to happiness."

"Overcoming troubles, huh? So that's why you chose Gino?"

"No, to be honest, I wasn't thinking about that at all when we first met. Back then, I couldn't even imagine a future filled with happiness. If anything, I'd completely given up on that idea."

"So what made you start seeing that kind of future?"

"Well... Sir Gino..."

“Hm? What’d he do?”

“H-He... H-He treats me v-very d-dearly...and through that I’ve changed.”

“You’re as red as an apple, Ana. So cute!” she giggled, poking my cheek from on top of me.

“Um, would you mind getting off of me?”

“Hm? You’re packing more than I thought in the chest area.”

“E-Eek! P-P-Please stop!”

Ginorious

The afternoon after my sister had her marriage talks, we had tea in the fortieth drawing room, called the Carnelian. Currently, it was me, my mother-in-law, and my sister. The duke was on business as the prime minister at the royal court, and Ana was at school for in-school research assistant work.

“So, what did you think of him? Now that you’ve had a day to think about it, do you have any opinions?” my mother-in-law asked.

“He’s very handsome! He’s exactly the kind of guy I wanted!”

“Well, that’s lovely to hear.”

“Oh, but I guess I wasn’t able to confirm that his chest is hairless.”

“Well...that’s lovely to hear.”

Of course you couldn’t confirm that! What kind of noble lady wants to inspect a guy she’s meeting for the first time for chest hair?! After we’d talked for a bit between the three of us, a servant came, notifying my sister that Eric had come to see her.

“Oh, let him in, please,” my sister said.

“We don’t need to be here if you’d prefer. You two can talk all you want by yourselves,” my mother-in-law said with a smile.

“It’s all right. He said he was leaving today, so I’m pretty sure he’s just saying goodbye. If that’s the case, it’s more efficient for you two to be here so he

doesn't have to find you after."

"Oh, you're with company, I see..." Eric said awkwardly as he entered the room.

"Yep. I thought it'd be easier for you to say goodbye to everyone like this."

"Right... Well, uh, here..." Eric said, giving the servant a box made of rosewood to place on the table. Inside was a milk vetch.

"Hm? Is this for me?"

"Yeah...it is."

"Thanks, but why this flower?" my sister asked.

"You wrote in your letter after finding out that Ginorious went to a mountain to get a black-ice flower that you wished someone would do the same for you."

"You went all the way to a mountain just for that?! Are you an idiot?! You don't even have to go to a mountain to get this flower! They grow in lots of places!"

"S-Sorry. I'm not too knowledgeable about flowers, but...I just thought it was pretty, so I chose it... Sorry."

"That's not the point! Why did you put yourself in danger?! I only wrote that as an idle thought. Why'd you put so much stock into it?! What would you have done if you'd gotten hurt?! Wait... Is that scratch on your face...from then?"

"Yeah. I was attacked by a monster..." he chuckled.

"Ugh! I knew it!"

Then, my sister began lecturing him. Though he tried to say that as a member of the knight troupe, injuries like these weren't too out of the ordinary, and that he didn't go too deep into the mountains because he was pressed for time, my sister's anger didn't diminish at all.

After she finished scolding him, she accepted the flower since he'd gone through all the trouble to get it for her. Then, Eric bid us all farewell before leaving to go back to his lodgings since he was planning on leaving the royal capital today.

Not only had my sister gotten all up in Eric's face while he was here, when he left, she plopped back down into the chair, which wasn't very good manners. She sat there, silently glaring at the table.

"Hey, Gino...do you feel anything when you see a pretty girl?"

"No," I responded immediately.

As someone who'd lived an entire life as an ugly guy, I'd gotten used to hating myself whenever I found my eyes following someone beautiful. If I only looked at those who were beautiful, I wouldn't be so different from the people who discriminated based on looks or who'd laughed at me for how ugly I'd been. As a result, I'd become someone who didn't care in the slightest about the looks of others.

Even now, if I saw someone beautiful, I could objectively classify them as such, but I didn't feel anything emotional from it. I might as well have been looking at a centipede. All I had was a strong mental block toward them.

"Then what about for a marriage partner? Other than looks, what's important?"

"Their personality. Using somebody's looks as a basis for marriage isn't appropriate in my opinion. So for example, you like that actor Tron Sivan now, but before him, you liked Raylin Gozling, right? In your case especially, the kind of guy you're attracted to changes frequently."

"Urk... Yeah...you're not wrong."

"I think you put too much stock in the looks of your potential partners, but I also think choosing your marriage partner based on how they look is wrong," I said.

"Why?"

"Everyone ages, and when they do, they eventually won't have the same face you fell in love with. Being married, you'll spend more time with your partner than anyone else, meaning you'll see the changes in their face the most. So you should focus less on something fleeting, and more on the things that'll last longer. I think that'll really be what brings you happiness."

Though the Adolni family couldn't turn down the marriage talks at this point, it was possible for the suitor to call things off. If that happened, I wanted to make sure the next guy she chose wasn't someone who just had a good face. I'd said all of that with these feelings in mind.

From my experience in my past life, I knew all about how one's looks faded with age. The prettiest girl in high school would become old at some point, and she wouldn't be noteworthy anymore. No matter how many heads she turned in her youth, she'd become just another person when she was old. Nobody would be looking at her the same way anymore.

That was why I had no idea why people put so much focus on an attribute that was so temporary. The person you married was someone you'd have to be with forever, even if they weren't as good-looking as when they were young. I couldn't think that marrying someone for only their looks was a good choice at all.

"Hm... Happiness, huh?" my sister said, falling into deep thought. "What do you think happiness is, Gino? How does someone become happy?"

"By getting married to someone as wonderful as Ana."

"Yeah, yeah. Thanks for your predictable answer. Sheesh, asking you was a mistake. What do you think is necessary to become happy, Lady Jennifer? What do you think happiness is?"

"Well, I believe that it's love."

"Love? I don't think it's just that. What about being able to show off by walking with a really handsome guy? I think that's important too."

"I don't blame you for wanting to show off, but I wouldn't recommend using that as a source of happiness. If you steep yourself in a sense of superiority from something you possess, one day, someone or something will inevitably outdo you. All that's fair must fade, and once that happens, all you'll feel is a strong sense of inferiority and humiliation. Whatever happiness you obtain at the start is offset by the humiliation waiting for you down the line. At best, it equals out, but usually, I think you just end up with more negatives than positives."

“You think so? But how could something that makes you feel superior end up as a negative?”

“I can think of a lot of different ways. At its core, superiority is a happiness gained by comparing yourself to others. By doing so, you become stuck in an endless cycle of judgment and comparison. You’ll always be competing with someone else, and if you live life like that, I guarantee it’ll be exhausting,” my mother-in-law said with a gentle smile.

I agreed with her. Many people with higher statuses lived in constant fear that they’d be outdone. It hurt them a lot when it actually happened. There’d been a lot of those kinds of people in my past life too.

Every now and then they’d overdo it and even try to impede others so as to not lose their number one ranking in some very narrow category. They’d feel so immensely pressured and cornered that they felt they *needed* to do this. It’d even get to the point that it damaged their relationships with others. When they ended up alone, they’d double down and cling to their sense of superiority even more. Chasing that high was just baiting oneself into a one-way trip to an unhappy life.

Of course, I didn’t mean to disregard the amount of effort they put in, but I believed that if they weren’t so fixated on results, they’d be living much happier lives. At least, that’s what I thought looking at it from the outside.

“Money is also a factor for many when it comes to marriage. For commoners, being poor leads to hardship, so it’s an important thing to consider. It’s not something that we often think about as nobles, though. It’s not difficult for us to find fulfillment in material goods.”

“But aren’t there a lot of nobles who put importance on the finances of the person they’re marrying?”

“Of course there are, but I think those kinds of people are also the type to seek superiority from the expensive jewels they have. To get that feeling, they need wealth. I think it’d be better for those people to try and change themselves so they don’t need to choose a marriage partner just for their money. People who focus on material things like jewels will always need to have the most expensive things, but even if they spend a fortune, once they see

someone with more expensive jewels than them, they'll do the same thing again. Their entire life will be nothing but a repetition of that without ever feeling satisfied. They'll be eternally envious. Doesn't that sound exhausting to you?"

"It does..." my sister said softly, slowly digesting what my mother-in-law had said.

"I think if you're looking to be happy, then what's important is finding something that you won't try to compare with others, and I think love is the best thing for that. You'll feel so happy that you want to cry when you find someone you love and treasure, and you'll even find yourself wanting to do your absolute best for their sake. I think that feeling is priceless. To me, loving and being loved is the key to a fulfilling life. That's why I think that even if it's through small gestures, having someone who can show their love is best. For instance, say, that flower of yours?"

"This? It's nothing but a troublesome gift," my sister said, looking at the flower while my mother-in-law snickered.

"It certainly is troublesome. I think you truly do wish that Eric wouldn't do anything to put himself in danger. However, I also think somewhere in your heart, you feel happy he went to those lengths for you. It doesn't seem like merely a troublesome gift from where I'm sitting."

"Well..."

"I suspect that even if he'd bought it in town, it's all the feelings behind the gift that makes it wonderful. I think that as long as you're careful not to overlook those feelings, if you can recognize the love toward you, and if you can treasure the one showing you those feelings, then you'll find happiness."

"So basically...it's better to marry someone you love, right?"

"There are many different types of love, but I think the most important kind is the sincere kind. I think anyone who shows you that kind of love is perfect to marry."

"Why that type?"

"Because that's the kind of love that doesn't fade. They'll be by your side

forever and love you every single moment of it. Even if we all differ in *when* we're ready for that kind of relationship, I think everyone has the potential to find that person eventually. If you can marry someone who treasures you like that, then you'll naturally become a couple who love each other dearly. In my opinion, a loving family is the happiest kind."

"Uh-huh..."

Manners! I chided her mentally but didn't say anything out of fear of breaking her concentration as she stared intently at the table. Despite being the kind of person who'd make snap decisions, she was now taking her time to properly consider something. It was a rare sight.

"Lady Jennifer, about the formal marriage talks..." my sister began after a few quiet moments.

"You don't have to rush to come to an answer. You can take your time to think about it and let me know."

"No, I've made my decision. Sorry, but I want someone different."

"Wh-What are you saying?!" I exclaimed.

After my sister had given my mother-in-law all those crazy requirements, and she had actually *produced* such a person, she was going to turn him down?! She was saying no to the wife of the premier duke, as the daughter of a destitute viscount?! I couldn't believe this. When my mother-in-law told her not to rush to decide, she'd just been being polite. And even if my sister *was* going to turn down the suitor my mother-in-law found for her, her first course of action should've been to stand and properly apologize. This wasn't something one should say while slouched in their seat!

"I understand. So, you're choosing Eric?"

My sister silently nodded. *Please, at least use your words.* I nervously observed my mother-in-law's face. Though she was a hard person to read, it didn't look like she was angry. If anything, she seemed happy.

"You don't have to worry at all. We don't particularly mind calling things off. After all, I'm used to smoothing over failed marriage talks." My mother-in-law glanced at me and smiled after noticing my gaze on her.

“Why did you suddenly change your mind? Didn’t you say he fit your requirements perfectly?” I asked my sister.

“Are you...mad?” She pouted, hanging her head and glancing at me.

Though I wasn’t exactly thrilled, I wasn’t angry. Still, she worried that I would be. It was just like her to do so.

I turned to my mother-in-law to say, “I’m deeply grateful for your graciousness.” Then I looked back to my sister. “Dear sister, whether I am angry at you or not depends on your answer to this question. You made a list of absolutely outlandish requests, and yet when presented with the man who fit every last one, you’re now saying no. Why?”

“Well, the last engagement didn’t work out because I only cared about my fiancé’s looks, right? I thought that by choosing someone who wasn’t from a strict family, was handsome, and had the exact kinds of interests I wanted, things would work out, but...now I’m wondering if I made a mistake.”

“With what?”

“You weren’t wrong about what you said, Gino, about how looks will inevitably fade during a long relationship. That’s why I started thinking I may have been wrong. Then I remembered what Ana told me about how she wanted someone who would treasure her. And Lady Jennifer just explained how someone who genuinely loves you is best.”

“Wait, hold up. What did Ana say? Can I hear more about that?”

“This isn’t the time to talk about Ana...” My sister sighed and poked her finger into my cheek as a warning. “Stay on track.”

I was extremely curious about the kind of guy Ana liked. I got so curious that I’d lost focus completely. That was entirely my fault.

“Anyway, both Ana and Lady Jennifer said the same thing, and now after hearing everything they said, I think I should find myself someone like that too. But I thought nobody really felt that way about me until...” She glanced at the flower on the table.

“I see. His present made you fall in love with him?” I asked.

“Of course not! No way I’d fall in love from something simple like that! I’m not so cheap a woman that I’d have my heartstrings pulled by one mere flower.”

“You two sure are close,” my mother-in-law giggled. “Gino really is a lost cause when it comes to romance. You’ve realized just how much love has been poured into that flower, haven’t you, Viviana?”

My sister’s face grew red, but she nodded. “Looking at it again, I can’t help but think about how he remembered something I said in passing in our letters, and how he went all the way into the dangerous mountains. Then, there’s the suitor I just met. When I think about who will make me happy, I can’t help but think the flower is a much more wonderful gift than the sweets I received. I know just how sincere Eric is, and he’s loved me for so long, so that’s why I think he’ll be a person who sincerely treasures me for the rest of my life.”

Oh, really? Up until now she’d only ever cared about guys who were handsome, but now she wasn’t choosing the guy with her ideal looks. She’d actually fallen for the one who’d brought her a flower. And now here she was, critically thinking about who to choose rather than just instantly going for the most handsome one.

“What’s that look for? I can learn from experiences too.” My sister pouted, seeing my face frozen in surprise. *I guess she really has matured.* “Besides, Eric’s really slimmed down and gotten very handsome. It was really cute how he got all red when I tried to check to see if he had chest hair. Yeah, I feel like this isn’t too bad at all.”

You forced your way into checking if he has chest hair or not?! What are you doing?! It’d be one thing if you two were married, but you’re not even engaged! I couldn’t believe that such a noblewoman existed. *I’d like to take back my evaluation. She hasn’t matured much at all.*

“I gotta go somewhere real quick,” she said, getting up.

“To him, right? Be safe. I’ve already prepared a carriage and security for you,” my mother-in-law giggled.

I’d noticed that while my sister had been lecturing Eric, my mother-in-law had been giving orders to the servants. It was only now that I realized it must have been for this. I couldn’t believe how fast to act she was.

“I can’t say that this was any less filled with problems than usual, but either way, I’d like to congratulate you,” I said. “I’ll send you a present in the near future.”

“It’s too soon for that. We’re not going to be officially engaged,” she giggled, her face going red from my sudden congratulations. “But I’m looking forward to it. Send me a present anyway, even if I don’t get engaged.” Then, as if to end the conversation, she dashed out of the room.

For a noble lady, I really wish you wouldn’t run in the hallways...



“Tell me what happened. Now!” my father said as soon as he sat on the sofa in the Valvalier estate.

Proper etiquette dictated that small talk would precede the main topic of discussion, but he’d jumped right in. He was likely too at his wit’s end to mind such customs. It was now six days after my sister’s marriage talks, and our father had come running, frantic after learning that my sister had requested the Sevensworths’ help in finding a fiancé. He’d come to me first to get all the details surrounding the situation before going to the Sevensworths.

Just now, he’d arrived on horseback ahead of everyone else in my family. My mother was currently coming as fast as she could by carriage with my brother Davy as her guard. The fact that their arrivals were staggered was proof of how panicked they were. So first, I started off by informing my father of the list of requirements that my sister had given the Sevensworths for her potential suitor.

“No chest hair?! That *idiot* daughter of mine!” As expected, he was red in the face with anger. “I can’t let this stand! I need to go to the Sevensworths immediately and rescind her request!” my father barked, jumping to his feet.

“Please wait. The Sevensworths have already found someone who matches her requirements, and they met six days ago,” I said, stopping him in his tracks.

Now he looked at me, gaping. Even from my father’s standpoint, my mother-in-law worked abnormally fast.

“Sh-She already met him?!”

“Yes, and he fit everything she wanted perfectly. She indicated as such to my mother-in-law as well.”

“Who is he?! What house does he belong to?!” My father grabbed me by the shoulders.

“Well, about that... After they met, she told us she’d prefer someone else.”

The next moment was graced by the sound of my father fainting.



Ultimately, Eric and my sister got engaged. He quit the knights and went to live in the Sevensworths’ territory, where my mother-in-law had given him land and a barony as a present. Now he was desperately cramming all the knowledge he could about the town he was suddenly in charge of so he could learn how to best manage it.

The higher the status of my sister and Eric, the higher the level of etiquette that would be expected of them. Though my mother-in-law could have elevated them even higher, she’d decided against it, knowing how at odds my sister was with the restrictions of noble etiquette. That being said, she was willing to raise their status in the future if my sister could learn to act appropriately.

There were two types of titles one could earn in this country: royally appointed and aristocratically appointed. If one had a title appointed by a royal, then they’d be a retainer of the royal family; however, an aristocratically appointed title meant you were a retainer of whatever noble house bestowed it on you. Including the Sevensworths, there were many greater nobles who had other noble families under them. In this way, Eric had been given status via the Sevensworths.

Officially, having royally appointed status was more prestigious than receiving it through other nobility, but in practice, it was hard to say. It was a great honor for families under greater noble families to be granted a higher status. More often than not, one’s place in the hierarchy would be based on aristocratically appointed status, and those who had status only through the royal family were considered outsiders.

With this newly appointed title and being left in charge of an area within the

Sevensworth territory, Eric was now under the Sevensworths' umbrella. After not only giving a list of insane requests to my mother-in-law but also giving the boot to the guy she found for her, my sister was greatly in her debt.

"No need to thank me. I did this for the sake of our family. If anything, I feel as if I should apologize," my mother-in-law said to me as I tried to thank her as we had tea together.

"For the sake of the Sevensworths?"

"Well, you're going to be the head of this family, aren't you? If I don't rein her in, she'll be a great point of weakness for you sometime in the future, won't she?"

"Then what would you need to apologize for?"

"Viviana is the biological elder sister of this family's future head. As such, her value is very high. Don't you find it strange that anyone would want to break things off with her?"

She has a point. The family of her last fiancé had found her to be too much for them to handle, which was why I'd thought their engagement falling apart had been only natural. But with me and Ana now being engaged, it was strange for them to want to end the engagement with my sister since she'd grant them access to the Sevensworths.

"Of course, their inability to rein in Viviana was one problem, but they pulled the trigger to break things off as soon as they saw a chance to make the slightest profit."

From my mother-in-law's explanation, I learned that they'd been offered a pittance from a greater noble family to break things off. The one who'd set this up had been Marquess Burton, with the intention of having his own son swoop in and claim my sister's hand. House Burton had also been the ones to leak about her monster-hunting activities.

It was true that my sister had been cut loose without too much of a fuss. But if they hadn't wanted to succumb to the pressure from House Burton, they could've gone to House Adolni and had them petition the Sevensworths for help on their behalf. If the matter was concerning the central political world,

then it was okay for even greater nobles to petition for help without reserve. If that family hadn't even done that, it could only mean that they'd immediately cut my sister loose without a second thought.

"Don't tell her, though," my mother-in-law added, trying to be considerate of my sister.

Pride meant a lot to nobles. Most noble girls would be deeply hurt if they found out that they'd been essentially sold off for a pittance. I doubted my sister would be too bothered, but even so, she'd still probably be a little upset.

"So then, the reason she wrote to Ana for help with looking for a suitor was because..."

"I made sure Ana proposed the idea of our family assisting with her search."

My mother-in-law was pulling strings from the beginning, then? Her being able to find the perfect suitor in no time at all was most likely so other families didn't have the chance to interfere. I was starting to see the full picture.

But either way, I was relieved. If my sister had married House Burton's son, she'd have been stuck between a rock and a hard place in regard to serving both families to the best of her abilities. She wasn't really suited to navigating delicate situations like that. I couldn't imagine her trying to successfully coordinate between the demands of two noble houses.

"Um...is it possible that you've made a move not just on my sister, but on House Adolni as well?"

"Of course. For example, the vendors for the Adolni territory's specialty product—medicinal tea leaves—mostly come from one of the houses under our umbrella. The same goes for weapons and armor supply. Now House Adolni shouldn't be feeling any financial pressure from any other houses. I've also made sure that they have guards and covert agents. That's also probably why Viviana was able to safely travel by shared carriage without being abducted. Ana doesn't know any of this, though, so she panicked and sent someone to pick her up."

Most likely, my mother-in-law had become privy to Marquess Burton's secret plot thanks to her covert operatives. *When I eventually succeed this house, will I*

be able to deal with things as adeptly as she does? I couldn't help but have that worry every time I learned something new.



“Yes! I found it!”

Two months after returning from the Saint Marylin School of Medicine, I'd finally arrived at an effective treatment method for Ana's affliction. I was grateful I'd selected a university that had specialized in both medical care and pharmaceuticals. I'd gotten a very good number of texts relating to magic pharmaceuticals.

At this point, I'd confirmed without a doubt that the identity of Ana's curse was indeed severe hypermana syndrome. I'd taken a sample of her saliva for testing, and took her temperature throughout the day without her noticing to diagnose her. I'd collected her saliva by having her spit into a small vial. I'll never forget the ice-cold look on Bridgette's face when I put it in my pocket.

The next step was to gather the necessary ingredients, but I didn't know what they were called in this world, so I had to figure that out. Thankfully, I had pictures, so it wasn't too difficult. With the exception of one ingredient, I was able to procure them with money alone.

The one ingredient I was having difficulty with was a special kind of glycoside that was extracted from a plant called rodeora rozheal in this world. It naturally grew in the mountains of the Gerald territory.

Modern use of it was as an ingredient in a pill that strengthened the bones and muscles of knights. Rodeora rozheal was not only rare, but it was also something that was used for the military. As such, it was strictly monitored by House Gerald and wasn't for commercial sale, meaning I had to come up with a different way to get my hands on it.

The first step was looking into their territory. I spared no expense in trying to find a weak point. There was no such thing as a perfect territory with no problems, so I was confident I'd find something. The next step was making contact with someone from their house. Their heir was a knight of the imperial guard in the royal capital, so I decided to try negotiating with him first. But before that, it would be smart to talk with the other knights he worked with to

get some information on him. *Hm. Where to start...*



Today, I was with my classmates at the royal palace's training grounds for a school swordsmanship tournament. As the one who'd earned the Sun Lion brooch, a symbol of my status at the top of the school, I was granted several privileges. One of those was the ability to change the contents of a class, which I'd used to organize this tournament.

The reason behind my doing this had to do with Anthony and my other male classmates who came from military families. Previously, I'd used my authority to organize an embroidery contest for Ana, and it'd been pretty much an event just for girls. After that, Anthony and the others came to me and said they wanted something similar, and that was how this swordsmanship tournament came to be.

Since we already had regular mock battles during our classes, I changed it so that we'd have the chance to spar with knights of the imperial guard. Students would get to do battle with the cream of the crop in our country and even receive some pointers from them. The students who came from military families were overjoyed by this prospect.

"Congrats on advancing to the main tournament," I said to Justin.

"Heh. Thanks." He flashed a smile at me.

Right now we were doing the preliminaries. The ten students who won here would be able to advance and fight the imperial guard knights. With Justin's battle concluded, we now had our ten students who would move on, and seven of them were from our elite class.

Though our classes were divided according to the grades we earned on assessments, the students in our class weren't all just brains. They were also pretty talented with swords too. My theory was that it was because there were a lot of greater nobles in our class, so they had a much more advanced education and training regimen compared to other nobles.

"Still, I never thought I'd have so many matches in the preliminaries."

"Well, the prize is pretty big, so I'm not surprised there are a lot of entrants," I

said.

“Yeah, I still can’t believe the prize is an adamantite sword forged by *the* Buela Pistah. I thought it was some kind of joke the first time I heard it,” Anthony said, laughing.

Buela Pistah was a master blacksmith—the best in the country, in fact—and he’d agreed to forge a sword for the winner of the tournament. He’d even gone so far as to use a rare metal, adamantite. Of course, one couldn’t simply get him to forge a sword just by asking, but with the duke’s influence, it had been possible. My mother-in-law praised her husband for how he got his cooperation, making the duke grin proudly. To me, it really seemed like she had him dancing in the palm of her hand.

“But getting even one win from here on is gonna be hard. The knights are all captain-level. Even my older brother’s participating,” Justin said, laughing wryly.

The students weren’t the only ones excited about the prize. Originally, I’d only planned for the regular knights from the imperial guard to participate, but now even the captains were joining. The reason for this was because both the overall winner of the tournament and the strongest student would receive a prize. After all, if the contest didn’t have separate categories for the winners, then the students wouldn’t really be motivated since it was almost guaranteed that they wouldn’t win against the knights.

During the preliminaries, and now as the actual tournament was starting, I’d been looking around for the heir to House Gerald. My highest priority was making contact with him since he was part of the imperial guard. Some of the guards were heading to the grounds now to participate, but the majority of them were going to the stands to cheer on their fellow knights. Out of all of them, I found the guy I was looking for, who was focusing on training by himself. I’d learned about this area when making arrangements to set this tournament up.

When I arrived at the training grounds, I saw a guy who fit the description I’d been given of House Gerald’s heir. He had curly, dark brown hair and blue eyes. He was the most muscular out of all the knights and moved in a way that tried

to compensate for his injured left leg. I was sure I was looking at Charles Jay Gerald, heir to House Gerald.

He'd earned status due to his achievements in the imperial guard. His middle name was his original house name, which he was a baron in. He had baron status despite being a part of House Gerald, whose current head was a viscount. Since he had two different titles, it was worked into his name.

For the record, there were many teachers at our school with multiple names like this since they'd all achieved many things in their fields. For example, Professor Kendall's middle and last names were Ghelgud and Kendall respectively, so technically we should be calling her Professor Ghelgud Kendall, but calling professors by their full names was typically too lengthy and not really practical to do all the time in speech. Because of that, our school made a rule that professors should be called by their last name only, and thus everyone called her Professor Kendall.

"Sorry, but the rodeora rozheal isn't part of my jurisdiction," he replied to my request.

I'd come to understand that knights preferred direct negotiations, so I plainly asked if he could give me some of the rodeora rozheal, but as expected, I was turned down.

"Then how about I solve one of the issues plaguing your territory. Would you give me some in exchange for that?"

"What kind of problems are you talking about?"

"You have an infestation of kobolds, don't you?"

He frowned at my words. Being close to a mountain range made it very inconvenient for those in the Gerald territory to conduct trade. To solve this, they built roads and bridges, which helped trade, and the territory as a whole, to flourish. But it also created a problem as well. By clearing the environment, they'd displaced those that'd used those areas as their habitat, unleashing monsters across their territory.

"I'm a member of the imperial guard and a knight of House Gerald. We will defeat them ourselves."

“But their pack leader can’t be cut by a sword or pierced by arrows, right? That’s how you hurt your leg, isn’t it?”

His frown deepened. Kobolds honestly weren’t very strong enemies, so I was sure that, normally, he could easily get rid of all the ones that were in his territory. However, he wasn’t successful at exterminating them because there was one that couldn’t be defeated. He’d gotten hurt, and I was sure he wasn’t the only knight who had. Most likely the kobold he’d fought was an aberration. Judging by how physical weapons had no effect on it, it had to be a magic beast that deployed a magic barrier to repel physical attacks. My guess was that kobolds in general were failed werewolves.

“You’re planning on gathering more knights and trying again, aren’t you? But what do you plan to do if neither swords nor arrows can hurt it?”

The reason he was pushing himself to train instead of participating in or spectating the tournament was because of this kobold problem. He knew that this was a battle of life or death, so he had to make sure he was prepared.

“I...have my pride as a knight of House Gerald. I can’t simply ask a knight troupe from another territory to help.”

How very noble and knightlike of you. You value your pride more than your own life.

“There’s no need to call for knights from other territories to come. All you need to do is invite me, a merchant, into your territory. If it’s just me, no one will think you’re asking anyone else for help, and thus no rumors will spread.”

“Huh? You plan to resolve this all on your own?”

“That’s right. If you leave it to me, I’ll resolve your problem in no time at all.”

He fell silent, so I decided to give him another push. “Of course, I will never speak a word of this to anyone in order to keep your honor intact. I’ll even prepare a contract saying as much. In exchange for some kilros of the rodeora rozheal, I’ll defend your family’s honor and make sure you don’t lose a single knight. Not a bad deal, right?”

“What about if you lose your life or get injured?”

“In such a case, I’ll make sure you feel no effects of it at all. I will state it in the contract explicitly.”

After finishing negotiations with Viscount Jay Gerald, I entered the tournament grounds and Duke Sevensworth called out to me.

“Pretty good event you put together here, kid. Looks like students nowadays are having a lot more fun than we did back in my day,” he said with a smile.

The actual tournament was taking place in a stadium with proper audience seating. Though most of these were filled with students, there were a good number of other audience members as well, with the duke being one of them.

Though he’d come to the palace today to attend to his prime minister duties, he was currently on his break, watching the tournament. Just like him, a lot of people had decided to take their breaks at this time to watch. Many people from outside the royal court were here too, and it seemed that even my mother-in-law had come. The place had become absolutely packed.

Imperial guards were assisting as referees, so I wasn’t really too busy. For now, I got to stand near the edge of the circular stage and simply watch. There were ten students and ten imperial guard knights in the tournament. All of the knights were captains. Winning even one match was going to be difficult for the students...or so I thought. Contrary to my expectations, they were putting up a good fight. Though getting past the first round would be difficult, if they focused on getting even one win, they’d have a very high chance of being deemed the strongest student and get a legendary sword.

Though the knights were fighting the students with the intention of saving their energy for future matches, the students were all fighting to the maximum of their abilities. This was most likely the reason the matches seemed so close. The stadium erupted as Anthony won against one of the imperial guards.

He was using the Treves’ dual-blade technique. His swords didn’t have any guards and had an unusual curve to them like kukris. Since his fighting style was unique to his family, his opponent was unprepared for it, as well as for his speed, which was already so fast that it was hard to match even if you were

used to fighting him. Though the knight was objectively more skilled, not knowing how to fight this unique style gave Anthony the opening he needed to win.

Ultimately, he was the only student able to move to the next round, but he lost to one of the country's elite five swordsmen in the following round. With that, there were no more students in the tournament, but the crowd was still very excited. They especially wanted to see fights between the country's elite five. Most likely it was why they'd come in the first place.

The winner of the tournament ended up being one of the country's elite five, Count Alan Fletcher, the vice-captain of Squad One. As the event organizer, I went up onto the stage and presented him and Anthony, the best performing student, each with a very ornate box with an adamantite sword in it.

Then, I thanked the nobles who'd helped fund the tournament, and read out advertisements for them. They'd been a big factor in how we'd been able to afford the sword prizes. By giving more money than the suggested amount, they were able to have longer advertisement messages, which had made many nobles scramble to donate. It was something I'd come up with using my past life's knowledge.

After I finished listing out all the sponsors and advertisements, I started to leave to greet the guests, but as I did, Count Fletcher addressed the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, your attention, please! This tournament was a competition between students and the imperial guard; however, the strongest student did not participate in this battle. He's the very same student who beat *the Lord Bloody!*"

As expected from a knight, his voice really carried. Lord Bloody was the nickname of a retired military officer who now taught swordsmanship at our school.

When I'd first transferred in, I'd beaten him. Therefore, the certain student that Count Fletcher was referring to was me. Winning against a great swordsman in this world wasn't too difficult since I could use body fortification magic from my past life, which allowed me to efficiently enhance my physical abilities.

For the most part, I'd try to put up a good fight and not actually beat the teacher, but since Ana had helped me so much with my test preparation and had wished me good luck, I'd felt as if I definitely couldn't let myself lose.

"Master Sultan, also known as Lord Bloody, was my master, and due to his age, he couldn't participate in this tournament with all of its rounds. However, he's by no means weak. Even now, in a one-match fight, he's stronger than me. Even so, that very same man lost to a student!"

Oh, so he was Professor White's personal mentee? Judging by the way he was calling him by his first name, he hadn't been taught by him in school, but rather as a proper trainee.

"Tell me, don't you wish to see that student fight?! I know I do! I wager this adamantite sword against him. If you agree, please show it with your applause!"

Huh? This isn't a part of today's schedule.

"Sorry, but there aren't many chances to fight someone like you. I'm gonna get revenge for Master Sultan," he said in a low voice, grinning at me.

The venue had been electrified by him. They were thrilled as if they were getting treated to an extra act of a play. *I see. Viscount Jay Gerald knew about this surprise event, which is why he said he wanted to talk again about our arrangement after the tournament. He must want to see how strong I am. Well then, I guess I can't say no. If I want to cure Ana's curse, then I have no choice but to accept.*

As I finished donning armor in the changing room, I went to go pick a random sword from the sword rack, when I was stopped.

"Here. Your sword," a man in a hood said, offering me a sword with both hands.

The sword he offered me seemed sparkling new as compared to the swords on the rack, which were all quite worn. *Wow, they even have a new sword ready for me. He must've planned this all along.* I thanked the man and headed back to the arena.

I'd been using light body fortification magic even in my battles with other students. If I didn't use it here and lost, I'd be berated by my classmates for holding back. If the same guy who'd beaten Lord Bloody lost without putting up a fight, they'd think he hadn't given it his all.

In one-on-one combat, knights fought with everything they had with their pride on the line. Holding back was something that masters did to their pupils and disciples. Essentially, only those who looked at others as being weaker or less skilled than them held back. If I did the same, it'd look like I was trying to humiliate them, and it'd escalate into a duel. That was why I decided to use some body fortification magic for this battle. I'd very much like to avoid the commotion of a duel.

My match with Count Fletcher began at the referee's signal. He truly lived up to his reputation as a member of the country's elite five with his incredible speed, strength and technique. The difference between him and the students was night and day, making him a difficult opponent.

When he raised his sword above his head and swung it down, I went low and moved left to try and strike his torso. If this were kendo, it'd be like he was aiming for a head strike while I was aiming for an abdomen one. But before my blade could make contact, I was met with a kick from him.

I frantically let go of my sword with one hand to stop his attack by catching his knee. I pushed back hard on it, making him lose his balance while I retreated to gain some distance. Thanks to that, he wasn't able to hit me with his follow-up attack. Swordsmanship in this country was quite different from kendo in my past life. It was completely okay to punch or kick your opponent. You could even grab them and stop their movements or push them to the ground.

"Color me surprised. You were able to block that?" Count Fletcher said with an amused smile.

He continued like that for the remainder of the match. With his skilled feints, he was able to control how I moved. Thankfully with my magic, I was stronger and faster than him, so at the very least, we were evenly matched, but in terms of technique, he far surpassed me.

But even so, this was more than enough. If I was able to hold my ground

against one of the country's elite five, then Viscount Jay Gerald should be convinced of my strength. Besides, there was no need for me to win against Count Fletcher. If I won against him in front of so many people, I couldn't even begin to imagine the grudge he'd have against me. Losing in a close battle would be the best way to make sure that there was no friction and to keep good relations.

I was a man of almost a hundred years of life experience. I wasn't one to dwell over whether I won or not. We'd been fighting for a good amount of time now. It was about time for me to lose.

"Sir Gino, you can do it!"

I couldn't help but look toward the spectators with surprise. *It's Ana! She's cheering for me with all her heart!* The stands were filled with people who were interested in swordsmanship, meaning that most of them were knights who were cheering for their brother-in-arms, Count Fletcher. Their cheers for him were like a huge chorus, but in the midst of that, Ana was trying her best to cheer me on.

It was bad etiquette for noble ladies to raise their voices. Despite that, she was screaming so loudly in front of all these people. She must have been so embarrassed, but even so, she was doing her best to make sure her voice reached me. *I can't lose. It's not an option at all. Who cares about rules regarding interpersonal friction?! Rules are made to be broken!*

I couldn't let myself increase my body fortification magic any further, otherwise I'd enter inhuman territory. Instead, I decided to use *overclock* which would temporarily boost my brain functions by three times. It'd make my reflexes much better. As soon as I used it, his movements felt surprisingly slow to me.

I could see everything—the movement of his eyes, the position of his arms and shoulders, even the direction his fingernails were pointing. Seeing everything like this, I could tell how he was tricking me with his movements. I could tell how he was beating me with skill despite me being faster and more powerful than him. But the thing about feints was that if the opponent didn't fall for them, then they were nothing more than useless movements. I ignored

his feint and immediately moved to press my sword to his throat.

“Match set! Sir Valvalier is the winner!”

As the spectators erupted with applause, I only looked at Ana as she clapped, beaming at me. Then, I went down on one knee, laid my sword flat in both of my hands and brought it above my head. It was something knights did to say that they dedicated this win to someone.

The crowd with its thunderous applause congratulated Ana. The girls in the crowd squealed while looking curiously at her, while the knights whistled and excitedly cheered. Ana looked down, her face bright red. *Oh, she’s cute. So cute! Just being able to see her like this makes winning worth it.*

“Please settle down, everyone. I may have won this mock battle; however, as you could tell, Count Fletcher had me backed into the corner the entire match. My victory was nothing but a stroke of good fortune. I thereby relinquish the adamantite sword to Count Fletcher in honor of his masterful skills in swordsmanship.”

As I said this, the crowd shot to their feet and applauded, accepting my suggestion. The imperial guards had joined the tournament out of desire for this legendary sword, but I was different. All I wanted was to successfully negotiate with Viscount Jay Gerald, and I had. With me being able to dedicate my win to Ana, this was more than enough.

“Are you sure? It’s an adamantite sword forged by Buela Pistah, you know?” Count Fletcher asked me, guilt in his face.

My having that sword was like a first-year violin student holding a Stradivarius. It’d be a complete waste for someone like me to have it.

Anastasia

“You did it! How incredible, Sir Gino!”

I couldn’t help but shout in excitement. Sir Gino had emerged victorious against one of the country’s elite five.

“No way!”

“He really won against an elite five member?!”

“Whoa!”

It seemed like the surprise from the military families was much louder than me, though. After losing in the preliminary rounds, they’d all joined the audience and had been quite excited while watching everything.

“Oh? I think Sir Valvalier is smiling at you, Lady Anastasia,” Lady Ekatarina said from next to me.

“Oh, that can’t be true,” I said.

I was in a sea of people. There was no way he should have noticed me, especially at this distance. Besides, being bathed in all these cheers as he was, how could he possibly find me in all these people? I couldn’t help but feel like he was impossibly far away.

“Oh, look at that! He *was* smiling at you! He’s dedicating this victory to you!”

Sir Gino was facing this way, had gotten onto one knee, and held up his sword toward me with both hands.

“Oh, how wonderful!”

“Not bad, Ginorious!”

“How romantic!”

“What a wonderful sight to behold! It’s straight out of a romantic play.”

“I bet the troubadours are gonna be singing about this in a week!”

Our classmates were all very excited, but then they all turned to me and began clapping. It sounded like thunder. Many of the knights and other men whistled and shouted their congratulations while the ladies excitedly squealed. *This is very...very embarrassing. My face feels so warm.*

After that, my classmates cheered excitedly once more when Sir Gino presented the adamantite sword to Sir Fletcher. Despite having been forged of not only a rare metal but by the greatest blacksmith in the country, he’d relinquished it so easily. Everyone in the venue got to their feet and applauded him, cheering his virtuousness. Even after being bathed in praise, Sir Gino didn’t

seem as if he were getting a big head or anything. If anything, he seemed his usual calm self—as if he'd done what was only natural. *Oh, he's so wonderful.*

Ginorious

After the tournament concluded, I went back to the changing room with Count Fletcher.

“I wish you'd told me your plans if you were going to spring that challenge on me like that,” I complained as he got dressed next to me. “The fact that you even had a new sword prepared just for me means that you were set on deceiving me from the start, weren't you?”

Our match had not been on the schedule. If they'd wanted it to happen, they could've done it without pulling a fast one on me, the organizer.

“Huh? New sword?” he asked, confused.

I then showed him the sword in question. After swinging it around a bit and examining it with one eye, something knights usually did when receiving a new sword, he flicked the blade and the look on his face changed as he heard the resulting sound. He continued flicking it in different areas.

“Did you really fight me with this sword?”

When I nodded, his expression changed to one of seriousness before he swung his blade against mine. Though he didn't even swing that hard, mine shattered instantly.

“It's a miracle. This blade was rigged to easily break, but it didn't the entire time we were fighting.”

The reason it hadn't was because I'd cast fortification magic on it too. When casting body fortification magic on oneself, it was common practice to also cast it on your effects. In my past life, anyone could run faster than a horse, but to make sure the friction didn't ruin whatever you were wearing, it was normal to fortify your shoes and other clothing as well. Out of habit, I'd fortified what I was holding, which had been the sword.

Even with the blade being blunt, it was still made out of iron. If I hadn't used

magic, I could've been seriously hurt when it broke. If it happened while I was blocking a blow to the head, it could've killed me. I never thought I would've been a target for assassination.

Count Fletcher asked me how I'd come to get the blade, so I told him about how I'd received it from a hooded man. As he heard everything I said, his face became even more serious. The only ones who'd known he was going to challenge me were the imperial guards he was usually around. If there had been an accident resulting from a rigged sword, the knights who were at the venue today would've been blamed. Thus, he posited that someone they knew must have planned this as a way to get them in trouble.

After I left the venue, I heard my name being called by the daughter of Duke Frances Lillard. She'd graduated the same year as the crown prince and had also been his fiancée until he called it off a few years ago. The dresses we'd used as prizes for the embroidery contest had come from Herr Mays, which was a store owned by House Lillard. She was in charge of the business side of things, so I'd come to know her from there.

Though we weren't especially close, she strangely acted as if we were. She would also come up with reasons to invite me for tea. Since I'd just nearly been assassinated, though, I decided it'd be best to not let my guard down around her.

I felt a gaze on me and found that Ana was looking my way, seeming uneasy. I quickly ran up to her and took her hand. Our classmates were also with her. The guys from military families whistled while the girls giggled. They were still talking about how I dedicated my victory to her. Ana was really cute as she looked down and turned red.

Bridgette was standing a little back from Ana, so I whispered for her to tighten Ana's guard due to the failed assassination attempt on me. Her expression changed to an even more serious one, and she promised to take Ana back to the mansion as soon as possible.

I didn't want to keep Count Fletcher waiting longer than I needed to, so I parted ways with Ana and went into the training barracks that the imperial

guard used. He then casually gathered all the knights of the guard and had me check to see if I recognized anyone as they trained.

From what characteristics I could remember—light purple hair and sharp eyes—I determined that he wasn't one of the knights that was close with Count Fletcher. It must've been someone else who'd somehow gotten this information. After all, it wasn't like they'd agreed to keep Count Fletcher's plans an absolute secret. If someone asked, they could've casually said something about it, meaning that it was possible for this information to have spread to someone in the royal court. But either way, knowing that this assassin wasn't a part of the imperial guard greatly relieved Count Fletcher.

In the end, we decided not to make the assassination attempt public. If we did, then the knights would search for the culprit, but in return, many people involved with the tournament would be punished. In this case, that meant the imperial guards in charge of security on the day of the event and, of course, the person who organized it all—me. It was possible that the mastermind's aim was for either me or the imperial guard to be punished. Given all of that, we determined it to be best not to say anything yet.

"There's also the possibility that they have a target in the imperial guard, but I think it's much more probable that they're aiming for you. Most likely, they would've been very happy if you'd died during the mock battle, but at least if that didn't work out, you'd still be punished. Their only miscalculation is the miracle that occurred, preventing your sword from breaking," my mother-in-law said, analyzing the situation. "Wow, you must have *really* good luck for your sword not to have broken, huh?" she giggled.

I reflexively gulped. She must have figured out that I'd done something the culprit hadn't accounted for, which had helped me survive. Though she didn't press me for details, she most likely assumed it was due to an Artifact.

Since Artifacts were extremely valuable items to the point where your life could be targeted for having one, never bringing it up was proper manners even at home since it was possible for servants to be loose-lipped. It was impossible to keep anything a secret from my mother-in-law, and though I planned to tell her everything one day, I still didn't have the courage to do so.

“The royal court is a completely different world from your school. Though it may seem like an elegant place, very unsavory things happen where no one can see. If you’d never left the Adolni territory, you’d never have had to involve yourself with the royal court, but now you’ve no choice but to enter this dangerous world due to your engagement with Ana. I deeply apologize for that.”

“You don’t have to apologize for anything. If this is what it costs to be with Ana, I’ll gladly pay it. If anything, I feel like it’s a very small price to pay. Meeting Ana is like a miracle to me.”

For heads or heirs of great noble families, the dangers of assassination were essentially just a part of life. They were more than prepared for it. My failure this time was in not checking the sword in advance as a knight would. I was still trying to break the mindset I had from living in peaceful Japan and had been too careless. I had to get it through my head that this wasn’t Japan and that I had to learn this country’s common sense. In order to protect Ana, I needed to mature even more.



I came across a group of kobolds resting under the sun by a cliff. They were nocturnal, so it was common to see them napping during the daytime. Among the pack of gray monsters, I saw one with black fur, leading me to believe it was most likely the one that couldn’t be hurt by swords or arrows.

I used stealth magic to erase my presence and gazed down at them from the cliff. Though the war beasts known as werewolves had been completely bipedal, with fur across their bodies and humanoid from neck down, kobolds were closer to monkeys. They could walk on two legs, but mostly they moved on four. Kobolds and werewolves looked completely different. If they hadn’t used the same magic, it’d be impossible to tell that they were the same creature.

I cast an invisible barrier around the pack and began throwing wood that I’d lit on fire at them. As soon as the wood landed near them, they tried to flee, but they ran into the invisible barrier, sending them into confusion. After I’d thrown all the wood, I sealed the top of the barrier, trapping them inside. Werewolves

didn't have magic that helped them to breathe in these kinds of situations, so they were powerless against oxygen deficiency and carbon monoxide poisoning. I assumed the same should apply to kobolds as well.

I stopped my stealth magic and came down from the cliff. As soon as they saw me, they tried to charge all at once, but they were stopped by the magic barrier. Try as they might, they couldn't break through. It was like looking at a packed train. Hearing the fuss, one of the pack that had just returned tried to attack me, but I cut it down with my sword. Even if the aberration hadn't been in the barrier, I wouldn't have worried. I could harm it because of my engineering expertise from my past life. My specialty had been in metal-cutting and machining magic; even cutting through orichalcum was possible for me. As I continued to take out the returning stragglers, smoke began to plume more strongly from the wood. It was because there wasn't enough oxygen to keep it burning. When the percentage of oxygen in the air was down to 1.28 percent, people could die in a matter of minutes. I was confident the same would apply to the kobolds, which meant I'd have my hands on the rodeora rozheal in no time.

Anastasia

Today, I was listening to music with Sir Gino in the mansion's music room. We were next to each other on a sofa in the listening area.

"Hm, I'll have wine today," Sir Gino said to a servant.

Apparently, commoners and lower nobles started drinking strong liquors in their teenage years. However, for greater nobles, we couldn't drink while we were underage. If we did drink, it'd be a very weak alcohol geared toward kids, like the kind they served at school parties. Every now and then, though, Sir Gino would order a stronger beverage.

"Sir Gino, did something good happen?" I asked.

Usually he would only have stronger drinks during social events for business or if something good happened. He'd done so when I'd first scored second in our grade, then again when I won the embroidery contest.

“Yeah, something very good.”

“Oh, please do tell.”

“I can’t. Not just yet. But soon. I guess I can say that...I’ve found a way to make you even happier than you are now.”

“Huh?”

His smile was beautiful and his eyes sparkled with sincerity. I became embarrassed and didn’t say another word after that. Most likely I’d gone red, and I looked down to hide my face. The reason he was so happy was because he’d done something for my sake. It was because he treasured me deeply. He truly was such a kind person.

Not long after, the orchestra began to perform and I found myself deep within the world of music. Having him by my side made the vivid music seem even brighter and more spectacular than usual. Suddenly, I felt his hand on mine, and I looked up in surprise.

“Being here with you, listening to this music...sharing this time together makes me so happy,” he said, very close to me and with a smile so warm, it could melt hearts.

I couldn’t help but feel embarrassed. The song playing right now was called “The Joy of Love,” whose main melody was played by a two-stringed instrument that produced a very sweet sound. It was an expressive song that essentially said, “I love you so much, I can’t help it. Whatever we do together is fun.” It was my favorite song.

Sir Gino’s tastes were slowly changing. Previously, he hadn’t been particularly interested in musical performances or theater, but recently, he’d even gotten to the point where he was requesting the kinds of songs I liked himself. *I’m so happy as well, being able to spend this time with Sir Gino.* I slightly raised my head and glanced at him. Though he wasn’t a very expressive person, which usually made it difficult to read his emotional state, recently I’d been able to understand him a little bit. At this moment, he really did seem happy.

Chapter 3: Royal Proposals and Creation of the Serum

Ginorious

There was about a month left before we graduated from school. After that, Ana and I would both officially be adults and able to participate in aristocratic society. My role as heir to the duke would also officially start.

I was currently doing some work for the duke in the administrative room at the Sevensworth estate. As I worked alone in the room, the door opened and the duke, who'd been meeting with a visitor, returned. For some time after, he wore a frown and kept exhaling deeply.

"Did something happen? Judging by the seal on the carriage, that was someone from the royal family, right?"

"Yeah. They wanted to talk about an arranged marriage."

"Huh?!"

"You know about the crown prince's engagement falling through, right?"

"Yes, I do. I think everyone does."

I desperately steadied my shaky voice, trying to hide my surprise. Years ago at the school graduation party, the crown prince had simultaneously declared the ending of his engagement with the daughter of Duke Frances Lillard and his new engagement with the daughter of Baron Mariott, citing Lady Lillard's wrongdoings as his reason for doing so.

However, Lady Lillard was famous for being completely flawless, so that already drew suspicion about the veracity of his claims, but the biggest eyebrow-raiser was the fact that he'd announced all of this while having his arm around the waist of Lady Mariott. Nobody believed his claims against Lady Lillard for a second, and instead they all assumed he'd been unfaithful.

Whatever little credibility he'd had walking into that party, it dropped to zero the moment he opened his mouth.

He'd chosen to end his engagement, not only at a party with many people gathered, but with his arm around another woman. This was the kind of thing only people who wanted attention would do. Because of his actions, the news spread so far that even commoners knew about it.

"The crown prince's standing has become perilous, especially with the first prince's faction growing in power."

The duke explained the crown prince's circumstances as briefly as possible. The king had been unable to conceive with the queen for a long time, so he tried with a concubine. Religious tenets forbade polygamy even for the king; however, there could be an exception solely in the event that he and his queen could not conceive. In that situation, continuing the royal line took precedence.

In any case, the king's concubine gave birth to a son, letting the people of the country breathe a sigh of relief. However, not too long after, the queen also gave birth to a boy, making things much more complicated.

According to law, the son of the queen was the rightful heir, so he became the new heir apparent. However, though he might have looked graceful on the outside, on the inside he really broke the mold for how royalty behaved, and not in a good way.

As a result, there was a sizable movement who claimed that the heir apparent was problematic and that the concubine's son deserved to be the true heir to the throne. Consequently, these people had rallied behind the king's concubine.

The two factions backing the first prince and the crown prince respectively had been fighting for a while now over who had the right to succeed the throne. This was also the reason the school had been changed to a merit-based system. It had been another part of their succession struggle. After the crown prince announced his new engagement, the first prince's faction became invigorated.

For the record, the Sevensworths were neutral in this matter. The king was my mother-in-law's brother and doted on her greatly, and thus, she was too close to things. This was a battle between the queen and the concubine, so His Majesty's other family quietly watched from the sidelines without interfering.

“So now the crown prince is looking for a new fiancée?”

The king didn't approve of the engagement between the crown prince and Lady Mariott. Her family had earned their status through their hotel businesses. They had a good amount of wealth, but not that much. For reference, it was maybe about as much as my company. They also were former commoners, so they weren't particularly popular or a family that could really be a powerful backer to the queen.

Currently, the crown prince didn't have an official fiancée. It was possible that he'd approached the duke with the assumption that he'd dissolve our engagement. It was extremely rude of him to do, but objectively, House Valvalier was nothing more than a normal marquess family, so they would easily be crushed by the royal family if they tried to protest.

However, it wasn't so easy for them to pressure the Sevensworths, who held almost equal power to the royal family. It was ultimately up to the Sevensworths whether they accepted the crown prince's proposal or not.

“This wasn't exactly a marriage request, though... He... He wants to take Ana as his concubine.”

“He what?! But he doesn't even have a wife to begin with!”

This didn't make sense. He couldn't have a concubine unless he already had a spouse who couldn't conceive. But he didn't even have an official wife yet, so why was he trying to take Ana as a concubine?

“He plans on not having children with his fiancée for a while after getting married, so he wants to make her his concubine in five years' time. What's more is that his fiancée is that girl from that hotel family. He's ridiculing us with this proposal.”

So he's intentionally creating an emergency situation? After losing the backing from Duke Lillard, he was now trying to find a new backer in the Sevensworths. In reality, the situation he was in was a lot worse than it seemed at first glance. He'd essentially publicly humiliated House Lillard, resulting in them jumping to the first prince's faction. He hadn't only lost a powerful ally but had sent them straight to his enemy's side.

“But why now? He broke off their engagement years ago,” I asked.

“It must be because the first prince’s fiancée from House Grimardy is graduating and becoming an adult this year. Both the first prince and the crown prince are trying to make a move.”

I don’t understand this at all. The first prince is already engaged to Lady Grimardy. Even if they were waiting to get married until after she graduated and became an adult, it wasn’t like the ties between families suddenly turned on after marriage. They were there from the get-go. Their families had been and still would be cooperating with one another, so it wasn’t like something big would change once they officially tied the knot.

“We’ve been maintaining neutrality so as to not be involved with anything troublesome, but maybe it’d be best to back the first prince at some point soon in the future. He’s much more reasonable. At least he asked for an actual marriage instead of for Ana to be his concubine.”

“He what?! But he has a fiancée!”

“Yes, that he does, but marriages for royalty and nobles are strategic. The changing of the political landscape can change who the best choice for marriage is.”

That’s right... Marriage is little more than a political tool to nobles. Even my marriage to Ana is political. Our engagement could be called off at any time due to a shift in politics.

“The marriage between the Grimardys’ daughter and the first prince is coming soon with her graduation. That being said, the Grimardys don’t have the strength to help put him on the throne. The first prince might be looking to find a new partner before actually committing to the Grimardys.”

I see. They want to have a marriage with an even more powerful household. House Grimardy was very high on the food chain, but they were still just marquesses. The queen had set their marriage up so the first prince wouldn’t gain enough power to threaten the crown prince’s claim to the throne. It was proving to be a hindrance to the first prince’s succession.

“Don’t look so worried, because there’s no need. I turned both of them down.

Sure, if we became a shield for the first prince, it'd probably make him the king, but that would mean Ana would become the future queen, and a queen is meant to represent the country. I love my daughter very much, so I don't mean this in a mean way, but I think her life in that position would become very difficult due to how she looks. I don't think she's the right fit for a queen." Perhaps in an attempt to reassure me, the duke smiled while saying this.

"So...if she wasn't cursed, then...she could've become the queen?" I said, doing my best to stop my hands from shaking.

"Indeed. After all, she's the best and most wonderful daughter. You won't find a better girl in or out of this country. It goes without saying that she'd be most fit to be queen."

It was obvious now that the first prince wanted Ana, and if she hadn't been cursed, the duke would've agreed. The only reason he refused was because of her curse. That was it. If her severe hypermana syndrome was cured, she could become queen and have a very bright future.

This was a political marriage. If her curse was lifted, the duke might revise his thinking about who she should marry based on the political landscape. Currently, the first prince was looking to marry Ana to become king, and the crown prince wanted her as his concubine to stop that. Regardless of which prince the duke chose, whomever had the backing of the Sevensworths would become the next king.

Ana was also the only child and daughter of the Sevensworths. The first son she would have with the first prince would become king, and the second could then become successor to the Sevensworths. In that case, the future king would be the biological brother of the head of the Sevensworth family.

Since my mother-in-law was the biological sister of the king, the Sevensworths already held a lot of power. With Ana marrying into the royal family, this would continue for another generation at least. I was nothing more than a former fourth son of a destitute viscount. There was no way I could stop our engagement from being rescinded. Thinking about it rationally, the duke was correct. Ana stood at the top of all the women in this country. She was so wonderful, I couldn't hold a candle to her. I was so shaken by this that I used a

claim of not feeling well to excuse myself for the day.

“Sir Gino?” Ana asked, coming over to me, worried. “I heard you weren’t feeling well. Are you all right?”

“Oh, yeah. I’ll be okay if I rest a bit.” As heavy as my mouth felt, I was able to squeeze these words out.

I walked toward the entrance hall with Ana. She tried to talk with me, still concerned, but I wasn’t really in the right headspace. It took everything I had to return her words with vague replies.

“Ana, what do you think about the first prince?” I asked before entering the carriage.

“I believe he’s a wonderful person who is fair, logical, and decisive.”

Wow I didn’t expect her to layer on the praise like that. I tried again, hoping for a different kind of answer this time. “So he’s someone you respect?”

“Yes, I greatly respect him. He’s one of the few who treats me like a normal girl.”

“I see...”

This came as a huge shock to me. *They’re a good match, then... If they get married, I’m sure they’ll be happy. Maybe it really is best if I pull out of this engagement for her sake.*

“What do you think about the queen? My sister said that all the women adore her and want to be her.”

“I agree with that. After all, she stands at the peak of all women. All fashion trends begin with her. It makes sense why so many women look up to her.”

“Have you ever thought of becoming the queen?”

“No, I haven’t. Not with the way I look,” Ana said with a wry smile.

So as I thought...it’s just a matter of your appearance stopping you from wanting to be queen. My legs felt like lead, but somehow, I was able to drag myself into the carriage and shut the door behind me. As I did, the tears I’d

been fighting back spilled out all at once.

When I returned to my room at the Valvalier estate, I couldn't find the motivation to do anything. I simply fell onto my bed and cried. The tears poured out like rain.

My betrothal to Ana had only happened because no one had been willing to marry her on account of her curse. That was why someone like *me*, who'd essentially been a commoner, had been able to get engaged to someone like her.

If she became engaged to the prince, it'd simply be the universe correcting what would have been had her curse not ruined everything. *Yeah... Yeah, that's right. She'd return to the place she truly belongs.*

Ana was the ultimate woman and most suitable to become queen. Someone like me who had been on track to becoming a commoner had no business being with her. The difference between us was like that between heaven and earth. Us not being engaged anymore would be nothing more than us going back to where we belonged. We'd only met under the circumstances of the curse, so this would be nothing more than natural order being restored. Even though I kept telling myself this, my heart wouldn't accept it at all. *This hurts...so much...*

That night at the Valvalier estate, I simply lay in bed and didn't even eat dinner. But even as I lay there, I couldn't sleep at all. The following day, I went to the Sevensworth estate.

"Sir Gino, you don't look well. Are you all right?" Ana asked, concerned.

"I'm fine." I said this without even being able to look at her.

Then, I left her and made my way to the duke's office. Usually, we'd walk and talk all the way there, taking our time, so seeing this change made the servants' eyes widen. I couldn't look Ana in the eye, but I could only assume she was wearing a shocked expression. *This is for the best. Our relationship is ending soon. It'll just be painful if we get any closer.*

I kept telling my heart this, but deep down I knew it wasn't true. The truth

was that if I talked to her, I'd cry. That was why I chose to avoid her altogether. I refused to let myself break down in front of her. It would prevent Ana from embracing the bright future awaiting her. I didn't want to be the kind of pathetic guy who was an obstacle on a wonderful woman's path to happiness.

I bet the first prince would still greet her with kind words in this situation. Hiding one's true thoughts must come second nature to someone who was raised by the royal family. However, for someone like me who hadn't had the same rigorous training, it was impossible.

He'd come from a long line of beautiful men and women, and though I'd never met him, I was sure I was nothing compared to him in both looks and how he could treat women. There was probably a world of difference between how I'd handled that situation and how he would've handled it by being more delicate and making sure Ana didn't feel any negative emotions. Before I knew it, I was comparing myself to the first prince and being absolutely crushed by how inferior I was. The jealousy was painful, like I was being burned by it. I felt so small not being able to be happy for Ana and the amazing future waiting for her.

"Sir Gino, would you like to have tea with—"

"Sorry. I have to go back right now for business at my company."

Though I could tell from her face how desperate she was, I turned her down before she could even finish her invitation.

"Oh, I see..."

My heart sank as I saw her expression from the corner of my eye. It broke my heart to see her sad face. I wanted to hug her and comfort her, but I held myself back. As soon as I finished my work at the Sevensworth estate, I went straight to my laboratory and threw myself into creating golems.

Anastasia

I'd received notice from one of our servants that Sir Gino was feeling unwell, so he'd be returning home early. I was worried, so I quickly made my way to

father's office, where I found Sir Gino in the hall outside. He looked pale, as if he were about to fall over any second.

"I heard you weren't feeling well. Are you all right?"

"Oh, yeah. I'll be okay if I rest a bit."

Though that's what he said, he seemed to be in great pain and was white as a sheet. All his responses seemed to be lacking any heart.

"Ana, what do you think about the first prince?" he asked before getting onto the carriage.

"I believe he's a wonderful person who is fair, logical, and decisive."

Since I was the king's niece, I was always surrounded by royal guards. I had to be careful about what I said when I wasn't in private, so I gave a safe answer. Sir Gino became noticeably more ill.

"So he's someone you respect?"

"Yes, I greatly respect him. He's one of the few who treats me like a normal girl." Once again I chose a safe answer. In reality, he did act like a gentleman toward me, but it was merely because he understood the power of the Sevensworths. He was very calculating but not very good at hiding his scheming.

"What do you think about the queen? My sister said that all the women adore her and want to be her."

"I agree with that. After all, she stands at the peak of all women. All fashion trends begin with her. It makes sense why so many women look up to her."

Another safe answer. Though the queen was the center of fashion trends, my mother was the current trendsetter. Though it was true that trends should begin with the queen, it was much more often that my mother started them with her vast information network and wealth. However, saying that out loud would be rude, so I tried to mask my answer.

"Have you ever thought of becoming the queen?"

"No, I haven't. Not with the way I look," I replied.

The position of queen was quite the high status. If even the smallest thing

happened to her, the biggest fuss would be raised. She lived under constant scrutiny and couldn't let her guard down for a second. For me, becoming a queen would be absolutely fatal, given my looks. The idea wasn't even a thought in my head.

Besides, becoming queen would mean I couldn't get married to Sir Gino, and I couldn't think of anything worse than that. Usually he'd hold my hand before getting into the carriage, but today, he staggered into the carriage, looking like he could collapse at any moment. *He must really be under the weather.* I was very worried.

Yesterday, Sir Gino had been ill, so today, I waited at the front entrance out of worry. When he came out of the carriage, he didn't seem to have recovered. There were very heavy shadows under his eyes too.

"Sir Gino, you don't look well. Are you all right?" I asked, concerned.

"I'm fine."

Usually he'd stop here to speak with me and then we'd take our time walking together to my father's office, but instead he quickly walked off by himself. I was so shocked, I stood paralyzed on the spot. I knew I needed to chase after him, but by the time I could move again, he'd already gone. *Have I done something to upset him?* I could feel myself trembling, my tears naturally flowing out.

"It's all right, milady. He's merely feeling ill and doesn't have his normal energy. He'll be better in no time and be the usual kind man you know. Let's go back to your room to rest," Bridgette said, comforting me and guiding me away.

Once back in my room, I couldn't help but think back to what had happened and began crying again. *I must have done something to upset him. I need to ask him what I did and sincerely apologize.*

I couldn't stay still, so I had a servant notify me when Sir Gino was done with his work, and I rushed over.

"Sir Gino!" I called out to him when I saw him in the hallway.

"What?"

I could see how pale he was. He wasn't his usual gentle self. *I knew it. I must have done something wrong.*

"I'm so sorry. I did something to cause you displeasure," I said, lowering my head apologetically.

"No need to apologize. You didn't do anything," he said in an unbelievably cold voice.

"But..."

I'd spent the whole morning planning out many different conversations with Sir Gino, but I was so shocked that I forgot every last one. My throat closed up and I found myself at a loss for words.

"Is that it? I'll excuse myself, then. I have work to do," he said, passing by me and heading for the main entrance by himself.

This served as another shock to me. Usually, he'd allow me to escort him out and even match my walking pace. But now, he was leaving alone. I frantically tried to chase after him, but he was walking so fast, I could barely catch up.

"A-Are you feeling better? You still seem under the weather."

"I'm fine."

The conversation ended no sooner than it'd begun with those two words of his. I tried bringing up other topics, but each time, it ended the same way, severed by his short responses. After seeing him off, I returned to my room and cried alone.

Ginorious

"It's okay if you don't want to talk about it," my mother-in-law said as we sat in the thirty-first drawing room, the Pomegranate, after I'd been silent for a while.

Currently the two of us were having tea together. The Sevensworths had noticed the shift in my relationship with Ana. My mother-in-law had invited me to tea in order to inquire about this, but I couldn't respond.

“I’m very sorry.”

“It’s all right. I don’t believe that others, even family, should speak out of turn about others’ romantic relationships. After all, there will inevitably be circumstances that only those two people know about,” she said with a smile, kindness in her eyes. “But even if it’s something only the two of you can solve, I do think you need to talk to someone. It might help to find a solution. At the very least, it’ll make you feel better.”

Maybe... Very long ago in my past life when I was still young, I think I tried confiding in a friend once. I definitely didn’t open up to anyone about my problems when I was older, though. I couldn’t help but think it was unseemly for a capable adult to be complaining.

When I’d lived by myself in my old age, the chances to talk to others decreased to the point that I was essentially only ever opening my mouth to reply to cashiers. Isolation became commonplace to me, so the thought of going to others for help never crossed my mind.

I might’ve felt better talking to Anthony or the others, but I didn’t really feel up to it. This was how I was used to living after so many decades. It was my way of living now. It was tough for an old dog to learn new tricks.

“Your feelings for Ana are genuine, so even if there are complications of some kind, I feel that things will work out. That’s why for now, I’ll let you two handle it yourselves,” she said with a smile.

I could only smile and try to pretend everything was okay. If just loving Ana would fix things, I would love her as much as I could. But we were living in the world of nobles, and that wasn’t enough.

“I’ll be here to lend an ear whenever you’re ready. Don’t worry, I’ll be fair.”

I don’t doubt it. But that’s exactly why I can’t ask you for help. Everyone in this family was fair and gracious. If they were to break off our engagement, I had no doubt that they’d do everything they could to make sure I wasn’t left at a disadvantage. But the more they let things tip in my favor, the less they’d be in Ana’s. From here on out, even the smallest thing could become a big deal when she ascended to the difficult position of queen. I wanted to make sure that the end of our engagement would leave her unscathed. If I could make her

struggles in the future a little bit easier, then I'd do anything.



"Hey, you two. Got a second?" I called out to a pair of twin girls after our practical class had ended.

"Oh, Sir Valvalier. How do you do?" the elder sister, Lady Lyla, answered with a curtsy.

Of course, she wasn't as well-versed in manners as greater nobles like Ana, but at the very least, she was head and shoulders above my sister. It must've been her upbringing as a merchant's daughter.

"Hey! What's up?" the younger sister, Lady Kate, said, grinning.

She acted very friendly with me and was overall very unrestrained in her manners. Lady Lyla glared at her sister for her poor manners in front of a noble. I'd become acquainted with these two from my practical class. Greater nobles tended to focus on the standard education courses, so they were only really at school for those classes—the bare minimum, basically. I was the only greater noble in this practical class and all the other students were commoners whose names I didn't know. Our curriculum frequently involved group work, and I'd become close with Kate when she'd approached me to make sure I had a group.

"Lady Kate, I'd like to speak with you. Do you have some time?"

"Huh?! Me?! You want to talk with *me*?! Oh man, what should I do, Lyla?!" Lady Kate said excitedly, snickering as Lady Lyla remained in her curtsy.

"It's an honor. If it's your request, I will make sure she makes time for you no matter what," Lady Lyla said, ignoring Kate and answering on her behalf, albeit obviously irritated.

Judging by this exchange, I could tell that it was a daily occurrence for Lady Lyla to be led around by her sister. It must've been very difficult. I knew what it was like to deal with a sister who didn't behave as they should, so I couldn't help but sympathize.

"You don't have to go that far, but I'd be happy if I could have some time. The sooner the better."

“Is it gonna be your treat? It is, right? Treat me! Let’s go! Ow!” Lady Kate yelped as her back was struck by Lady Lyla.

Even after smacking her, Lady Lyla kept her smile plastered on, but I could see veins popping out from her forehead.

“I’m the one inviting you. Of course it’ll be my treat,” I said.

“Yay! If we’re having a chat, that means meat skewers, right? Let’s go!”

She was referring to the equivalent of my past life’s yakitori. A lot of discussions were held over grilled meat, but those kinds of restaurants weren’t a typical place for students. It was mostly adults who did business there, but I personally didn’t care about location too much, so I let myself be pulled along by Lady Kate, who was practically skipping.

After we finished changing into our street clothes, Lady Kate guided me to an alleyway in a commoner neighborhood where there was a restaurant that sold the skewers she wanted to eat. Fortunately, there weren’t many people around since it was the afternoon on a weekday. The interior of the restaurant was essentially just the kitchen, with no space inside to eat or drink. Instead, customers would sit at one of the tables outside. The alleyway was quite packed, so carriages couldn’t pass through. Tables lined the entire length of the street, sometimes even reaching the center, where any passersby would have to squeeze past. Since I wanted to have a little bit more of a private discussion, I chose a table in a more secluded part of the alley.

“And here we are! I bought the food! With your money, anyway. But whatever, let’s eat!”

As I readied the table, Kate brought back food and drinks on a tray. The plates were piled high with meat. *She really went all out despite using my money.*

“Mm! It’s so juicy and tender!”

Lady Kate’s heart was stolen away by the food on the table, making it difficult to get any discussion started. *Yeah, this might not have been the best place for this after all.* She simply wanted to eat here, so I gave up and began eating as well.

The grease from the skewered meat pooled on the plates below. It was completely different from noble dishes, which were plated in an almost artistic way with the expectation that you'd use silverware.

As I took a bite, I could tell that it'd been salted and also marinated with a multitude of spices. The meats that nobles ate were parts of animals that didn't have any strong smells or gaminess, so they were lacking in fats or anything else that would look vulgar. Of course, they also didn't serve anything charred either.

However, this grilled meat was different. Biting into it resulted in a burst of hot juices. These were innards that had a very strong scent, but also very strong umami. Even the charred parts were full of flavor. It was delicious, and definitely a solid representative of good dining for commoners. It was very high-quality for these kinds of meats.

"Good, isn't it?" Lady Kate snickered, seeing my satisfaction.

"So anyway, what I wanted to discuss was..." I started saying to Lady Kate as her cheeks puffed up like a hamster.





I'd been able to obtain the rodeora rozheal from House Gerald, which I needed to make the serum. Ever since I'd gotten it, I'd been working on the serum nonstop, and today was no different. I just threw everything I had into it. There was nothing like getting lost in work, especially when things were hard.

Using magic on my eyes for extended periods took a lot of effort, so I made glasses that could do that for me. With these glasses, I examined the liquid inside the flask. *As I thought. There's a problem with the enchantment. I don't even need to inspect it. I can tell this batch is a failure.*

The last step was to cast an enchantment on the serum to complete it, but I was having trouble with this final task. Enchanting every last polymer was something that experienced magic pharmacists could do, but not a former engineer like myself. There was no helping it. I'd only been at this for a few months, so it wasn't going to be easy for me as an amateur to replicate what a professional could accomplish. But this was for Ana's sake so she could overcome the difficulties in her way. I needed to figure out what to do. *Okay, I'm not a magic pharmacist. I'm a golem engineer. Could I possibly use that knowledge in some way?*

Though I had to enchant each and every last polymer, there were three types of enchantment magics. Would it be possible for me to have my golems do this? Even if I thought I was making the same magic circuits each time, they'd end up being similar but not identical, which would lead to the serum not working. But if I used a golem, then they'd do the same thing each and every time without fail. If anything, it might be more efficient to use a golem.

In my past life, a lot of jobs had been automated with golems. There had been a lot of people who'd lost their jobs to them, but one of the few fields where that didn't happen was in pharmaceutical creation, where using golems in place of humans wasn't allowed.

The reason behind that wasn't because the golems couldn't do the work, but because the Magic Pharmaceuticals Association was a big backer of the political party in power, so they lobbied for a law that would prevent them from being replaced.

Oh, now I remember. In foreign countries, they used golems for everything—from examinations to treatments. There must've been similar work for creating magic pharmaceuticals. And...ah yes, there it is. I was impressed by the wealth of knowledge that the college library had. They had a lot of books regarding foreign practices for magic pharmaceuticals. As expected, other countries had regularly used golems to manufacture their pharmaceuticals. This was news to me, but now I had some hope. The principle must've been the same as in magic dyeing, and if that was the case, I had experience with setting up a factory line for that.





I was in the process of making golems that could enchant the serum, but it was becoming apparent that I was running out of time until graduation. I needed to pick up the pace, so I asked the duke for some time off.

“There are two weeks until you graduate and you want to focus on your company?” the duke asked, displeased with my request.

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“You’re the heir to this house. Shouldn’t you start passing the reins of your company to someone else and focus on your duties here?”

“That’s the purpose of my request for time off. To be honest, I’ve identified someone at the school who’s graduating that I’d like to leave my company to.”

This part was true. I did plan on doing this to make sure my employees weren’t left without leadership.

“I see. Then, I approve. Make sure you wrap things up nicely.” Suddenly, his mood brightened and he approved my time off.

“Thank you very much.”

Good. I think I’ll be able to make it in time now.

Chapter 4: A Tearful Graduation Party

Ginorious

“Sir Gino,” Ana called out to me as I reached the entrance hall. “I heard you won’t be coming here for a while so you can focus on your business.”

Ever since I’d found out about her chance at being queen, I’d been giving Ana the cold shoulder. I could tell she was still trying to force a cheerful smile despite feeling quite down, most likely because she thought acting depressed would just make me dislike her more. *It hurts. Seeing how earnestly she’s trying is truly painful.* I couldn’t hide my pained expression, so I turned my face away from her.

“Yeah, sorry. I won’t be able to come here until at least the day of the graduation party.”

“About the party—”

“Oh, right. Sorry, I won’t be able to escort you to the venue, but I’ll be attending, so let’s meet there.”

Ana’s eyes opened wide with surprise. I’d assumed she’d wanted to talk about our outfits for the party, so I interrupted her and unilaterally declared that I wouldn’t be accompanying her there.

“Oh...I see. There’s no helping it, then. After all, you are busy.” Ana was doing her best to smile, but midway through her sentence, a single tear rolled down her cheek.

I quickly turned around and climbed into the carriage because I couldn’t hold my tears back anymore and I didn’t want her to see. As the carriage departed, I glanced back at her through the rear window and saw that she was crying into her hands. She was wearing a purple dress—the first dress I’d gotten her. She’d probably worn it in hopes of grabbing my attention.

Suddenly, it became hard to see her clearly anymore through my own tears.

Anastasia

“Sir Gino, would you like to have tea with—”

“Sorry. I have to go back right now for business at my company.”

Though I tried to begin conversations with him many times, none of my attempts were successful. He’d completely stopped accepting my tea invitations. I even tried to gain his interest by preparing uncommon tea leaves, but nothing seemed to work.

“Oh, I see...”

Though I did my best to keep my disappointment from my voice, it still leaked out. *No, I must continue being cheerful and maintain my smile. What man would want to have tea with a gloomy, depressed girl?* It was then that his previous words to me echoed in my head, telling me not to give up on my happiness—that it was okay for me to be happy. I’d often remember his words of encouragement when things became difficult. It reminded me not to smile as though I’d given up on everything, and that my life was only just beginning. It was all because of him that I’d been able to change this much.

Right now, I was living life, doing my best to stay positive as he’d so urged me to do. If this had been my past self, I might have already given up. But I wouldn’t do that now. I wasn’t that same person anymore, thanks to Sir Gino. *I’m going to do my best to become happy!*

Some days later, a servant told me Sir Gino would be taking a break from coming to the Sevensworth mansion in order to focus on his business. According to Sir Gino, he was planning on using this time to find someone to take over his company so he could focus on becoming my father’s successor. Knowing I wouldn’t be able to see him for a while, I made sure to wait for him in the entrance hall to catch him before he left. Unfortunately, I was once again unable to stop him and he immediately continued past me to his carriage.

“I heard you won’t be coming here for a while so you can focus on your business,” I said, calling out to him while trying to catch up.

“Yeah, sorry. I won’t be able to come here until at least the day of the

graduation party.” He didn’t even look at me while saying this.

“About the party—”

“Oh, right. Sorry, I won’t be able to escort you to the venue, but I’ll be attending, so let’s meet there.”

I was so shocked, I couldn’t speak.

“Oh...I see. There’s no helping it, then. After all, you are busy.”

I was somehow able to force a smile, but as he got into the carriage, I couldn’t hold back my tears. But I had to do my best not to cry onto my dress. After all, this was the first dress Sir Gino had ever given me, and it was the color of his eyes. Despite it being too lavish to wear around the house, I’d worn it to draw Sir Gino’s attention, even if only a little bit. Thus, I cried into my hands so none of my tears would fall on my dress.

Up until Sir Gino had transferred into our school, I’d only ever attended the school parties by myself. Parties were places to meet potential marriage partners, so everyone in attendance was very active in socializing, looking to find someone to marry for love or political reasons. However, through all that, no one had ever approached me. Back then, before I’d made any friends, parties had only ever made me feel lonely, so attending them had been nothing but painful.

However, that had changed greatly since Sir Gino began attending school with me. He’d escort me to the parties, both of us wearing each other’s colors, and what had once felt like colorless jails suddenly became lively events that were so much fun to attend.

Being complimented by him on my dresses filled me with so much happiness, I’d feel like I could fly. When he invited me to dance with him, it was like a wonderful dream and I couldn’t help but smile. It was all thanks to him that these parties began to feel more and more enjoyable. Attending them with him was incredibly fun. Since this was our last party at this school, I was hoping we could once again go together, arranging each other’s outfits in our own colors. I wanted this to be a memory we treasured forever. But ultimately, I couldn’t even speak to him about our outfits or about escorting me to the party. I was left completely stunned.

Ginorious

Now that I had time off from working with the duke, I threw myself into golem creation. Once I had the special equipment I needed, then this wouldn't even take a day, but first, I had to make that special equipment from scratch. Time wasn't really on my side. I continued my delicate work slowly but surely. In tough times, I liked throwing myself into my work because it kept my mind focused.

Finally, after much effort, I finished the golems I needed. I wouldn't be mass-producing the serum, so I only needed the golems to be about fifty celchimètres in width and length. I'd have them imbue the serum with magic and then I'd inspect the final product. If everything went well, that'd be it.

Many times I had the thought that I should only complete this serum after marrying Ana so nobody could steal her away from me, but I shook these ideas from my head each time they surfaced.

The longer this condition went untreated, the longer the afflicted's organs would be subject to adverse effects. The intensity of the damage increased according to how much mana they had, which could mean significantly shortened lifespans. Since Ana had about ten thousand or more times the amount of mana as the average person, she was at a much higher risk to get worse sooner than later. If left untreated, there was no telling when her affliction might take her life. One day, out of the blue, it could flare up, and by that time it'd be too late to do anything to cure her.

Weddings for greater nobles took a lot of time to put together. Even if they began preparations now, the fastest they'd be able to arrange one would be at least a year in the future. There was no guarantee that Ana wouldn't pass away during that time. Even if the absolutely beautiful allure of going through life with Ana by my side could be my reward, I wasn't about to gamble with her life. I steeled my will and turned one of my new golems on so it could enchant the serum.

I knew that both the crown prince and the first prince had their eyes set on Ana, but I'd prefer if she married the first prince. The crown prince was not a good option whatsoever. He only wanted her as his concubine for the power

it'd give him, which was absolutely ridiculous.

As I thought about all this, the golem finished its work, so I began the final inspection and found that there were no problems with the serum at all. It was complete. I should've wanted to jump for joy, but I couldn't. This essentially signaled the beginning of the end for my relationship with Ana.

But even so, I'd be able to save her and bless her with a bright future. Knowing that, I felt somewhat at peace. She was such a wonderful person, and I knew that so long as the curse was undone, the people of the country would love her. I had no doubt she'd go down in history as one of the best queens the country ever had. I shut my eyes and began imagining Ana's future. In my visions, she was splendid and smiling. *Ah, she seems so happy.*

Anastasia

Today was the graduation party, but I hadn't had any contact from Sir Gino about it, so I arrived at the party by myself. Ever since he entered the academy, we'd always gone to parties together, so this was the first time in a while that I rode in a silent carriage. I couldn't help but tear up.

I chose to wear my most elegant dress—the one I'd received from Herr Mays. Recently, Sir Gino hadn't been paying me much attention, so I chose this dress as a way to grab it even if it was just for a little bit. Sir Gino had greatly complimented this dress before. Now, I only wished to get a small fraction of that reaction.

When I arrived at the venue, I looked around for Sir Gino but couldn't find him. As I walked toward the entrance, I asked others in my class if they'd seen him, but had no luck. I began to worry he hadn't come at all.

"Lady Anastasia Sevensworth of House Sevensworth!" one of the servants announced as I walked into the party hall.

Though the party had begun, I still hadn't been able to find Sir Gino. Students typically would enter with their intendeds unless they didn't have one. I was the only one who had a fiancé and yet hadn't arrived with him. The looks I got from everyone hurt.

"I can't believe Sir Valvalier. How could he let you enter the party by yourself?" Lady Ekatarina growled angrily.

"There's somethin' up with him these days. It's like he's bein' backed into a corner or somethin'."

"We're worried about him too. We keep saying he can come to us if he needs help, but he hasn't said a word."

It seemed Sir Justin and Sir Anthony, as well as the other military sons, were also worried about him. Everyone in our class had noticed the coolness between myself and Sir Gino.

"It's not ladylike to stick one's head into another's business, so I won't," Lady Ekatarina said. "That being said, I believe he could do with a slap to the face. I'm sure that would bring him back to his senses."

Lady Ekatarina is amazing as usual... She's very strong and straightforward. Everyone else voiced their willingness to help mediate whatever problems there were between us, but I politely refused them all. My sense was that Sir Gino's situation was very tenuous, as if the slightest breeze could break everything apart. Though he might not want to show any weakness to me, I was sure he was carrying some kind of burden. Everyone who offered to help was already quite upset with Sir Gino. I was afraid their angry words might break him.

Since the beginning of the party, I'd been constantly glancing at the door, and eventually it finally opened and among the people who entered, I saw someone tall with black hair. *It's Sir Gino!* I felt so elated after waiting for him to appear all this time. I quickly made my way to meet him, but I stopped in my tracks when I saw he'd brought a girl wearing a purple dress. *What's going on? Who is that? Why is he bringing her to this party? Why is she wearing a dress the color of his eyes?* I felt faint to the point that my legs began to shake. He continued walking with the girl to the center of the room before stopping once he found me.

"Lady Anastasia Sevensworth, I hereby call off our engagement!"

Huh? What did he just say? My thoughts ground to a halt, refusing to process his words. I must have done something wrong. I needed to prostrate myself and beg for forgiveness. I needed to speak with him. To do that, I needed to go to

him. Though I tried walking forward, I was so shaky, I couldn't take even one step.

"Uh... Ah..."

I tried to at least have my words reach him if nothing else, but I couldn't even manage that. *Hurry! Say something!* He'd claimed he was calling off our engagement. The reason had to be because of me somehow, so if I could fix whatever it was, then he'd certainly return to his usual, kind self. *I need to ask him why. I need to know the reason.*

"Wh-Why...? Is there somewhere that I'm lacking? If there's a problem with me, please tell me. I'll do anything to fix it. I promise." I was finally able to formulate my question.

"Yes, allow me to answer. I'd like everyone to hear this! I'd like to assure everyone here that Lady Anastasia Sevensworth did nothing wrong! She has a pure heart, is kind, modest, very considerate of others, and is very attentive. She is virtuous, wise, and self-aware. Even when nobody's looking, she's always tough on herself and high in discipline. She's a very noble spirit!"

I...don't understand. None of these sounded like complaints or accusations. I was hanging onto every last word he was saying to understand the reason for his announcement. To my great confusion, though, none of it seemed to indicate he found fault with me. If anything, he was praising me more than he ever had before.

"She has perfect manners and etiquette. Her handwriting is beautiful and she's easy to talk to. I'm sure anyone who reads her letters will be touche— Oof!"

Suddenly the girl he'd brought had elbowed him in the side, making him grunt with pain. I'd never done anything like that to him. Seeing how friendly they looked together made unseemly emotions bubble up inside me. *No! Stop! If I become jealous here, I'll only show my ugly side to him. I can't do that! I need to be an outstandingly wonderful person to make him reconsider!* I desperately tried to hold back my emotions.

"A-Anyway, Lady Anastasia Sevensworth is the best lady in the world—no, in history. If anyone wonders who's worthy of being our nation's next queen, I will

always point to her. There is nobody else!”

Huh? Though I’d asked him about what I lacked, he’d declared that I was essentially flawless. I couldn’t understand why he’d answer like this. *None of this makes sense.*

“Th-Then why do you desire to end our engagement?” I asked, putting my desperation for him to reconsider into my question.

If there aren’t any problems, then there should be no reason to end our engagement. Please! Take it back! I looked at him and prayed in my heart that his next words would be him changing his mind.

“I was unfaithful to you. Due to my inability to restrain the lower half of my body, I shared a bed with another woman and now she is with child. This is my new fiancée, Kate.”

Huh? Child? He slept with that girl? Sir Gino did? No. No that can’t be. I felt my legs lose their strength and then the sensation of the floor beneath me. My ears were ringing and my surroundings began to spin. I could tell that Lady Ekatarina was saying something, but I couldn’t hear what. I had no idea what she was saying.

I had no clue how long I was there for, but suddenly the only thing in my mind was that I needed to chase after him. I couldn’t let things end like this. For some reason I felt as if I’d never see him again if I didn’t go after him now. But I couldn’t get up. My legs wouldn’t listen to me. They continued to tremble. Eventually, with Lady Ekatarina’s help, I was able to somehow find my feet and stumble toward the entrance of the venue, but when I got outside, I couldn’t see him anywhere. *I’m too late.* What I felt now was even deeper than simple despair. It was as if my entire world had been shattered into a million pieces, leaving nothing but a bottomless void in front of me.

Before I knew it, I was in my bed. When I opened my eyes, I saw Bridgette next to me, crying while saying something. However, I couldn’t process her words. I told her I wanted to be alone, so she left.

My parents came to my room to comfort me, but speaking was painful, so I asked for them to leave me alone. I didn’t have the will to talk to anyone or do

anything. I simply stayed in my room, not taking a single step out of my bed.

Ginorious

“Lady Anastasia Sevensworth, I hereby call off our engagement!”

Though I’d arrived at the party late, I immediately called out in a loud voice to Ana. She turned pale, seeing me arrive with a girl that wasn’t her. Her legs seemed to tremble when she heard my declaration.

“Uh... Ah...” She was unsteady on her feet and unable to produce any words. “Wh-Why...? Is there somewhere that I’m lacking? If there’s a problem with me, please tell me. I’ll do anything to fix it. I promise.”

“Yes, allow me to answer. I’d like everyone to hear this! I’d like to assure everyone here that Lady Anastasia Sevensworth did nothing wrong! She has a pure heart, is kind, modest, very considerate of others, and is very attentive. She is virtuous, wise, and self-aware. Even when nobody’s looking, she’s always tough on herself and high in discipline. She’s a very noble spirit! I’ve no doubt that the word ‘noble’ was made with her in mind. She’s extremely mature for her age and is a wonderful person who won’t be swayed by fleeting emotions. She takes good care of her parents and can make any home feel warm and welcoming. She’s an absolute embroidery genius as well. But I’m sure you all know that, since she’s the first in-school research student this school has seen in thirteen years. She doesn’t only have an amazing artistic sense, but an incredible and dedicated work ethic as well. She has perfect manners and etiquette. Her handwriting is beautiful and she’s easy to talk to. I’m sure anyone who reads her letters will be touche— Oof!”

Suddenly, I felt Lady Kate’s elbow connect with my side.

“You’re rambling. You’ve complimented her enough,” she said in a voice low enough that nobody else could hear.

“A-Anyway, Lady Anastasia Sevensworth is the best lady in the world—no, in history. If anyone wonders who’s worthy of being our nation’s next queen, I will always point to her. There is nobody else!”

Ana’s mouth was agape. She’d no doubt expected me to list all of her

shortcomings, and instead I'd said nothing but compliments.

"Th-Then why do you desire to end your engagement with me?" she asked, her eyes pleading.

"I was unfaithful to you. Due to my inability to restrain the lower half of my body, I shared a bed with another woman and now she is with child. This is my new fiancée, Kate," I said, wrapping my arm around her waist.

"That can't..." Ana fell to her knees, her face going blank. Her eyes filled with despair and then fell to the ground, unable to see straight.

"I apologize for the disturbance, everyone. I'll take my leave now. Please enjoy the party," I said before escorting Lady Kate out of the venue.

In order to get to the carriages, we had to pass through the garden. We didn't say a word to each other as we simply walked.

"Are you sure this is what you wanted?" she asked, finally breaking the silence.

"Of course," I replied, not looking at her.

"Then why are you crying?"

Oh... She's right. I'm crying. This was the place where I kissed Ana for the first time. She'd confessed her feelings for me and I'd felt so elated. We'd also strolled through this garden countless times, not talking about anything particularly important but enjoying ourselves all the same.

Simply seeing her smile was enough to make me happy for an entire day. *When did I start treasuring Ana so much? It might've been from the day we met, when I saw myself in her.* As the months passed, she became more important to me than even myself. Memories of our time together began playing vividly in my head, one after another, making it impossible to collect my thoughts or reply to Lady Kate.

Though I'd resolved myself for what I needed to do, I wasn't sure how Ana was taking this. Was she crying? *What can I do for her? I... No. I need to stop. I can't continue like I've been doing and thinking about Ana.*

The next thing I knew, I was sitting on a bench in the garden with Lady Kate, nobody else around. Though I was supposed to be the one escorting her, she'd led me by the hand, which was most likely how we'd ended up here. I'd only sat down because she forced me to.

"Okay, now cry your heart out."

Lady Kate said this, standing in front of me and pressing my head into her chest. Though I hadn't had any intention of crying, having my eyes covered and feeling the warmth of another person made it hard to stop the tears. Before I knew it, I was clinging to her, bawling and wailing.

Ana. Please... I pray you become happy. It's okay for you to be happy. It's okay for you to become so happy that other girls envy you for it. You are the most worthy girl to stand at the top of the country. You have a bright future in front of you. Once you are free of the curse, there'll be nobody left who'll look at you with disdain. You're going to become the jewel of this country. Being betrayed like this might be hard now, but you don't know any other guy besides me, and I'm just a loser from a different time in history. I wasn't able to get engaged to you by my own strength. Even after almost a century of living, I've never been able to get close to a girl on my own. I'm pathetic. Other guys are much better at treating women than I am. I'm sure they'll make you happier than me. I'm sure that when you're old, you'll look back and think it was fortunate that our engagement ended. You'll be so glad you didn't marry a loser like me.

I love you, Ana...



Realizing that I was being incredibly rude by clinging to a girl and crying with my head buried in her chest, I quickly removed myself from Lady Kate.

“So, I’ve been wondering, but couldn’t you have broken up with her a little nicer? It probably would’ve been easier on you too,” she asked.

My voice was hoarse from how hard I’d been sobbing, but I felt a lot calmer. I’d heard before how crying could rebalance a person’s mental state, and maybe it was true.

“No, I couldn’t. Ana wouldn’t come out clean that way.”

“Why not?”

“Why so curious all of a sudden?”

“Oh, I mean, this isn’t coming out of nowhere. I’ve been curious for a while, but then I thought maybe you’d reconsider your plan if you actually thought about it, and that’d leave me kinda high and dry, so I held my tongue all this time. But now our contract’s fulfilled, so I won’t lose anything by asking now, right? So yeah, what gives?”

Wow, she’s got a good merchant’s sense. I’d known how eccentric of a person she was, but it seemed she could think rationally too.

“It might not make sense from a commoner’s perspective, but for nobles, when an engagement is broken off, everyone points the finger at the woman. It’s because nobles expect the men to take over the house while the women take care of things inside the home and keep everything peaceful. So, if an engagement falls apart, they assume the woman didn’t do her job in keeping the home settled, and they bad-mouth her.”

I was thankful for how we were moving past the awkward atmosphere that came from me bawling like a baby. In the interest of getting past that, I answered her.

“Of course, there are a lot of situations where no matter how hard the woman tries, things won’t work out, but those engagements still get called off behind closed doors, so third parties won’t know what really happened. If I’d done that, people would immediately blame Ana despite her not having done

anything wrong.”

“Uh-huh... Go on.”

“But there’s one real-life example of an engagement being called off and the woman’s reputation improving. It was when the crown prince ended his engagement with Duke Lillard’s daughter.”

“Oh, I heard about that. So you were copying that?”

“Yes. It happened in front of others at the graduation party instead of behind closed doors. That way, it was clear to everyone that Lady Lillard wasn’t at fault whatsoever. In addition, the crown prince did it while holding the waist of the very girl he was cheating on her with. His crazy idea unintentionally saved Lady Lillard because though it’s an expectation for the girl to keep the relationship steady, it’s hard to do that when the guy is completely unhinged. When that happens, nobody sees the woman as being at fault. If anything, they pity her and commend her for putting up with the guy for as long as she did.”

“And that’s why you needed a girl to pretend you cheated on her with?”

“Exactly. But just having that girl isn’t enough. It’s necessary to cross the lines of common sense and create a scene just like the crown prince did.”

“But couldn’t Lady Anastasia still have been able to get married to the prince even without you doing that? I dunno too much about them, but aren’t the Sevensworths, like, incredibly powerful?”

“Sure, they could still get married, but there are a lot of people who don’t like how quickly the Sevensworths have been expanding their power. If they could find even the smallest smudge on Ana’s record, they’d use it against the Sevensworths. She’d become nothing more than cannon fodder. The Sevensworths don’t have many weaknesses, but Ana is one of them. She wouldn’t be able to live a peaceful life at the royal court.”

“Then couldn’t you explain the situation to the Sevensworths and have them put on a show accordingly?”

“No, everyone in that household is noble and good-hearted. They’d try to have our engagement end in a way where my standing wouldn’t be affected, but if I came out with some kind of advantage, it’d mean Ana would be at a

disadvantage in some way. She's going to be caught up in the succession struggle. This had to be done without the Sevensworths knowing my motives."

"But did you really have to do it at the graduation party?"

"It was the perfect time. If I did it before graduation, she would've been too shocked to attend school anymore and would've maybe even been unable to graduate. She needs to graduate in order to become queen, so I couldn't do this any sooner. And I did it here because it needed to be in a place where people knew me. If I waited until some later function, people who don't know me might have tried to stop me from making my announcement, but at school, I pretty much know everyone and vice versa. I knew they'd all listen until the end before saying anything. There wasn't anyone who'd let the blood rush to their head and charge me either. This party was the place with the highest chance of success."

"But didn't you just, like, put a huge damper on the party?"

She's really pure. I couldn't help but look at her warmly. "Did it look like that?"

"No, everyone seemed entertained. Well, aside from the people around Lady Anastasia."

"Since you don't plan on entering high society, this might be hard to understand, but nobles don't attend parties to have fun. They're essentially there to network and gather information. The Sevensworths have the largest influence in the country. Their influence is everywhere. When people hear that the daughter of the Sevensworths is no longer engaged, a lot of them will start digging into the reason. But they won't have to dig too far because I did it in front of all those people. They'll be happy to have witnessed it firsthand. But even without that, nobles love scandals. They'll all be thrilled to have something to gossip about. The only downside is that I... I did something horrible to Ana."

I could only imagine that Ana was the center of attention right now. Though I knew what I'd done had been necessary, it didn't stop my heart from hurting.

"Ugh. Yeah, I really hate the world of nobles," Lady Kate said.

"Yeah, it's horrible."

It was the kind of world where even if you loved someone, you'd be forced into a position where you had to end your engagement with them in public. It was the kind of world where even if that person was crying, you couldn't comfort them and have to pretend you don't care. It really was a horrible world.

"Wow, you really thought this through. To be honest, this entire time, I kinda just thought you had a screw loose. Sorry about that," Lady Kate said.

"So that's what you thought of me..."

"Well, duh. Commoners don't know the rules of nobles. Who wouldn't think the same thing after you tell them that you want help to ruthlessly break off an engagement in front of everyone?"

"True... Sorry, I really put a lot on your shoulders. It must've been hard staying by the side of someone you thought was crazy."

"Nah, I was okay. After all, the reward's so juicy."

"Well, I mean, you've lost a lot on this deal too. After all this, you're never gonna be able to step foot in the world of nobles again. You might not care right now, but when the time comes when you need to work with a noble, it'll be too late."

"Eh, it's fine. I don't wanna really work with any nobles anyway. I doubt that'll ever change. Besides, that's a very small price to pay for getting the Rurban Trading Company."

"That makes me happy to hear. Don't worry. I keep my promises. I will be giving you full authority over my company."

"Yay!" she said, jumping for joy before snickering.

"You do know the Sevensworths are gonna get revenge on you, right? I did my best to make sure you won't be blamed, but it's not perfect. Considering what's best for your safety, you'd be better off not being near me."

"Oh? Really?"

"Yeah, so that's why I'm ending our engagement, Lady Kate."

Kate looked confused for a second before bursting into uncontrollable laughter. "Wow, deadpan delivery! Aha ha ha! That's not fair! Oh, it hurts! Aha

ha ha!”

What part of that was a joke? After Lady Lillard was publicly humiliated, her father joined the first prince’s faction despite backing the crown prince for so long. The rational move would have been for him to gradually move out of the crown prince’s camp instead of all at once, but even so, House Lillard tossed away everything they’d built up in the one faction and jumped ship to join the other. It meant starting from scratch, but it was a matter of pride instead of what was most profitable.

The Sevensworths were also very proud nobles, and if their pride was on the line, they’d be absolutely merciless. In the worst-case scenario, I could be killed. If they were feeling generous, I might get off with only losing an arm. In order to protect the dignity of their family, nobles sometimes had to go to extremes. That was exactly why, in preparation of their retaliation, I was giving my company away to Lady Kate and severing ties with her immediately.

“Aha ha ha. Man, you broke off two engagements in one day! My stomach hurts!”

She continued laughing. I was envious of how laid-back she was. “Aw man, I was finally able to talk to you informally. Now I gotta go back to calling you Sir Valvalier instead of Sir Gino and be all formal again. What a pain.”

Wait. Were you trying to speak formally all this time? There hasn’t been a change in how you speak to me at all since the moment we met.

“Don’t worry about that, you can still speak to me informally. I’m a commoner as of today. I’m not going to be able to keep my family name, so you can just call me by my name.”

“Say what?!”

“Why are you so surprised? I humiliated the Sevensworths—the house with the most power in the country. What house would want anything to do with me? This is how nobles deal with protecting their house.”

Lady Kate looked at me, eyes wide with surprise, but her gaze eventually turned gentle, and then finally sad.

“That’s how much you love her, huh?” she asked in a soft voice, still looking

right at me.

I wasn't sure what to say, so I looked away in lieu of an answer.



After the graduation party, that very night, I went back to see my adoptive parents at House Valvalier.

"I deeply apologize for betraying all the kindness you've shown me," I said, prostrating myself to show how sorry I was. It was the same way that people would apologize in my past life.

"So...what are you planning on doing now?" my adoptive father asked, restraining his anger.

"I'd be grateful if you could disown me."

"So you can go back to House Adolni?"

"I humiliated the daughter of the Sevensworths in public and called off our engagement, and will leave House Valvalier. I doubt House Adolni will take me back. If they did, they'd make enemies of two great noble houses—the Sevensworths and the Valvaliers."

"Yes. Then what are your plans?"

"To become a commoner."

"The girl you committed adultery with was from a merchant family, right? Are you planning on slipping in and running their business?" he asked, his anger seeping out.

I'd planned on discussing Lady Kate after this, but it seemed that he was unable to hold himself back anymore.

"No, I've ended my engagement with her."

"Huh?!" Both my adoptive father and brother screamed out in unison.

Like father, like son. Heh. What a pointless thought to have right now.

My adoptive brother let out a long sigh. "I thought this was all fishy. After I heard about everything that happened, I scrambled to get information. You abruptly ended your engagement while doing nothing but praising Lady

Anastasia. Doing it in an unconventional place like a party, your arm around the very person you committed adultery with... None of that's in character for you at all. So, let me guess, this wasn't a simple case of you being unfaithful, was it."

"Please accept this money as my way of payment for the damage I've caused," I said, not answering his question and offering a sachet of money from my pocket.

A servant took the money and as soon as he saw the amount, his eyes widened. The servant quickly placed the bag on the table, allowing both my adoptive father and brother to see the contents.

"What?!" the two of them exclaimed at the same time.

They really are related. I'd given them twenty-one ruby coins—currency that was typically used only for cross-national trade or between major transnational companies that dealt in very large sums. Since this country's yearly GDP was around eighty of these coins, I'd essentially given them a fourth of the amount of money that the country had. It was also nearly all I had left from selling the rejuvenation lotion.

It was only right that after causing so much trouble I was prepared to become penniless. I'd already sent money to House Adolni for the problems I caused them, so now I was giving money to House Valvalier, and they would most likely split this with the Sevensworths.

"There's no way you amassed all this money in one day. This wasn't some dumb, impromptu thing you did last second. You've been planning this for a while. What are you aiming for?"

"I think there will be an announcement from House Sevensworth and the royal family later. I haven't spoken to them or anything, but I believe this is the best move for this country and the Sevensworths' daughter."

I wasn't Ana's fiancé anymore, so I didn't call her by her nickname. I didn't have the right. Still, it hurt because it really drove home that our relationship was over.

"I know you haven't talked to the Sevensworths because the duke came here earlier, in a rage," my adoptive brother said with a wry smile. I could only

imagine how much of an earful they got. *I'm so sorry.*

"I suppose it wouldn't be wise of us to pry too deeply if the royal family is involved and you won't tell us exactly what's going on," my adoptive father said after some consideration. "But tell us this, what do you think we should do now?" he asked, staring right at me.

"After disowning me, use the money I gave you and compensate the Sevensworths for the ending of the engagement. After that, it'll be best to patiently observe. If you make a wrong move, you might end up caught in the succession struggle."

"I understand. I won't pry any further and follow your advice. You are hereby disowned, however just temporarily. I *will* reverse this decision whenever I'd like at my own discretion. Remember that. Don't forget, I bought *you*. My daughters love you too, so Ginorious, please allow me to call you my son again someday."

"Th-Thank you very much." My voice trembled as I said this, and tears began welling up.

House Adolni, House Sevensworth, House Valvalier—I'd been blessed with nothing but good people. But like this, I was removed from House Valvalier. When I left, my two former little sisters cried at the entrance hall.

Now that I was disowned, there was just one last thing for me to do—Ana's serum. If I gave my name, there was a chance they'd immediately toss it away without even looking at it. I was fully ready for them to hate me to that extent. That being said, sending it anonymously or under a fake name would only raise suspicion, especially since this was an unknown medicine. That was why I decided to send it anonymously while also sending all my research on Ana's condition and its treatment.

I'd also be sure to write about how Ana's life was in danger, so I really wanted her to take the serum. This was one thing I'd never talked about. When they learned that her lifespan was uncertain, Ana might be shocked, but with the cure included in the package, she wouldn't fall into despair.

I'd also sent bottles of the rejuvenation lotion already. It was an important

strategic item for securing Ana's position in the royal court. I couldn't have them running out of it, so I sent two years' worth. It had a limited shelf life, so I couldn't send more than that for now. I would send more when the two years elapsed.

With that, I was virtually penniless. I had enough money to survive as a commoner for about a month. The clothes I was wearing had the Valvalier crest on them, so I couldn't sell them. The crest served as a form of identification, so it was a huge crime to sell them without permission. The only option left to me was to burn the clothes.

Since I had no money, I needed to start working. The only problem was that I couldn't work in a place where the Sevensworths, other nobles, or other countries might catch wind of me. It'd be especially bad if the Sevensworths found me. I could only imagine what kind of punishment was in store for me, and Ana would be hurt if she found out that any harm came to me at the hands of her parents. I had to avoid that at all costs.

My first step was to leave the royal capital. I needed to get to somewhere that the Sevensworths and other powerful nobles didn't have eyes on. I made sure to cover my tracks while leaving the royal capital to look for work.

I left my mansion with my golems and laboratory untouched. It'd take too much time to take care of all of that, so instead, I put magic security on the building. As a former engineer, I was able to make a fairly strong security system. The mages of this age would never be able to break through it, so I didn't have to worry about anyone ever getting inside. With that, I was set.

Chapter 5: Anastasia's Curse Is Lifted and Ginorious Gazes at the Sky

Ginorious

After going from place to place to shake my pursuers, I was finally able to settle down in a part of the slums about a four days' walk from the royal capital. I was in one room of a housing complex not too different from those kinds of low-income apartment buildings that had a shared bathroom on each floor. Even so, it was in a lot worse shape than those places. Parts of the stone walls were falling apart and one of the rooms was so badly damaged that it was completely unusable.

For most nobles, living in a place like this would be impossible, but I still remembered my experience of living in a one-room apartment. Though this was in a lot worse condition, I knew I'd get used to it.

I'd even found work as a cook at a restaurant and as a bouncer at an establishment in the red-light district. Though I had no cooking experience in this life, I'd lived my past life alone, so I'd done plenty of cooking for myself then. In college, I'd even worked in a kitchen so I wouldn't have to interact with customers. I knew my way around a knife and cookware, so I was fairly confident in my cooking skills.

Besides, I knew how to make a lot of different dishes from my past life, so I could make foods that nobody had ever seen before in this world. When I demonstrated that, they hired me immediately.

The other establishment hired me as a bouncer after they happened to see me take out several men who'd tried to attack me. Since then, they'd call me in once every few days to help with excessively drunk or uncooperative customers. When I wasn't working, they were okay with me being elsewhere as long as they could reach me if need be. Working there gave me a much larger paycheck, so I was very thankful, especially since I was planning on sending the

Sevensworths another shipment of the rejuvenation lotion.

Though the cost to make the lotion wasn't too high, the money I made as a commoner was...not great. Even with both of my jobs, it would take about half of what I earned to be able to gather what I needed to make the next batch of lotion, which was what made my life rough.

If I'd tried to work as a merchant instead, my life would have almost certainly been much smoother, but I had no doubt that the Sevensworths would've easily been able to find me. It wasn't exactly a secret that I'd had my own merchant company, so if I did business with anyone connected to nobility, the Sevensworths would be immediately notified.

Knowing how rough I was living, the female employees from my nighttime workplace and some of the lady regulars at the restaurant would often treat me to meals. The manager of the restaurant would always tell me not to turn down these offers to avoid spurning them. Though it was against the law to force employees to entertain customers past their work shifts, it was expected here.

It was also very hard to turn down the women from my night job. As women who made their living off customer service, they had a way with words. I didn't try to forcibly refuse them and instead joined them for meals when asked. It really did help to cut down on food costs, so their generosity was truly a lifesaver.

There were also girls who asked me to date them, but these offers I did turn down every time. I didn't feel like it was possible for me to have a romantic partner anymore. I doubted any girl would happily agree to my plan of using the majority of my earnings on my ex-fiancée. I could tell that somewhere down the road there'd be some kind of fight about money, so getting a girlfriend in these circumstances was out of the question.

Besides, I still hadn't really moved on. I still loved Ana and Ana alone. I already knew that I'd only ever love her for the rest of my life. After being reincarnated, I'd planned on doing everything in my power to avoid experiencing the crushing loneliness of growing old alone for the second time. Getting married had been my number one goal in life. Now, though, that didn't matter to me at all. I didn't care if I lived out the rest of my days entirely by myself. I'd found something

more important than that, to the point where being alone seemed like nothing but a minor inconvenience. I'd found a truly wonderful person who I truly treasured and who I was willing to give my everything and more to.

I looked out the window toward the royal capital. Spring was around the corner and it was starting to get a little warmer. The sky was mostly covered by a thin veil of clouds, and there was a specific kind of warmth that couldn't be felt under a pure blue sky.

It was said that the blue sky is most beautiful when seen through the window of a jail, and I was starting to understand that sentiment. The view of the sky from the window of this paltry one-room apartment was much more beautiful than any of the times I'd looked out of the windows when I'd been a noble. It must've seemed that way because of the hopes and wishes I projected onto it.

I would constantly think about Ana while looking at the sky and had done so quite frequently since I'd come here. *Ana's on the other side of this sky.* Just thinking that gave me the motivation to work and make it through tomorrow. I'd never fallen in love with anyone in my previous life, and in this life, I wouldn't love anyone else but Ana. *That's why I give everything I have to you, Ana. I give you all my love from my past life and this one. There's no need for you to feel bad at all. I'm doing this all of my own accord. I pray for your happiness on the other side of this sky.*

Anastasia

Sir Gino appeared in the entrance hall.

"Sir Gino!" I ran to him.

"Ana, I have a favor to ask of you. I've changed my mind. I'd like to succeed the Sevensworths, so would you raise this child with me?" he asked, smiling hesitantly.

"Of course! If you return, I will raise the child with all my love."

As long as Sir Gino returned, I didn't need anything else. I was so happy, tears began to stream down my cheeks.

"I've thought about how I can be accepted back into the family, and I think

your father won't be able to say no if we have a child together."

"Yes, if you return, I'll do anything you wish. Even though my body is hideous with all its bumps, if you so desire me, I shall submit to your every last whim. When I heard that you had a child with another woman, I was so very sad and vexed. It's made me want your child too, Sir Gino."

"Thank you, Ana. I'll be with you forever."

"Sir Gino!" I called his name and stretched my hand up from the bed, grabbing nothing.

It was...a dream. It seems I've been asleep for quite some time. After sleeping, it felt as if I'd recovered slightly. Looking to my side, I saw Bridgette looking at me with concern. She must've heard me calling out for Sir Gino as I slept.

I'd fantasized about him returning with a child many times since that day, and now it seemed the desire had infiltrated my dreams. Reality was cruel. It was highly unlikely that Sir Gino would discard his wife in order to return and succeed this house. Even if something happened to her, I had no doubt he'd raise the child on his own. It was also very inconceivable of him to ask for premarital relations.

In the past, Bridgette had once scolded Sir Gino for what she'd perceived to be him trying to taint my chastity. He'd responded that if on the off chance we had a child out of wedlock, the scandal would hurt me, so he swore he'd hold back his desires to avoid doing something that could potentially result in me being harmed.

The Sir Gino of reality was much different than the Sir Gino of my dreams and was much more sincere. It'd be nice if he was a little bit more sleazy like the Sir Gino of my dreams... *It does seem as if I prefer these nice dreams of fantasy to harsh reality.*



When I opened my eyes again, I was facing a different direction on my bed. It seemed I'd fallen asleep again. The first thought in my head as I awoke was Sir Gino. In my miserable life, the time I'd spent with Sir Gino had been the only shining, wonderful part. It'd truly been wonderful. I doubted I'd be able to have

any comparable experience in the future. He was the only one who would ever call me cute.

I'd only been able to come this far because of his words of encouragement begging me not to give up on my own happiness. But after losing him, I had no clue how to find that happiness anymore. I'd believed his words that I was truly cute, and I'd tried my best to think of myself that way as well. Even if I heard the whispers around me of people calling me the Goblin Maiden, I didn't look down but proudly puffed out my chest and kept my head held high.

I'd only been able to change thanks to Sir Gino. He'd promised to compliment me over and over again, and that had given me the courage to change myself. But now he wasn't by my side. He wouldn't compliment me anymore. He wasn't there to support me anymore. I didn't have the willpower to tell myself I was cute anymore.



Thinking about it, this might have been for the best. Now he could find love with a normal girl instead of an ugly one like myself. Someone who hadn't been ridiculed as the Goblin Maiden from a young age. Being married to me wouldn't bring him the happiness that being married to a normal girl would.

That's right. Someone as wonderful as that shouldn't be married to me. It was a mistake, and mistakes eventually get corrected. It's only natural. That's what happened here. The mistake was corrected and now everything's back to how it should be. This... This is for the best. If he's happy, then it's okay. If he can smile happily, then I'm happy. His happiness is my happiness.

But even so, I couldn't stop the tears. Despite him being happy, even though I tried to be for his sake, I just couldn't. I only felt sorrow. Up until I'd met Sir Gino, I'd never thought I'd fall in love. I'd never thought I'd be able to have a picnic or travel with the man I loved. If anything, all of it felt like nothing more than a fantasy now. I'd been able to have a dreamlike experience that I shouldn't have been allowed to have in reality. I should be happy to have experienced that at all. My monochrome life had, for a brief moment, been filled with bright, dazzling colors. Shouldn't that be good enough?



How much time has passed since the graduation party? Ever since that day, I'd spent the majority of my time in bed. Though my sleep was never long or restful, I still drifted off easily. As I stewed in my sorrow, I heard a knock at my door and my father entered wearing a troubled look.

"I'm glad to see that you look better," he said with gentle eyes.

"Thank you."

Before, I hadn't been able to hold a conversation, but I could now. I'd healed a bit over time.

"This was delivered to us by an anonymous sender. It's a medicine to lift your curse," father said as he tapped on a wooden box he'd placed on my table.

I looked at my father, confused. "What is this unknown person's objective, sending a suspicious medicine like that? Whoever they are, surely they don't think I would use it, do they?"

Most suspicious packages were discarded immediately by the servants. It was my father's job to determine what motives political opponents had in sending packages like these, so the fact that it was here meant he'd already checked it, but it was still strange that he'd brought it to me. I didn't understand what he was thinking whatsoever.

"Along with the medicine, they also wrote a letter explaining the cause of your curse."

We only learned simple magic at school, so the only people with deep knowledge of magic were specialists. I couldn't really hope to understand anything that complicated, but I accepted the letter and lowered my eyes to read it.

"Huh?! I-Is this—"

Though I hadn't even begun to take in the words yet, I could tell with one glance that whoever had written this had handwriting mature for their age, was very polite, and wrote at a slight angle. *There's no doubt. Sir Gino wrote this!*

"As you know, mage specialists keep their knowledge of magic highly guarded. The ones who do share their secrets are extremely rare, so it'd be

hard for us who aren't mages to verify what he wrote. I took it to the court mages immediately, but it seems that the understanding of medical magic in what's written here is at least five hundred years more advanced than what we know now. Some even said it's a thousand years more advanced."

Tears began streaming down my face. I'd thought that I would never hear anything from Sir Gino ever again, but now I had some kind of connection to him right in front of me. I was worried about my tears falling onto the letter, so I quickly put it beside me on the bed.

"I had a court magic pharmacist analyze the contents of the medicine as well, and it seems that it has magic in it, but they couldn't tell what. But at the very least, they could confirm that it contained the exact nonmagic components that are listed in the letter. I'll leave it to you whether you want to drink it or not. What would you like to do?"

"Of course I'll drink it."

"I knew it... You and Jenny came to the same conclusion."

It seems that mother agreed I should drink it, but judging by father's face, he doesn't feel the same.

"Are you against me drinking it?"

"It has unknown magic in it. In the worst case, you may die."

I may die? But if I died, that'd make Sir Gino sad. Knowing him, even if he's no longer in love with me, he has a strong sense of responsibility and would no doubt come visit my grave if he killed me. Oh, that might be nice. If he remembers me even ten years in the future, he'll come visit me each year on the day of my death. Maybe he'll even lay flowers on my grave. Oh, how wonderful!

What I feared most right now was Sir Gino forgetting about me. I would never forget Sir Gino as long as I lived. I wanted him to remember me as well. Even if I was nothing but a small thorn in his heart, if he could never forget me, then nothing would make me happier. This was my first time feeling a broken heart. It was very frightening and painful to imagine not being in the heart of the person I loved. Besides, it seemed that father had forgotten something.

"Sir Gino went all the way to a dungeon to try and find a way to lift my curse.

I'm sure this medicine is the result of his efforts. I must drink it."

We'd learned in school that on average, those who ventured into dungeons only had a three percent survival rate. The difficulty varied by dungeon, but even the safer ones still had a less than ten percent chance of survival. He'd put himself in danger for my sake. When I'd realized that, I'd almost fainted.

"That's true, but he also betrayed you," father said.

"It's okay. Even if his heart is with another, I don't believe he resents me."

He hadn't said one bad thing about me at the party. If anything, he'd complimented me most insistently. It was hard to imagine that he disliked me. *Now that I think about it, I believe he called me the best lady in the world and in all of history.* At the time, I'd been so focused on our engagement being called off that I hadn't fully comprehended it, but he'd said that in front of all those people. I couldn't help but wonder what everyone thought when they looked at me. Thinking about it frightened me.

"This letter was also included," my father said, giving me a second page to read. The script was identical, also written in Sir Gino's hand.

Oh? It seems that with this curse, there's a chance of me dying at any given time. So even if I drink this and die, it'd be no different than not drinking it and dying at some point anyway. Now I have even less reason to hold back. Despite these letters being "anonymous," they showed how much he cared about me. I could tell who'd written them immediately by how kind the writing was.

The last month of my relationship with Sir Gino hadn't gone well, which was why he'd ended our engagement. Even so, he'd sent me such warm letters. *Huh? The words are getting blurry... It's because of my tears.*

"Sir Gino..."

I couldn't hold my emotions back anymore, and I held the letter to my chest. The sincerity in his words spread through me. Since we were no longer engaged, I should've been calling him Sir Ginorious; however, I couldn't bring myself to do that yet. I still had yet to remove the ring he'd given me. If I did, it'd be like severing a vital tie with him. If I did, something in my heart might break. I didn't want everything to change.

I followed the warnings in the letter and focused on getting back to being healthy. I ate even if I wasn't hungry and took sleeping aids at night to rest. This was a medicine that Sir Gino had gone to great lengths to make for me. I needed to get myself strong so I could take it and show him he'd been successful. *Hm? It was only a few days ago that I was thinking about dying, but now all I can think about is succeeding in lifting the curse. Perhaps I've regained a little bit of positivity along with my health.*

After I'd returned to good health, it was finally time to drink the medicine. In the letter, he'd warned that drinking it would cause a high fever, so it was best to take it with a fever reducer and sleep medicine that he'd also included.

"Father, mother, I'm going to drink the medicine now. It should take about ten hours for it to work, so I should be able to join you for lunch tomorrow."

"Remember to stay strong. Never give up on living."

"Whether the curse is lifted or not, you're still our precious daughter. We'll have a feast waiting for you, so make sure you come down for lunch, okay?"

Father and mother respectively said their words of encouragement before tightly hugging me.

"Bridgette, it seems the medicine won't work if I wake up during the process, so make sure no one disturbs me until I naturally wake, okay?"

"As the matron of this household, I'll also make sure that's strictly enforced," mother said with a worried face.

With that, there should be no one to cause any disturbances near me while I slept. Everyone left my room, and I got into bed and drank the medicine. As expected from a magic-infused medicine, it worked very quickly. Within a minute, I could already feel a powerful wave of sleep washing over me. Magic-infused medicines had much quicker effects, but even so, this cure to lift my curse would take ten hours. It was a very unique medicine. I drifted off as I thought about these things.

I slowly regained consciousness and opened my eyes. When I looked around, I saw Bridgette quietly crying, tears streaming down her face.

“M-Milady! Th-Thank goodness! You woke up!” Bridgette wailed, embracing me.

It seemed my time asleep had really frightened her.

“L-Look! L-Look in the mirror!” Bridgette said through her tears, offering me a mirror.

“This is...me?”

I saw a girl with silver hair accompanied by bright green eyes and a beautiful face similar to my mother's. *Is this really...me? This is a completely different face from the one I saw last night.* The face looked so different, it was hard to believe I was looking at myself. I continued to change the angle of the mirror, gazing at my reflection.

“Let's get you changed and show your parents. They've been waiting in the dining hall since this morning!”

I continued examining myself in the mirror for quite a while, and in that time, Bridgette had prepared everything for me. As I got dressed, I was able to confirm that it wasn't just my face that had changed, but my body as well. All the bumps had disappeared and there wasn't even a spot of green left on my skin. *You did it, Sir Gino! The medicine you made succeeded!* I cried out internally as though I could make him hear me.

“Ana?! Is that you?!”

“I-Is that really you, Ana?”

When the servants opened the doors to the dining hall, father and mother both shot to their feet in surprise. They ran over and embraced me tightly. Father's eyes were red and he kept wiping them with his handkerchief.

Mother was disheveled and she was crying loudly. She continued hugging me over and over again. Though she'd received training on how to conduct herself as a member of the royal family, she was allowing herself to be this emotional.

It was incredibly rare.

I remembered once when I'd come home after being bullied as a child, I'd asked my mother why I'd been born with this face. My mother had apologized through tears for not being able to birth me beautifully. She'd embraced me, and I'd felt her hands against my back as she cried into my shoulder. Her tears had surprised me so much that, after that, I hid my bullying. I didn't want to make her sad.

I was sure that even until today, she'd blamed herself for everything. As the one who gave birth to me, she felt responsible for my ugly appearance and lamented my hardships because of it. And now, she could let it all out. Both my mother's and father's hearts were so kind that I couldn't help but cry too.



Chapter 6: Anastasia Learns the Truth

Anastasia

Two weeks had passed since my curse had been successfully lifted, and I was currently having dinner with my parents.

“I’m planning to find Sir Gino,” I said. “After all, he was able to lift a curse that’s so rare, it doesn’t even have a name. I believe as a member of the Sevensworth family, it’s only proper that I express my thanks in person. Do you know where he is, father?”

Father looked toward our head butler, Mash, for confirmation, but he shook his head.

“No, but we do know where the woman he ran away with is. That’s about the only clue we have,” father said.

He must be referring to Lady Kate, the girl who came to the graduation party wearing a dress the same violet color as Sir Gino’s eyes. I didn’t really relish the idea of meeting with the girl with whom he’d been unfaithful to me. The thought of it truly put me in low spirits. Even so, I needed to find him. I was sure he’d be overjoyed to learn that the medicine he’d developed had been a success. Being able to make him happy from a place at his side might not be something that was in the cards for me anymore, but even so, I wished for his happiness. It was one of the few things I could still do for him.

“If you’re going to meet with that girl, I’d like you to have her pass on a message. Tell him that now that he’s successfully lifted your curse, he’s forgiven for the humiliation he put our family through. I’d send our men to express this, but I suspect it would have the opposite effect and he’d think it was a trap. I’m sure he’ll trust the message if it comes from you, though.”

I can’t pretend to turn a blind eye to the fact that father is basically admitting to have wanted to harm Sir Gino. Is the reason Sir Gino’s been lying low because he knew that?

“Father! Don’t tell me you were planning on harming Sir Gino?!”

“N-No. I’m *forgiving* him, see?” He was obviously panicking from my menacing look, but I wasn’t about to let him off the hook so easily.

“Please listen carefully. If anything, anything at all, happens to Sir Gino, I promise I will never, *ever* forgive you! If you even put so much as a scratch on him, I will go to a convent and spend my entire life atoning for the pain you’ve caused him. I will never come home again! You will never see me again!”

I made sure to drive this point home to ensure he wouldn’t ever entertain this idea again.

“R-Right. I said I forgave him, didn’t I? Besides, I was never planning on physically harming him. No matter how you look at it, this whole affair is strange, so I was planning on capturing him and making him talk.”

“Never. Again. Do you understand me?!”

“Y-Yes! I swear to you that no harm will come to him.”

Now that he’d promised me, I could rest easy. Nobles didn’t break promises, so I was assured that father wouldn’t harm Sir Gino. Still, though, with Sir Gino in hiding, this left the daunting task of having to meet the very woman he’d cheated on me with. I was sure that living on the run wasn’t easy, so I needed to locate him as soon as possible to tell him my family’s decision. I wanted him to be able to live a normal life again.



Sir Gino’s new fiancée, Lady Kate, was working at the main branch of the Rurban Trading Company in the royal capital. It was the very same company that Sir Gino had founded. I was sure that if it hadn’t been for my father’s plot against him, the two of them would have already been happily running the company together.

After I stepped out of my carriage and entered the building, an employee asked my business in visiting today.

“I’d like to speak with Lady Kate, but it seems she’s busy entertaining other customers, so I will wait.”

On the other side of the room, I could see Lady Kate talking with a group of men in business attire. As much as I tried not to let her existence bother me, I couldn't help but find myself watching her. She was a person who seemed to laugh quite a bit and was on the whole very cheerful. I wasn't sure if she was simply very personable, but she could make her male customers laugh with her jokes. Though I only spent a small amount of time observing her, it was enough to easily tell that she was cheerful, lively, charismatic, and a skilled speaker.

She was the exact opposite of me—someone who was timid, introverted, unable to smile because I had a complex about my face, and boring because I wasn't very good at being witty. It was clear as day who between us was the more attractive option. In addition, Lady Kate had a much more bountiful bosom than I. I'd heard before that guys liked large breasts, and since Sir Gino was a man, I was sure he preferred larger chests as well.

Though I hadn't even begun talking to her, I was already miserable from how inferior I felt. I was positive that when our conversation actually began and the topic of her happiness with Sir Gino inevitably came up, I'd be crushed even more. *Is my expression okay? I'm not sure anymore.*

"Apologies for the wait. I've been informed you have business with me?"

After Lady Kate had concluded her conversation with her other customers, she came to greet me. She had brown hair and matching eyes. From up close, I could tell she was very cute. This was the girl who'd earned Sir Gino's favor and was carrying his child.

It went without saying that my relationship with Sir Gino had never gone that far. She knew a side of him that I didn't. I couldn't keep myself from glancing at her abdomen where Sir Gino's child was, and a sense of jealousy and inferiority dragged my spirits down.

"I believe this is our first time meeting. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm the eldest daughter of the Sevensworth family, Anastasia. It's an honor," I said, doing my absolute best to smile while introducing myself.

When I did, Lady Kate's eyes widened with surprise. She must not have expected the very same girl who Sir Gino had tossed away to come visit her.

"Huh?! You're Sir Gino's princess! Whoa, I didn't recognize you at all!"

Oh, now that I think about it, we did technically meet at the graduation party, but I look completely different now. I realized her surprise had come from the change in my appearance. I'd been so crushed by the strong feelings of losing my fiancé to someone else, that it'd been all that I could think about. I completely forgot that I didn't look the same as I once had.

But also, though I'd expected this to be the case, Lady Kate had called Sir Gino by his nickname. They were close enough that they'd promised themselves to one another, and she had a much deeper, more physical relationship with him than I'd ever had, so it was only natural that she would. Even so, every word that came out of her mouth felt like a knife reopening the wounds of my broken heart. I could tell it'd be a while before I could fully heal.

"It's all thanks to the medicine I received from Sir Ginorious. It lifted my curse."

I couldn't allow myself to call him "Gino" in front of his fiancée, so I elected to call him by his full first name. I no longer had the right to call him by his nickname. I needed to understand my place as a woman he'd tossed aside, and mentally distance myself by referring to him in a less intimate fashion.

He'd also been disowned from House Valvalier and was not allowed to return to House Adolni, so he didn't have a family name. Calling him by his first name was the most formal I could be to him at this point in time. But even so, I still called him by his nickname in my head. It felt like something important inside me would break if I couldn't at least do that.

"Oh right, he did mention something about that. Y'know, I wasn't really sold on his story, but it looks like he actually succeeded in getting the medicine together, huh?" she said, snickering.

She was the kind of person who never stopped smiling—the complete opposite of a gloomy person like myself. I could only imagine he had more enjoyment being with a bright and cheerful girl like her instead of a dark and gloomy girl like me. I couldn't help but feel pathetic in front of her.

"Yes, he was successful in lifting the curse from me, so I'd like to thank him, which is why I came by today. Is Sir Ginorious around?"

"I've no idea."

Oh, I see. She's still wary of the Sevensworths targeting him. "There's no need to worry. The Sevensworths have no intention of doing anything to him anymore. Since he lifted the curse from me, our house considers the debt of his humiliation paid."

"Oh, is that right? But I still don't know where he is."

I...don't understand. Sir Gino isn't the type of person who would abandon his pregnant fiancée. I couldn't help but regard her with suspicion.

"Um, are you perhaps saying you are unaware of your own fiancé's whereabouts?"

"Hm? Oh, right! That is, he actually ended our engagement."

"Huh?!" I couldn't help but let out an unladylike shriek of surprise.

"Want me to tell you the details? I'm a commoner, so I don't really know your noble etiquette, but if you're okay with that, I'll tell you everything you wanna know," Lady Kate said, smiling brightly.

"I wouldn't dream of forcing noble etiquette onto commoners. However, are you sure you're comfortable talking about your engagement with an outsider like myself? Please don't misunderstand me—I'd be more than happy to hear about this. However..."

I desperately wanted to hear what she had to say, but I had no ties to Sir Gino now. I needed to first confirm that it was acceptable for an outsider like me to hear these details.

"Yes, it's no problem at all! I had a contract with him where I'd act like his fiancée so he could end his engagement with you. It didn't say anything about not talking about it after the fact, though, so there's nothing to worry about."

"Huh?! You only pretended to be his fiancée?!"

I froze in place, and Lady Kate began snickering at my reaction.

"Okay, okay, let's get goin', then. Can't really talk about it here, can we? To the drawing room we go!" Lady Kate said, firmly pushing me forward.

My guards moved to step in, but I stopped them with a glance. I allowed myself to be pushed along by Lady Kate deeper into the company building.

“You’re telling me Sir Ginorious ended our engagement so I could be married to either the first prince or the crown prince?”

“Yes, that’s right. He really loves you a lot. He was a big mess after he ended things with you.”

Lady Kate began to reenact Sir Gino’s crying, using a pillow from the sofa as his head while laughing and explaining everything to me. I was thankful she’d made this conversation so lighthearted. If she’d taken a more serious approach, I wasn’t confident I could have held back my tears. Thanks to her, I was able to cut it back to just a few. However, I couldn’t accept the fact that he’d buried his head into her chest. *That’s completely immodest! It should have been me—I mean, not that I’d have the courage to encourage such behavior, but...if he insisted...*

I couldn’t help but laugh at how he’d ended two engagements in one day. Lady Kate’s impression of Sir Gino was especially faithful to his manner of speech as well, catching a lot of his nuances. She also explained that the object of my biggest concern—their supposed child together—was also a fabrication. She neither had a child, nor had their lips even once touched. I felt relieved from the bottom of my heart.

Though I’d been as delicate as I could in the way I approached the subject, I was quite taken aback by how blunt Lady Kate was in her responses. Commoners truly had a lot of freedom with their words. This might have been my first time having this kind of chat with a commoner, but I never thought I’d hear these kinds of words come out of the mouth of a lady.

I hadn’t known until she told me, but commoners apparently called everyone, not just family and fiancés, by nicknames. In the noble world, calling someone so informally had large implications; however, it meant next to nothing for commoners. Lady Kate even called guys she knew from childhood by their nicknames.

Her referring to Sir Gino that way didn’t have much to do with any feelings she had for him. If anything, it seemed like she didn’t think of him in a romantic way at all. Knowing this truly made me feel relieved.

She had a lovely face and large breasts, and was friendly, cheerful, and entertaining to speak with. From my perspective as a girl, she was extremely charming. If the two of us competed for Sir Gino, I was not confident I'd win. However, when I told Lady Kate my relief about her lack of romantic interest in him...

"Huh? Wait, are you kidding? Sir Gino's really hot, kind, gentlemanly, and an amazing businessman. He doesn't ogle my body and I can really trust him. Sure, I thought it'd be nice to be with him, but I knew there was no chance whatsoever of getting between the two of you, so I gave up ages ago."

It seemed that Lady Kate did carry some affection for him, but she'd already given up. It was likely safe to assume she wouldn't try to make any moves on him at this point. Still, I couldn't help but be somewhat worried about someone as charming as her holding some kind of feelings for Sir Gino, even if she said she wouldn't act on them.

Even so, though she had no obligation to me whatsoever, she still volunteered the information that she'd given up on him. She truly was a wonderfully honest person. *Now I can't help but wonder what kind of feelings Sir Gino had as he rested his head on her ample bosom.*

Oh, it's just hit me. I'm jealous. This dark emotion within me is jealousy. For most noble boys, the most they were ever able to touch of a girl's body were their hands. However, Sir Gino had been able to bury his head into a girl's chest, probably for the first time in his life. I wished I could've been the first person he'd done that with.

"The reason I decided to tell you everything is because I really feel bad for him. He went so far as to reduce himself to a commoner for your sake. He gave up his company, and has to live on the run for the rest of his life, and he didn't even do anything wrong. Isn't that just tragic?"

These words didn't carry the same lightheartedness as her previous ones had. These were much more serious.

"I couldn't agree more. Sir Gino shouldn't have to continue living like this any longer. I promise I will do everything in my power to restore his status and honor to him."

I probably shouldn't have told her that, but I couldn't help but be honest. It was only right, in response to the sincerity and honesty she'd shown me. I also decided not to hold back and called him by his nickname. *I vow that I will not give up. Calling him "Sir Gino" out loud is my conviction. I will not fail. I will be able to call him this to his face again.*

"Thank you. This wasn't something I could help with as a commoner."

After speaking with Lady Kate, I returned home by carriage. During the ride, I couldn't stop myself from crying. Because she'd kept our conversation so lighthearted, I'd been able to prevent myself from breaking down, but now, everything I'd held in was bursting out.

Though I'd believed that Sir Gino didn't care about me at all anymore, I knew now that I was still in his heart, and he'd gone so far as to tarnish his own name and lose his noble status for me. It was no longer possible to stop my tears.

It suddenly struck me that Sir Gino had previously asked me about the first prince. I'd given empty answers that I had thought were essentially lip service, so I never could have imagined they'd be the source of all this. However, if Sir Gino had known about the first prince's plan to ask me for my hand, then I'd essentially told Sir Gino to his face that I'd have a good marriage with him. He must have misunderstood me. Thinking even further about it, that was the day Sir Gino changed. It was far too late now, but I couldn't help but regret how careless and foolish my words had been.

When I returned home, I didn't immediately change my clothes but instead went straight to my mother. I'd come home from my talk with Lady Kate crying, and as soon as my mother wrapped her arms around me, I began sobbing like a little child, greatly surprising her.

She held my shoulders and patiently listened to everything I had to say as I tried to explain through my tears. As I continued my story, her eyes gradually turned to daggers and she had a servant summon my father. Then, when my father arrived, I explained everything again.

"So the boy ended the engagement not because he'd been unfaithful, but because of what I told him about the princes?!" My father looked utterly

stunned.

“Explain this to me, dear. I too heard about the first prince’s and the crown prince’s plans to try and become engaged to Ana; however, I don’t exactly remember being privy to any discussion where we’d marry her to one of them if her curse was lifted.” Though mother was smiling, her anger was visible from the veins popping at her forehead.

“W-Well, I-I never thought that her curse would truly be lifted,” father squeaked, completely flustered.

“Even if you had no idea he’d succeed, surely you didn’t forget how Ginorious went all the way to a dungeon to find a way to lift her curse, did you? Just what were you thinking telling a person going to those lengths something that would completely cut their legs out from under them?” Her smile became more ferocious; she was unappeased by father’s excuse.

“W-Well, uh...”

“Thanks to your little slipup, completely uncharacteristic of someone who’s supposed to be this country’s prime minister, you put Ana through an inconceivable amount of pain. You know that, don’t you? How about we have a nice, long chat later?” Though mother was still smiling elegantly, she couldn’t hide the vein popping out from her head. Father went pale, his face frozen.

“Now, Ana, what would you like to do?”

“I cannot stand the thought that Sir Gino became the laughingstock of everyone and lost his noble status all for my sake. I’d like to do everything possible to restore his status and honor.”

“That won’t be a problem. Our family can certainly accomplish that without any issue. However, what I’m asking is, how do you feel about Ginorious? Can you forgive him for what he did?”

“Ever since my curse was lifted, we’ve had so many court mages over to confirm that I’m truly cured. Every last one of them told me how shocked they are by this miracle. They all say that the paper he wrote contains concepts that can only be thought to be hundreds of years ahead of our time. All I can think is that it truly is a miracle. When I realized it, I couldn’t stop crying.”

I paused, too choked up to continue. I'd already been unable to stop the tears from earlier, and now the emotions from these memories were flooding back up as well. Mother didn't force me to go on, but silently watched over me with gentle eyes.

"I-I... I still want to be married to Sir Gino. There's no one else who's made a miracle occur for me or who has thrown away everything for my sake. Meeting him was already like a miracle in and of itself. He's truly a wonderful person and I...I can't imagine being married to anyone else but him." My voice still wavered, but I was able to somehow get these words out.

"You're right. No one else has done any of that. You absolutely can't let go of him."

Mother approved of my reengagement to Sir Gino, so now all that was left was locating him and having marriage talks with him again. I was so happy that I began crying even harder. Though having tea and taking strolls around the garden with him were small things, during those times, we'd always have the most enjoyable conversations. I now painfully knew how important even the most mundane days were when I spent them with him.

Some time later, I needed to speak with my mother about something, so I headed to the fifty-fifth drawing room, called the Fluorite. When the servant opened the doors to the room, I saw that not just mother was present but father as well. Curiously, he was sitting on his knees on the floor, while mother sat on the sofa.

"Oh? So was it a lie that you regret your actions?"

Most likely concerned about his image as my father, he quickly tried to get up and sit on the sofa; however, one word from my mother made him go back to his knees. After he did, she began listing all the ways she took issue with how my father had treated Sir Gino, including but not limited to how he'd told Sir Gino there was a possibility of me being married off to one of the princes. Father tried to protest that he wasn't directly responsible for what'd happened, but that only brought about another round of scolding. *I should come back later. I can already tell that my mother's fury will only become more intense.*

“It’s not my fault! That boy kept putting his arms around Ana and had essentially no sense of proper etiquette. If I simply accepted him as part of the family, that would’ve just emboldened him to go even further.”

“Oh, don’t speak nonsense. The way he acted was all your fault.”

“What do you mean?” This piqued my interest, so I couldn’t help but ask.

Just what did Sir Gino’s attitude toward me have to do with my father? I wouldn’t have assumed there was any connection.

“Your father here is the very person who strongly petitioned the Valvaliers to keep Gino’s education regarding women to the bare minimum.”

“Can you really blame me?! Both you and Ana praised the boy constantly for being handsome! If he became any more knowledgeable about how to act around women, that’d only make Ana fall even more head over heels for him!”

“Father...”

How petty. How absolutely petty! That was your reason for interfering with another family’s noble education? I can’t believe you! I’m very disappointed in you, father. Are you truly the prime minister of this country?

“It’s not my fault! Ana...Ana’s my little princess and mine alone!” father exclaimed, but mother swiftly silenced him again.

Thinking back, Sir Gino most likely hadn’t known that calling a noblewoman by a nickname held special meaning. He’d seemed to only realize it later, after a visit with his elder brother at House Valvalier. I was starting to see a lot of my father’s influence in places I hadn’t expected to before.

“Hm, it might be best to restore Gino’s honor and dole out a punishment to you in the same move. So, how about we do this?”

My father vehemently opposed the plan my mother proceeded to lay out, but he was powerless to say no, and ultimately agreed.



From there, the Sevensworths spared no expense in searching for Sir Gino, but to no avail. After gathering all the sightings that had been reported, things only became more unclear. Even with the fastest horse, it’d be impossible to

cover the distance that he'd allegedly traveled in one night.

We also spoke directly to the three covert agents who'd originally lost sight of Sir Gino in the royal capital, and it seemed that he'd vanished into thin air right after turning into an alleyway. It was strange because there'd been nowhere for him to hide, and if he'd made a run for it, they should've been able to see him do so.

In the east, there was apparently a group of people called ninjas who could vanish into thin air. Our agents posited that, based on the reports from witnesses and the fact that they'd lost track of him in a situation where it should have been impossible, that Sir Gino was able to use ninja techniques. Being able to make oneself suddenly disappear was an extremely high-level technique that apparently even many of the best ninjas couldn't use. If Sir Gino was able to use those techniques, he must have been a master. If that was the case, then tracking him would be difficult even for our family. Hearing this report, my spirits dropped.



"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm the head of House Lyntch, Baronetess Debbie."

Her house was one that specialized in theater. It was quite unusual for a woman to be not only the head of a house but to have status of her own, separate from her inherited title. However, it was possible for those with great achievements in the art world to receive status, even women. It was a special exemption made for those whom the country did not want to be lured away to other nations. The fact that she was the head of her family was evidence that she was recognized as one of the top playwrights of this country. As an aside, the embroidery professors at our school also possessed their own status in this way.

The method my mother had come up with to restore Sir Gino's honor was with a play. After his actions during the graduation party, Sir Gino's reputation was greatly damaged. My mother planned to have this play show a different perspective of those events and show how wonderful Sir Gino was and that breaking off our engagement was actually a display of his noble character.

Of course, simply having a good script wouldn't necessarily mean the play would gain popularity and become widespread. That was why our family was going to subsidize the cost of each showing so that even if there weren't any people in the audience, the theaters wouldn't lose any money. We were sure that this would be performed in many different theaters. It'd cost quite a bit of money, but the only person whose wallet would be hurt was father's.

"I think it'd be better for the main character to be Lady Anastasia rather than Sir Ginorious," Lady Lyntch said after hearing the full story.

"I doubt it'll be a particularly interesting play if the spotlight is on me. The only thing that makes me different from others is my curse and the fact that I was an in-school research assistant. Even my personal life is painfully average, what with me merely going between school and home. I don't think there's a play to be had from such a conventional life."

Sir Ginorious, on the other hand, had scored the highest grade on the transfer exam in our school's history, and was even able to solve a problem that supposedly had no solution. He also put together various noteworthy events for our school that were all heavily praised. He even won against one of the five best swordsmen in the country during a tournament. He was by far much more worthy of having a play made about him.

I had none of the glowing achievements that he had, and simply being compared to him made me embarrassed. I lived a boring and unremarkable life. Having a play centered around Sir Gino was sure to be much more entertaining.

"If you boil their life down to a few lines, anyone's life will become unremarkable. Say you're someone who got promoted to manager, or who married an actress. Where's the interesting story in that? That you got promoted to a higher position? That you got married to a prettier woman than others? If you simplify anything, it sounds more commonplace. Just because you lived what you think to be a boring, unremarkable life, that doesn't mean it was," Lady Lyntch said.

"That may be true, but I can assure you that my life has not been especially interesting."

“On the contrary. Even if we sum up everyone’s life in a few lines, most of them have drama. That’s just how it is. You’ll never think your life is as interesting as others might actually find it to be. The people who claim their lives are boring and ordinary simply don’t realize how interesting their lives really are.”

Wow, she really lives up to her reputation as one of the best playwrights in the country. She really talks like a professional.

“All right, then! I think it’ll be best to leave the rest to you, the professional.”

“What the... I don’t approve of this!” my father yelled as we sat in the twentieth drawing room, called the Purple Pearl.

A week had passed since Lady Lyntch began working on the script, and now we had our first chance to look over it. Father’s reaction was to turn bright red with anger. Since it was based on real events, both father and I appeared in the story, albeit with slightly altered names.

The character based on my father was kind of a laughingstock. As a noble, father cared about his honor a great deal, so this was not easy for him to accept, especially since it was for a play that’d be viewed very publicly.

“Oh, are you perhaps complaining? I’m the one who came up with the direction for this character.”

“Huh?! Y-You did? I-I thought it was the playwright...”

Seeing my mother’s innocent smile made my father’s face turn from red to white.

“The title of the play is *The Goblin Maiden*—the very same epithet used to humiliate Ana. She’s agreed to that, and yet you’d like to voice a complaint about something you’re not comfortable with? In order to restore Gino’s honor, even Ana is making sacrifices, but are you saying you’re not willing to?”

“W-Well, but isn’t this a little... As the one funding this play, is there really a need to degrade me so much?”

Though father resisted, he ultimately agreed to move forward with the script.

Since it was based on real life, some of the later events might change depending on how the future played out, but for now, the script was set. Father seemed to have lost his motivation, or perhaps his vigor, because he was sitting dazed on the sofa like a dried-out plant.

“It seems what you said to him really helped.” My mother giggled like a child would after successfully pulling off a prank.

She was referring to when, in the midst of his protests, I’d voiced my opinion by saying, “You haven’t reflected on your actions one bit, have you? I’m so close to despising you.”

He’d gone white as a sheet after that and immediately agreed to the script without a word of further resistance. I couldn’t help but feel as if he’d been attempting to get in the way of our efforts to restore Sir Gino’s honor, so the blood had rushed to my head. *I might have been a little cruel and shouldn’t have told him I may despise him, though. I suppose I’ll embroider a scarf as thanks for all his help. I’m sure it’ll make him feel better.*

Chapter 7: The Separate Lives of Ginorious and Anastasia

Ginorious

“Hey, Kirk, sorry, but could you come in today too?” a beautiful woman in her forties asked from my apartment’s front door.

She was the manager of the house in the red-light district where I worked as a bouncer, and Kirk was short for Kirklyle, which was the name I was going by now. After all, since I was in hiding, I couldn’t very well use my real name.

Since I was living in the commoner world now, she called me by my nickname, like all the girls who worked at the house did.

“Isn’t Bruce working tonight?” I asked.

Usually, I’d try to speak more formally to someone older than me, but I didn’t because she’d strongly urged me not to. There were many girls at the house who hated speaking politely.

“Bruce’s out sick. Caught a cold, apparently.”

“Okay, then. I’ll be there,” I said.

Though it was okay for bouncers to not always be on the premises, they had to make their whereabouts known at all times in case of emergency. I declined my boss’s request to come inside and instead asked her to tell me where Bruce’s house was so I could visit him.

Bruce was an older guy, around sixty or so. He used a cane to get around because his legs didn’t work so well, but his strong arms still made him an effective bouncer. Most likely, he was a spy that’d deserted, but I, of course, never really asked. It was proper manners around the slums not to pry. There were tons of people around here with troubled pasts, and just like how I was using a fake name, I was sure Bruce was as well.

I knocked on Bruce's front door and when it opened, the old guy himself answered it and immediately began complaining, asking what I was doing at his place. He scowled at me as I walked inside and began cooking for him with the groceries I'd bought.

"Who told you to do this?!"

"Nobody. I'm doing this because I want to."

I remembered back when I was old and living alone, being sick was always hard. Because I knew how tough it was, I couldn't help but try to lend Bruce a hand. This country didn't have any plumbing systems, so if you wanted clean water, you needed to get it yourself from the public water area. Also, the only people who could afford refrigeration magic tools were nobles, so commoners didn't have much in the way of food preservation. Being old in this time period was a lot more difficult than when I'd lived, and being sick only made it worse.

"Are you dumb? What kind of idiot busts into a person's house to cook for them?" Bruce complained while eating the porridge I made for him.

Here, they used millstones to grind millet, which was what I'd used for the porridge. Though nobles usually ate hulled grains, commoners boiled the grains with the hulls still on.

The trade-off for cheap housing in this area came at the sacrifice of being far from the water area. With Bruce's legs, it was hard to get water even when he didn't have a fever. As he ate, I filled his water jug to the brim. I also saw that he didn't have much firewood left, so I restocked that too. This was another challenging thing for an older person with difficulty walking to do.

I continued taking care of him like this day after day, and by the time his fever was gone, we'd become friends. After that, every now and then, I'd bring booze and snacks to his place. As someone who knew how hard it was to live by oneself at an old age, I couldn't leave him alone.

"What do you get out of hangin' out with a penniless geezer like me?" he'd often ask with a scowl.

Even so, he'd still drink with me.

One day when I was drinking with Bruce, we began talking about the girls at work over some salted mushrooms.

“Y’know, kid, those girls are all head over heels for you.”

“No, they’re just in work-mode still. It doesn’t make sense for any of them to talk up a boring guy like me.”

Bruce stared at me with confusion. “You’re not thinkin’ about datin’ *any* of them? You’re still young, you know. You have to test the waters before settling down.”

“I don’t really have any plans on dating. Even if I did, it’d be a little awkward dating a girl from the place I work.”

“Why? Don’t like their type?”

“Before I took this job, I was a bit scared of girls who worked in the industry, but now I’m fine with them. They’re just normal people like you and me. The reason I think it’d be awkward is because of how popular they are with other guys.”

“Well yeah, it’s their job to be popular with guys. Only the ones that can do that are able to stay in this line of work. The more men they attract, the better for them it is. What’s wrong with that?”

“Well, they’re always surrounded by guys, so even if I dated one of them, I could see myself immediately being dumped because I’m not nearly as charming as the others.”

Bruce stared at me again with confusion. “You’re...being serious right now?”

“Yeah.”

“Kid, you really need to work on your confidence. It’s rock-bottom.”

Bruce proceeded to launch into a lecture. Older people loved giving lectures to youngsters who had different thinking from them while drinking. I understood how he felt, so I sat and listened.

“For example, let’s say a guy who’s better than you in every regard comes for your girl. What would you do?”

I couldn't help but think about Ana and how I couldn't stack up whatsoever to the first prince or the crown prince.

"I'd give up and hope for their happiness together."

"Without even putting up a fight?"

"Yeah."

Bruce was once again very surprised.

This was the kind of question one would ask when they wanted to make a point about never giving up. Most likely, he was trying to get an answer out of me that proved there was something I was willing to fight for, so he could then tell me I needed to work on myself until I had the confidence to put my money where my mouth was. I was sure that was the kind of lecture he wanted to make. Though I knew that, I couldn't bring myself to answer in the way he wanted. The memories of Ana didn't allow me to.

"You're even stranger than I thought. Your lack of confidence is next level." *It's not that I don't have confidence. I just have an accurate evaluation of myself.* "Besides, if you love someone, you should fight for them even if you think you'll get beaten silly. That's what being a man is. You not doing that is just plain strange," Bruce said.

So guys should lay down their lives for the women they love? *I think that was something Japan had valued way back in the past.* Generally, this country wasn't only behind Japan in terms of technology but values as well. Even so, it was possible that from both a Japanese point of view and the point of view from someone in this country, me not fighting for Ana was something they didn't understand.

"But if you truly care about someone, isn't it best to move aside if you know they'll be happier in the future?" I asked.

"The future's not the only thing that matters. What about the memories you two share? Those are equally important. Even losing the fight for her might become a good memory for that special someone. It's important to protect their memories. Men need to know how to grin and bear the pain, but it's also important for them to show off too."

Memories... I never thought about that. “But I think when the last girl I was with chooses someone new, whoever she picks won’t be worse than me. When that happens, she’ll realize almost immediately how riddled with problems I was, and all those good memories will lose their charm.”

Even now, I hoped I could remain part of Ana’s precious memories, but I knew that probably wasn’t possible. Regardless of which prince she married, she’d quickly realize how much of a failure I was in comparison. The rose-tinted glasses she’d viewed our relationship through would break, leaving only the ugly truth. If that was the case, then it was a lot better to just make her think I was a horrible guy.

“Can you hear yourself? That kind of thinking is fundamentally weird. How do you have so little confidence?” *Is it weird? If anything, I think I’m properly assessing myself based on my experiences up until now.* “Also, it’s your job to bring happiness to the girl you love. To do that, you gotta fight. It’s not right to think you should leave it to another guy to make her happy without even trying to fight for her.”

Would anything have changed if I’d tried to fight? What could I have done to make Ana stay with me? I have no clue. Eric fought for my sister despite knowing he had no chance at winning, and through that, he’d somehow pulled victory from the jaws of defeat. Maybe that was the perfect picture of what a man should be.

“Look, I don’t know anything ’bout your past, but what’s important is the future. Don’t you ever let another girl go. That’s what it means to be a man.”

If that’s true, then...wow, I’m really a loser for letting go of Ana. I’m a pathetic excuse for a guy who entrusted her happiness to someone else because I couldn’t do it. I don’t have any confidence at all. I wish I could be like Eric. Bruce got fed up with how spineless I was, so he began training me in martial arts to instill some confidence into me.

“I’m not only tryin’ to give you confidence. It’s been botherin’ me for a while, but the way you fight is sloppy despite how surprisingly fit you are. It’s such a waste.”

Well, I can’t really help that. I’m not from a military family. Growing up, I’d

only really dabbled in swordsmanship as a hobby. I only began to train for real after that time I thought Ana had been kidnapped.

“Also, you’re a noble, aren’t ya?” I ground to a halt at Bruce’s statement. *How did he know? Did he look into me?* “Don’t worry, I’m not gonna tell anyone.”

Seeing his smile put me at ease. *Is it possible that he’s not a deserter but an active agent undercover for a noble family? Is that how he found out?*

“For the record, I didn’t look into you. You told me yourself.”

“I did?”

“Well, there were a lot of hints, but what sealed the deal was your footwork during that fight at work. You didn’t even try to mask it. You moved the exact way that noble-trained swordsmen do. You were pretty much introducing yourself as a noble.” *He knew just from that? It’s true that my movements are second nature to me now from my training at school.* “Don’t worry. I’ll teach you how to fight in a way that won’t expose you.” He flashed a bright smile at me.

I see. The real reason he’s training me is to teach me a less conspicuous way of fighting. It must be his way of showing thanks. I really appreciate it.

Anastasia

Now that I’d graduated, I’d become an adult and it was time for me to make my debut at an adult social function. Since we’d yet to find Sir Gino, I asked my father to escort me instead. Apparently, it’d been his dream to do so, and he was in very high spirits...until mother brought him back down to earth by scolding him for being the reason Sir Gino wasn’t here to escort me in the first place.

Since it would be my first proper social event, my mother chose for me to attend a simple evening party. Strict etiquette wasn’t required, so I was allowed some leeway even if I didn’t act perfectly. This was the kind of party where your arrival was heralded in by the chatter of others rather than a servant’s announcement.

As custom dictated, mother bought me a crown of flowers for my first

appearance as an adult at a social function. When I entered the venue with the crown on my head and father escorting me, there was quite the commotion.

Everyone knew my father, of course, since he was not only the premier duke but the prime minister of the country, but I'd doubted anyone would be able to figure out who I was. Surprisingly, though, it seemed some people were able to put the pieces together from my age, hair color, and eye color. Their eyes widened greatly when the realization dawned on them.

After we finished our first dance together, father also accompanied me for conversation. However, he soon had to leave to talk business with others, and in his absence, I was swarmed by boys. Usually, no one paid me any attention at social functions, but today was different. Everyone invited me to dance and some even asked me out on dates. A few of my past suitors also spoke to me. They complimented me on my beauty and fervently tried to invite me to have tea or go see a play with them.

However, as I spoke with them, all I could remember were their harsh words from our past marriage talks, where they'd called me ugly and repulsive, and told me not to speak or even get close to them. I couldn't bring myself to accept any of their invitations. Their obsequious voices made me feel sick as they tried to coax me into saying yes.

There were plenty of guys who were already engaged also inviting me to go on dates. Knowing the pain of having my engagement ended, I felt nothing but displeasure at seeing them smile while offering to toss their fiancées to the wayside.

Before my curse was lifted, there hadn't been any guys who would speak to me further than the required greetings. At parties, I'd simply stand quietly against the wall and gaze at the groups of boys that eagerly gathered around beautiful girls.

Back then, I'd been envious of those girls, but now that I was actually experiencing it, I found it nothing but annoying. Whenever guys tried to speak in a group, they'd all try to one-up each other, and it seemed simply childish to me.

Despite apparently having enough skill to elude covert agents, Sir Gino had

never once boasted about it. Granted, I did wish that if he'd had enough skill for even the top agents to sing his praises, he'd have shared that with me. Perhaps there was no helping it since I wasn't reliable enough for him to divulge his worries to, but I saw no reason he couldn't have boasted to me about himself. I felt sad that he hadn't told me anything.

Besides being boastful, the guys my age seemed to all be childish in their points of view and ways of thinking, which were emotional, self-righteous, and narrow. Sir Gino truly was special for how he would at times have more graciousness than even my father. The more I spoke with these boys, the more precious my memories with Sir Gino felt.

When I return home, I think I'll work on an embroidery piece for Sir Gino. Of course, we hadn't been able to locate him yet, so I had no way to give it to him, but even so, making something for him erased some of the loneliness I felt in his absence. I'll do my best to make something beautiful! In order to feel connected to Sir Gino for a little longer, I'll embroider him a new piece. I hope he won't be too troubled when I give it to him.





When I'd still had bumps all over my body, men would adopt a cold attitude toward me, but now, they were very friendly and eager to interact. But then I couldn't help but think about Sir Gino. Even when I was cursed, he still called me cute and treated me very kindly. All these other guys treated me differently now that my curse was lifted, but would Sir Gino change anything about the way he interacted with me? He was a guy too, after all.

He called me cute before, but now with my new appearance, would he still act the same? If he was disappointed, I...

In the last month or so before our graduation, Sir Gino had barely looked at me. Would he perhaps act the same as he did then? Uninterested and cold? Imagining that made me so scared, I began shaking. *Oh, I know! There are medical procedures with which one can change their appearance! I should ask Doctor Susanna!*

"Doctor Susanna, I've a question I'd like to ask."

We were currently in the sixty-first drawing room, known as the Peacock, where I was meeting with my primary physician, Dr. Susanna Welker.

"Ask away. I'm happy to tell you anything as long as it's within my realm of knowledge."

"With my curse removed, the bumps on my body have disappeared."

"Indeed they have. Congratulations. You've become quite beautiful."

"Well, I'd like to ask you about that... Would it be possible to get those bumps back?"

"Pardon... What?"

"I'm thinking about returning to my previous appearance and was wondering if that's possible with your medical skills."

Doctor Susanna's eyes went wide as she gaped at me, but no words came out. I looked to the side and saw that Bridgette's eyes had also greatly widened.

“Doctor Susanna?”

“O-Oh, yes. Well, it is possible to create visually similar lumps. Though getting rid of the lumps was difficult, it should be simple to make them. All that’s required is inserting a needle and injecting fluid underneath the skin.”

“Oh, so it *is* possible? How wonderful! Then how about having parts of my skin be green? Is that possible?” She once again fell silent at my question.

“Um... Doctor Susanna?”

“O-Oh, yes. It’s possible. All we’d need to do is use ink for tattooing.”

“Oh, splendid! Then, could I ask you to do that today?”

“P-Please wait a second, milady!” Bridgette frantically exclaimed.

“Hm? What seems to be the problem?”

“It’d be best if you consulted with your parents first. Wouldn’t you agree, Doctor Susanna?”

“Y-Yes. It’d be best to receive their approval first.”

“Oh, in that case, I’ll go do that right now.”

I almost forgot that mother felt like it was her fault that I wasn’t born beautiful. I’ll be sure to make it clear that I will be changing my appearance by my own will, so it’s nothing for her to need to worry about.

“And that’s why you came to me?” mother asked, letting out a long sigh. “How about this, Ana? You can change your appearance at any time, so why not wait until you ask Gino what he’d prefer?”

“You’re wise as ever, mother! That’s a good idea. I’ll be changing my appearance for his sake, so it’d be best to ask him for his opinion.”

Seeing my wide smile made mother let out another deep exhale. This just went to show that you never really know how life will go. Who would’ve thought I’d want to return to having green skin and lumps all over my body after hating it so much? But right now, the most important thing was becoming engaged to Sir Gino once more.

I'd already lived out my old dream of being surrounded by men at a party and it hadn't been nearly as enjoyable as I'd thought. If anything, it'd been annoying. With that knowledge, I had no problem returning to the way I used to look.



I received an invitation from the royal family to an evening party, which was for singles only.

"I've no problem with you turning them down. This isn't exactly ideal timing," mother said.

That being said, this was a letter that had come from the royal family. Not making an appearance would be a bad move politically. When she said she didn't mind me turning them down, she was really saying that she was content with taking care of the problems that would ensue if I did.

However, I was an adult now. I couldn't keep relying on my parents forever. Someone like that wouldn't be worthy of Sir Gino. As an adult, I needed to deal with my problems on my own.

"If you want to handle this yourself, then I'll of course support you. Just be careful, okay? Both the crown prince and the first prince have their eyes on you."

The intensity of the struggle for succession had increased, and even our family had been caught up in it. Both the crown prince and the first prince had asked for my hand. The organizer for tonight's party was the first prince, and there was no doubt that he had something planned. Most likely, he'd made the party for singles only so neither of my parents could attend.

He must have been planning something that wouldn't succeed if my father, the prime minister of the country, or my mother, who had the nickname of "the empress," were present. Regardless of what he had planned, I had no intention of going along with it. I needed to successfully avoid his schemes if I was to become engaged to Sir Gino once more. *I'll do whatever it takes!*

"Wow, you've really become even more beautiful than you were before."

“You’re radiating beauty. You’re several times more beautiful than the last time we met.”

“Thank you kindly for your praise,” I responded.

“You’re as beautiful as a goddess. Please allow me the honor of offering you a song.”

“I appreciate your offer; however, I will have to decline. It’s an honor I don’t deserve,” I said.

As soon as I entered the party venue, I was surrounded by guys showering me with praise, so I used the standard etiquette to deal with them in a businesslike way.

Recently, I’d been working on my fashion and makeup skills. Since I decided not to immediately revert to how I used to look, I’d be meeting Sir Gino like this, and I had no clue if he’d like how I looked now. Even so, I wanted to try meeting him looking the best I could. I didn’t know when that would happen, so I was trying to always look my best regardless of where I was.

It was very confusing to receive compliments from everyone. When I’d still been under the effects of the curse, I’d taken great pains to make sure I wouldn’t cause anyone any displeasure, but never to great success. However, now with just a little bit of effort, I was able to raise everyone’s opinion of me.

Whenever Sir Gino had called me cute, I’d always get embarrassed and happy to the point where I wanted to jump for joy. I’d been unable to calm my heart whatsoever whenever he said it.

However, now whenever anyone called me cute, I didn’t feel happy at all. If anything, it made me sad because it made me remember Sir Gino. *I want him to call me cute again. I want to hear him say it in his deep voice. I wonder what he’s doing right now...* I was feeling a little exhausted, so I left the circle of boys and as I did, I heard Lady Lillard call my name.

“You’ve really been through so much. That scoundrel really showed his true colors. I thought he was a wonderful guy from everything I heard about him, but really he was just a lowlife. You shouldn’t feel any burden with how he acted. It’s not your fault at all, so please don’t let that miscreant keep you

down.”

“I appreciate your kind words.”

She was referring to the graduation party where Sir Gino had ended our engagement. When I heard her refer to Sir Gino as “lowlife,” it took everything I had to not let my anger show in my face. Lady Lillard didn’t know the truth behind Sir Gino calling off our engagement and thought that it was because he’d been unfaithful.

Many houses were aware of how capable Sir Gino was; however, there weren’t any that wanted to involve themselves with him now. Everyone was under the impression that our family was furious with him, and therefore, none of them thought it’d be possible for him to return to noble society. Even if one did want to take him into their family, they’d be too frightened of the possible retaliation from the Sevensworths.

Everyone was operating under this misunderstanding because our family was keeping everything we’d since learned about Sir Gino a secret, including the fact that he was the one who’d made the drug that lifted my curse. At this point, we absolutely couldn’t let the truth be known to anyone.

There were houses who would see Sir Gino’s return as being disadvantageous to them, so they would certainly treat this as a good opportunity to take his life while he didn’t have the protection of guards or knights. It was also a very opportune time for any house that wanted to take him in. If either of these types of people knew the truth, they’d rest at nothing to find him.

“It’s good that you’re no longer engaged to a guy who can only think with his lower half. I’m also relieved to no longer be with someone like that.”

Though her slander of Sir Gino infuriated me, I made sure to not let it show on my face. Lady Lillard had had a similar experience to mine, where, a few years ago at her graduation party, her engagement had also ended. Her fiancé had been the crown prince, who was rotten to his core.

“Even now, I respect Sir Ginorious greatly. To me, he is second to none,” I said.

Since I was unable to reveal the truth, I could only really fight back like this. It

was frustrating because I knew how wonderful a person he was. In response, Lady Lillard looked at me with pity.

“Hey there, are you all having fun?” the first prince asked, coming over.

“Your Highness. It’s an honor to receive your invitation. I am the eldest daughter of House Sevensworth, Anastasia.”

“No need to be so formal. You can just call me Chris. In fact, I insist.”

I...don’t understand. Chris is short for Christopher, but why is he asking me to call him that? The first prince was my cousin, but I’d only ever spoken with him at social functions such as these. We weren’t nearly close enough to call each other by nicknames.

“I must decline. Such an honor is wasted on me.”

Of course, I turned him down, but he wasn’t deterred. Instead, he offered me a glass with a type of alcohol made from a fruit.

“My deepest apologies, I’ve yet to finish my current drink. If it would please you, you’re more than welcome to drink it.”

If a man offered a girl a drink, she could refuse if she’d yet to finish her current one and then ask him to drink it instead. Since I had a drink in my hand, I asked His Highness to drink it for me. I could tell that behind his smile, he was panicking.

It was proper etiquette for guys to drink if a girl asked him to, so I expected him to do the same, but instead, he continued talking to me without taking a single sip. This continued for a while until he finally gave the drink to a servant to take away. The fact that he’d ignored proper etiquette and sent the drink away untouched meant he must’ve done something to it. I’d been taught very extensively that girls should be careful when guys offer them drinks, and mother had even told me to make sure I always had a drink in my hand for this reason. Never did I think I’d be in a position to use this knowledge, and yet... *This is frightening. I’m wearing the Artifact that Sir Gino gave me that nullifies any toxins, but I’m still frightened.*

“Thank you to all those here for coming this evening. Since it’s not everyday

that we have parties for singles, we're going to have a bird and flower dance."

I'd become quite shaken, so I was trying to slip away and not stand out, but that was when the first prince went to the center of the venue and announced this dance. *He's going this far?* The majority of nobles had political marriages; however, there were a small number of them who looked for partners on their own. The bird and flower dance he mentioned was something that happened at evening parties like this for those kinds of people.

The name came from how birds and flowers were often painted or embroidered together. In the past, I'd always stayed out of the way and out of notice, so no one usually cared if I danced or not, but everyone had to dance at least once. The goal of the dance was for the blooming flowers to meet a bird that perched on their branch. It was a rule that the person you danced with had to meet you later at least once after you finished dancing.

Everyone seemed a little uncomfortable hearing this announcement. Typically, if this dance was planned, it'd be written on the invitation. It was very bad manners to suddenly spring it on one's guests. Even so, the first prince didn't seem to be bothered whatsoever and began ordering the orchestra to play the music for the dance. The fact that he was being so pushy about this made it clear that his aim was not in the dance itself but in the subsequent meeting. After dancing, he'd want us to talk alone, and then he'd use people to spread a rumor about how we'd been intimate in order to trap me into an engagement with him.

As I stood against the wall while watching everyone dance, I noticed Lady Janail, the daughter of Marquess Grimardy, glaring at me, so I went over to her. I needed to apologize to her. She was the fiancée of the first prince, and normally, they would've been preparing for their wedding now that she'd graduated. However, it didn't seem like that would be happening anytime soon since the first prince now had his eyes set on me. I had no doubt she carried a lot of resentment toward me.

"I understand that it's not your fault, Lady Anastasia. But...looking at you...I can't help but get irritated..." Lady Janail said after I made my apology.

"I don't blame you. I understand how you feel. I merely wanted to apologize

to you, so I'll be taking my leave now."

Before I could walk away, though, she started to rattle off all her complaints, so I stayed and listened to every last one of them. It seemed like she'd been holding this in for quite a while. Like me, Lady Janail had been in the elite class at our school since elementary school. Though we weren't friends like me and Lady Ekatarina, we'd been classmates since we were six. I felt like it was easy to listen to her worries and whatever she wanted to say.

"Up until now, I've...always done whatever my family wanted me to do... As noble ladies, we're taught that it's the proper thing to do. But...becoming a concubine without even being able to get married is just...too much."

"A-A concubine?!"

"That's right..."

I was at least aware that if they got married, the first prince would become heir to House Grimardy, and that he was holding off on getting married because it would mean losing his royal status, essentially forcing him to drop out of the battle for succession. However, I had no clue that he'd suggested her becoming his concubine.

My first instinct was that she should feel justified in refusing that terrible offer, but it seemed that their family wasn't sure what to do. Most greater nobles got engaged before they became adults. At this point, there wasn't a high chance that Lady Janail would find someone of a suitable age for her unless she snatched them away from someone else, which meant her prospects of getting married were low. Most likely House Grimardy was thinking that becoming the future king's concubine didn't seem too bad compared to the alternative of remaining unmarried.

I won't let that happen! Nobles value their pride over everything. If a noble girl was walked all over like this, it was possible that she might resort to drinking poison. As she began to cry, I asked her to promise me not to make any kind of rash decisions. I promised her that I would see if my father could do anything to help her family.

By the time we'd finished talking, so had the eleventh of the twelve songs in the bird and flower dance. Now that there was only one song left, I had no

choice but to dance. The first prince hadn't tried to approach me yet, most likely because it would've been awkward to do so with Lady Janail here, but now he was finally making his way over with a grin on his face as if he were boasting victory.

"Would you dance with me, Ana?"

He's calling me by my nickname?! And in front of Lady Janail?! The only guy I want calling me by my nickname is Sir Gino!

"Your Highness, I kindly ask that you call me by my full name. Also, regrettably, I will have to decline your offer," I said, smiling as I walked past him.

By the time I reached the dance floor, the twelfth song had already begun. I steeled my will and began dancing by myself. No one danced alone. It was something done in pairs, not by oneself. However, there was no actual rule against it. I simply needed to dance before all twelve songs finished playing, so as long as I did, it wasn't an infraction of the rules.

I could feel everyone's surprised gazes fall on me. Their whispers became so loud, I could hear them even from where I stood. It was only natural since this was something that no one would think of doing. It was very, very embarrassing, and I was sure my face was red, but I wanted to marry Sir Gino. Even if I was embarrassed, I was going to pull this off. *I'll do everything I can!*

When the song ended, I looked over and saw the first prince standing there in a daze. I was sure that even he hadn't expected me to dance by myself. *Prepare yourself, Your Highness. It's my turn now.*

"The bird and flower dance has now concluded with the twelfth song. However, there's still one who hasn't danced yet. Please play the thirteenth song," I said in a loud voice that surprised everyone.

This was another rule of the dance. Since they only played the twelve songs once, time flew by before you knew it. There were some who were too shy to ask others to dance, which was where the thirteenth song came into play to force those who hadn't danced yet to do so. If the ratio of boys to girls didn't match, sometimes, same-sex pairs would dance together, and if there was anyone left over, then the organizer would dance with them.

The only one who hadn't danced yet was Lady Janail. During this dance, it was permissible for either the guy or the girl to invite the other, but Lady Janail was not the kind of person who was able to ask anyone to dance. Also, she was still officially the first prince's fiancée. It went without saying that there wasn't anyone with the courage to invite the fiancée of a member of the royal family to dance. That meant the organizer, the first prince, needed to dance with her. I knew he only had one goal for this dance so he didn't care if anyone else hadn't participated by the end of the twelfth song, but I wasn't going to let it pass. It wasn't proper etiquette for anyone but the party organizer to request the thirteenth song, but since the first prince had already betrayed proper etiquette by not listing the dance on the invitation, it was only fair that I wasn't bound by proper etiquette either. *Serves you right.*

As I watched the two of them dance together, I started to feel a little better. Lady Janail wanted this thirteenth song because even though she'd been treated horribly by the first prince, she still wanted to dance with him. *I really don't understand what she sees in him, though. I suppose he's handsome, but aside from that, it's a mystery to me.* In my mind, he was a terrible person.

After the dance ended, the first prince glared at me. The fact that I'd requested a thirteenth song, thereby ignoring proper etiquette, was essentially me flaunting my power as a Sevensworth. I'd also simultaneously sent a strong message that our house wished for his marriage with Lady Janail. Now everyone at the party had gotten that message, and with that, the first prince was greatly put on the back foot in his fight for the throne. Even if the crown prince were to lose his place as the heir, I doubted the first prince would immediately be named in his stead.

"Simply brilliant," the crown prince said, walking over with a smile after the dance had ended. Everyone was now chatting with one another as per the rules of the dance, and he'd taken this chance to speak with me. "It reminded me of something the empress would do."

He was referring to my mother, his aunt. In actuality, the plan had been something she had come up with. I was still worried about being on my own, so mother had given me a lot of advice. She'd even anticipated the dance and that

the first prince wouldn't ask for the thirteenth song, and had given me many different ways to deal with the situation. I was still far from being able to see three moves ahead like my mother could. Even when she'd suggested it, I hadn't thought the first prince would really go this far, but obviously I'd been completely off the mark. In contrast, mother had accurately predicted everything.

The only part of the plan that I'd really come up with on my own was maybe dancing by myself, but even then, mother had given me the hint that I should try to dance with someone who was politically a safe option. But whomever I chose to dance with, I'd have had to meet them after the dance concluded, and I'd had no intention of having such a meeting with anyone other than Sir Gino.

I need to work harder. All I've been doing until now has been relying on mother's advice. I'm an adult now and if I can't do anything on my own, then I won't be worthy of Sir Gino.

"I was quite moved by how you danced by yourself for the twelfth song. I completely understand how you feel, Lady Anastasia. I probably would've done the same thing had I been in your position. I have someone I love that deeply as well."

"You still care that deeply for Lady Mariott?"

His Majesty did not approve of the crown prince's marriage with Duke Mariott's daughter; however, he'd yet to give up. He'd been spending the whole time at this very party right next to her.

"I do. I couldn't care less what other people say, I'm not giving her up. If I were in the same situation as you, I'd dance by myself the same way—no...I may have gone further. If we were to separate, I might disgrace myself by clinging to her, breaking down into tears, and even prostrating myself like a commoner, begging her to stay. I would've made a much more pathetic spectacle of myself than you did," he said, wryly smiling.

I was shocked. These certainly weren't words I'd expected to ever hear from a member of the royal family. There wasn't a royal in history who'd prostrated themselves like that in a public place. *He's truly not suited to being king, but I can tell that he deeply loves Lady Mariott.*

“I’ve only approached you today to commend you on your actions. As a show of my respect, I’ll save my proposal for you to become my concubine for another day. However, I’ve no intention of giving you up either. After all, I need you in order to make her my queen. I fully plan on sacrificing you for the sake of our happiness.”

“That’s something you’ll have to discuss with my father. I’m not the one who decides.”

I had no intention of sacrificing myself for them. I’d already decided that I wasn’t going to give up on my own happiness, and I conveyed as much to His Highness.

“Don’t worry, I’m prepared for you to resent me, but if you do, I only ask that you keep your focus on me and leave her out of it,” he said as he returned to Lady Mariott’s side.

Sir Gino had previously told me that the crown prince was very eccentric, but at the very least, I didn’t get the sense that he was as bad a person as Sir Gino said he was. However, I saw what he meant about the real problem with the crown prince, which was that he’d listen unconditionally to everything Lady Mariott said to him, even if it was something completely devoid of common sense. In that regard, I could understand why Sir Gino had a certain impression of him. Though the crown prince’s interests were in direct opposition to mine, I at least understood him.

After I returned home from the party, I went to my room, deep in thought. Though a lot of shocking things had occurred, the most shocking by far had been the crown prince’s words. When Sir Gino had called off our engagement, I didn’t cling to him, wail, or prostrate myself. The crown prince showed that he’d fight much more desperately than me to save his relationship with the one he loved.

I’d worked hard to build myself up, using Sir Gino’s plea for me to not give up on my happiness as my compass. However, I couldn’t help but think I hadn’t tried hard enough. The crown prince seemed much more determined than me.

From what Lady Kate had told me, Sir Gino had broken down into tears

immediately after leaving the party. If he truly wanted to marry someone else, then I'd give up on him, knowing that I'd merely be getting in the way of his happiness. However, in that moment, I hadn't been able to even confirm whether it was what he actually wanted. The moment I heard him say that Lady Kate was carrying his child, I gave up on everything and stopped thinking altogether.

If I was to do my best on not giving up on my happiness, then I needed to try harder. I needed to discard all pride and reputation to the point that I'd cling to him, cry like an infant, and prostrate myself. I'd have to try harder to the point that even if I were told that another woman was to have Sir Gino's child, I wouldn't fall into despair, nor would I give up. I needed to try harder to the point that no matter what shock awaited me, I could still think about Sir Gino's happiness.



Three months had now passed since Sir Gino disappeared and we'd yet to have any success in locating him. Regardless of how skilled he was at hiding, all humans had to make a living in one way or another. Our covert operatives had said that even for a high-level ninja, it was impossible to erase every last trace of oneself.

This was especially true for Sir Gino, who'd given away what we could only assume was basically all his money to Houses Adolni and Valvalier. He was truly a sincere person to do all that in order to apologize.

Since he'd given away essentially everything of his, he lacked any funds, so he needed to earn money. However, it wasn't easy for nobles to blend in with commoners. Most male nobles who became commoners ended up on the streets. However, Sir Gino had run his own business and could feasibly become a merchant with his experience. So our covert operatives began investigating the homeless and anyone who'd either been recently hired as a merchant or started their own trading company. They'd even spread their search to other countries.

Despite our efforts, we couldn't get any information about Sir Gino. I was told that in this case, it was possible that he'd lost his life or had been taken captive

by another noble family or country. Sir Gino had given away his entire fortune, which could be interpreted as the actions of someone who was preparing for the absolute worst...

My chest filled with unease and I began crying. All I could do was pray at this point. I went to the church each day and prayed for Sir Gino's safe return.

Ginorious

When I was standing by at home for my bouncer job, I heard an incredibly loud knock at my door.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It's Lehne! Please! Open the door!"

It was one of the women I protected, but I didn't think she was working today. Confused, I opened the door and she practically collapsed into my room. I was shocked by her appearance. Even in the slums, the dress she had on was on the nicer side, but it was torn apart. Lehne had tears in her eyes and was shivering. I could immediately tell what had happened. I grabbed my jacket from my clothes basket and draped it around her shoulders.

"Shut the door!" she cried.

"But..."

I lived alone. Shutting the door would mean that we'd be alone inside.

"Please! They might still be looking for me!"

Well, if she's scared that the ruffians might find her, then I guess I don't have a choice. I shut the door. Since I was living by myself, all I had was a table and a chair. The only other place to sit was my bed of straw, so I had her sit in the chair while I stood. I'd just finished boiling water too, so I gave her a cup of it to calm her down.

"You're a strange one. You drink hot water?" she asked as she sipped on it.

After some time in silence, she seemed to calm down a little. Since I'd lived as a noble for so long, drinking tea had become habit to me, but tea was

expensive, so I just drank hot water.

“Kirk, you had your heart broken recently, right?” she asked as she held the wooden cup with both hands.

“What makes you say that?” I asked.

“I mean, it’s obvious. You’re practically screaming ‘woe is me,’ and if that wasn’t evidence enough, you’re always looking sadly off into the distance.”

I guess I do have a broken heart. I never really felt like I did. By doing things for Ana’s sake like sending her family the rejuvenation lotion, I could keep our love alive, or at least that’s what I was thinking. I was just sad because I’d never be able to see her again.

“Did you know the best medicine for a broken heart is a new romance. Not that it’s possible for me...” Lehne chuckled wryly.

“Why’s that?”

“Well, just look at where I work. I get assaulted by men too. I’m...dirty.”

“That’s not true.”

“Do... Do you really think so?”

“Of course I do.”

“Then...sleep with me. Prove it to me by sleeping with me.”

Lehne put the cup down and got up, slowly walking over to me.

“What are you...”

I unconsciously took a step back, a chill running down my spine. Suddenly, there was another pounding at my door, cutting off our conversation. Apparently, a guard had come over hearing that there was a woman who’d been a victim of a crime.

My room was very small and there was no place for Lehne to hide. As she was the only girl in my room, the guard took her with him, concluding that she was the woman in question. She looked very displeased, and I couldn’t blame her since she was no doubt going to be asked questions that no girl wanted to be asked. Though I felt bad, I had no way to help her. Nobody listened to anything

people in the slums had to say.

Chapter 8: Reunion

Anastasia

“Milady, we’ve found Sir Ginorious!” Bridgette exclaimed as she rushed into my room.

Before I knew it, I’d shot to my feet. “You have?! Is he all right?!”

“Yes, he is. He’s working as a cook in a dining establishment in the city of Amorum.”

“I’m so relieved...”

Half a year had passed since Sir Gino called off our engagement and vanished into thin air. When we began our search for him, I’d been told to be prepared for the worst, so I’d been worried sick this entire time. The moment I heard he was safe, I could feel tears of joy streaming down my face and I immediately offered a prayer of thanks.

But a cook, huh? So even that’s something he can do... It’s not something people would expect of a former noble, so it certainly makes sense why it took so long to locate him. However, I can’t help but feel that if he was that proficient at it, he could’ve at least mentioned it to me. It makes me sad that he kept it to himself.

Despite all the other guys constantly bragging about themselves, Sir Gino had never done that once. I wanted to hear him boast to me. I wanted him to tell me more about himself.

At a request from our family, House Valvalier had rescinded their disownment of Sir Gino. Now that we’d located him, the only thing left was to become engaged once more and then have a formal wedding. Thinking about this, I giggled. *I’ll finally be able to see him again.* I was so happy, I could sing. *Oh no, I mustn’t get so excited.* Before I realized it, I’d begun twirling.

We were finally going to be able to see one another after half a year. It would

be nice if when we reunited, I could show him at least a little of how beautiful I'd become. I'd need a new dress, and also perhaps I should meet with a beautician. I still had no idea what Sir Gino would think of my new appearance, but I was going to do my best for him to like me.

"Bridgette, I'd like to have a new dress made. Could you call the dressmaker? Also, I'd like to freshen up my face, so please call the beautician as well."

"Is this all for meeting Sir Ginorious?" she asked.

"Yes, it'll be our first time seeing each other in so long. I want to look as beautiful as I can."

"No, I don't think you should wait for all that. You should go to him immediately."

"Oh? What makes you say that?"

"Though his main job is in the kitchen, it seems he also has to serve food to the customers occasionally. Apparently, the restaurant has become very popular with the local girls because of the handsome man who'll bring your food and speak to you like a friend. Every day after he finishes his shift, they wait for him at the back of the restaurant and compete for the right to take him out for a meal. Since they're regulars, he can't refuse them, so he ends up accepting their invitations."

"O-O-Oh." I couldn't hide my shock at this information.

"The reason we were able to locate him in the first place is because our covert operatives caught a rumor in that city about an abnormally handsome restaurant worker."

"I-It's already that big a rumor?"

"That's not all."

"Th-There's more?"

"Though he works at a restaurant in the daytime, at night he works as a security enforcer at a certain establishment in the red-light district."

"A security enforcer? H-Has he been hurt at all?"

“There’s no need to worry about his safety. As a test, one of our covert operatives posed as a drunkard and made a ruckus, but he was quickly subdued by Sir Ginorious without even knowing what hit him. The mission was to gauge Sir Ginorious’s strength in hand-to-hand combat, and if it seemed his skills weren’t enough to keep him safe, we would put pressure on that establishment to fire him. However, judging by how he subdued our operative so easily, I don’t believe Sir Ginorious is in any danger while he works there.”

Oh, so Sir Gino is not only skilled with a sword but in hand fighting as well? Enough to even surprise our covert operatives... This is one more thing he could have bragged to me about but didn’t. However, that aside, if there’s no worry about him getting hurt, then I’m not sure why I need to rush to him immediately without any preparation.

“The problem is, this establishment is the kind where men go to be entertained by women. And Sir Ginorious, as you know, is handsome, strong, young, polite, and a gentleman. Many of the girls there are already enthralled by him. Let me remind you that these are women of the night. They are professionals when it comes to charming and enticing men. For someone like Sir Ginorious, who is not used to these types of women, it’s difficult to know how long he’ll be able to resist their temptations.”

“Wh-Wh-What?!”

“These women are dangerous. For example, shortly after we began surveilling him, one of the girls he works with went to his home. She ripped her clothing outside his door, to the point where she was practically half naked, and begged him to let her in, claiming that she’d been assaulted. She pretended to be so frightened, she convinced him to shut the door behind her.”

“N-No way! S-S-So, wh-what happened after that?! D-Don’t t-tell me he spent a night with her!”

“No, our operatives immediately alerted the city guards that a woman had been attacked and the guard took her away to question her, so they did not spend the night together. However, that should show how much of a threat she is. Since then, she’s continued to invite him out for meals and has tried to earn his sympathy by crying and claiming she’s frightened for her life. For someone

like Sir Ginorious, he has absolutely no clue that she's making it all up. He's a kind person, so she's masterfully attacking his weak spot, and it's working. He feels sympathy for her, and he stays by her side when she says she's scared to be alone."

Bridgette very precisely laid out how a noble-boy-turned-commoner could fall prey to the wiles of a woman. It was standard for nobles to have political marriages, and if they were the honorable sort, they would remain faithful to their intendeds throughout the engagement process.

When with their fiancées, they'd usually only ever do things like have tea with them, take them to dances, and maybe touch hands occasionally. They were never alone in a room together. In contrast, apparently commoner women would link arms with guys, pressing their breasts against them, and even hug them. Those were all things that noblewomen would absolutely never do. It was a very excessive flirtation technique that could easily make a noble guy fall for them.

"Th-Th-This is horrible! Wh-What should I do?!"

"From our reports, it doesn't seem as if he's begun courting any women; however, there are many who are very aggressively approaching him. We speculate it may only be a matter of time before he does become entangled."

"Th-There are m-m-many women doing that?!"

"Milady, it'd be best if you hurry. Sir Ginorious is a virtuous individual. If he does develop emotions for one of them, it's unlikely that he'd easily give up on them. There's a very high chance that if he falls in love with a commoner woman, he'll continue living as a commoner with her. You must steal him back before that happens."

Sir Gino remaining a commoner even after we found him wasn't an option I'd even once considered. I couldn't stay here. I needed to make haste and meet Sir Gino at once!

I explained the situation to my parents, and though father was reluctant to let me go out so suddenly at night, mother approved, albeit with a wry smile. I was granted permission to take our fastest carriage, and I immediately departed. In order to not waste any time, I also arranged for fresh horses to be ready along

the route so I could change them out swiftly without needing to wait while they rested. Many wouldn't look kindly on a noble working either in a restaurant or at an adult entertainment house, so it was extremely important that we kept it an absolute secret. To that end, we arranged for specialists to come afterward. They'd be taking individual horses, so they might even get there sooner than me.

Though I'd left the house in such a hurry that I'd barely had time to think, I was now starting to get worried about seeing Sir Gino again. It had been half a year, after all. If this were a romance novel, that was more than enough time for the heartbroken protagonist to find a new romantic partner. And if he was being aggressively pursued by many women, then it wouldn't be strange for his heart to have been captured by one of them by now. If that happened, then it was up to me to beat them out and win his heart so we could be engaged once more. However, I wasn't confident that I could win against so many other women, especially ones whose work relied on their skills of enticing men.

"Bridgette...I don't think I can win against those women," I said, unable to contain my anxiety any longer.

"Don't worry. He hasn't fallen in love with any of them yet."

"Even if not, there's still a possibility that he's interested in one of them, isn't there? What should I do if he is?"

"Hm. In that case, for someone like you who isn't experienced with romance, you won't win if you try to strategize and overthink it. I think you should be straightforward with your approach. Muster your courage and tell him your feelings clearly. It's very common for both guys and girls to be moved by direct, heartfelt confessions. They fall in love before they even realize it's happened."

I should tell him my true feelings? But there's not much more to my true feelings than I want to marry him. Also, I've never heard of a girl proposing to a guy.

"Won't he think me indecent for doing that?"

"Milady, in the battle for love, the one who professes their love first wins. You need to be fast and clear about expressing your feelings if you hope to emerge

victorious.”

She’s right... This is a battle, and I need to win. My foes are women with a wealth of experience when it comes to charming men. A girl like me will have to pull out all the stops to stand out enough for him to choose me. Oh, that’s right... Didn’t I tell myself that I would never again give up on my happiness? Even if I learn that there’s someone else in his heart now, I won’t turn away defeated. I will throw away my dignity and honor and cling to him even if it’s unladylike. I’ll do whatever it takes! I’ll propose to him shamelessly, and even if he turns me down, I’ll hold on to him, listen to what he has to say, and if in the end I find that letting him go is truly what he wants...then, and only then, will I give up.

I’m not going to give up on my happiness, but Sir Gino is extremely important to me. I want to make him happy more than anything else. If he’s not happy, then I can never be.

“One more thing, milady. It’s important for you to make close physical contact with him. This is a vital step in winning the heart of a man.”

“Oh? What specifically should I do?”

“Hm... How about holding his hand?”

That’d never even crossed my mind, but now that I thought about it, I’d always been on the receiving end of Sir Gino’s displays of affection. I’d never done anything on my own to try and capture his heart. *I can’t let things stay this way. I must change.*

“Thank you Bridgette. I’m going to do my best.”

“One more thing. You should go to his home as soon as possible. Ever since that one woman went inside half naked, other girls have been plotting ways to get in there as well. So far he’s just been barely able to keep them out, but remember, he’s no real experience with women. It’s only a matter of time before they succeed. I’ve received reports that it’s gotten very dangerous and there’ve been many close calls.”

“Th-Th-That’s very worrisome!”

This is terrible! Sir Gino’s chastity is at stake. There’s no time to stop to rest at

lodgings on the way. I will sleep in the carriage and continue on until we get there!

Eventually, the carriage came to a halt in a corner of the slums. It was a place where many small huts were crowded together along the stone-paved road. There was a stone building in front of us where one of the walls on the first floor had a hole in it and the stairs to the second floor, where his room was, were half falling apart. Before I knew it, tears were falling down my face. If our engagement hadn't ended, he wouldn't have ended up in a place like this and he'd still be able to live without worry or want with the Valvaliers.

As I stood in front of his home, lacking the courage to take the last step forward, I saw a woman making her way toward his room. One of our covert operatives whispered something in Bridgette's ear.

"Milady, it's one of the women he works with."

It is?! Oh no! I quickly called out to the woman and said I had something very important to discuss with the man who lived here, so in exchange for a gold coin, I'd like her to leave.

"I guess I don't mind if you're paying me this much, but judging by how you're dressed, you're from a pretty big merchant family, aren't you? If you're tryin' to take Kirk as your lover, I think you're wastin' your time. He hates greater nobles and greater merchant families."

Kirk must be his nickname. I'd been informed that his full fake name was Kirklyle. I'd learned a little bit about commoner customs from Lady Kate, including how commoner girls often called guys by nicknames even if they didn't have any kind of special relationship. That being said, it was still good manners to call them "Sir." They'd only drop that part if they were in a deeper relationship, which made me realize just how close he'd already gotten with the people here. *Maybe I don't have a chance...*

"Well, I don't see much of a future for you, but good luck. If you're gonna blame anything, blame the fact you were born a noble," the woman said, smirking at me as if she'd won before leaving me there with my head down.

No. I'm not going to give up. I've already decided that I'm going to cling to him

even if it's unladylike. Even if he has someone in his heart, I'm going to fight till the end!

Ginorious

After working at the restaurant, I was treated to a meal by one of the regulars as usual, and then I went home. As I was relaxing, I heard a knock at the door. Usually if someone came knocking at this time of day, it was someone from the entertainment house coming to request me to work as a bouncer. It was a little earlier in the evening than usual, but not too strange. I put on my arm-guard weapon and opened the door, but standing there wasn't one of the people from the house. It was a girl with a dress far too lavish for the slums.

"Who might..." I started before I lost all words from the shock.

Her silky, silver hair was braided, and her teary eyes were a verdant green. She had a face very similar to my former mother-in-law with a dreamlike beauty. Though she was crying, she was wearing a bright smile.

"Sir Gino..."

Her beautiful voice was so nostalgic. In the next moment, she leaped forward, embracing me.

"L-Lady Sevensworth?"

"Please call me Ana," she sobbed, hugging me tighter.

"You shouldn't be doing this. Please remove yourself. You're going to be the future queen. Bad rumors will spread if you do this."

But due to our difference in status, I couldn't forcibly remove her, so I tried to move back instead.

"I'm not going to be the queen!" she exclaimed.

"Huh?"

"You told me once that I shouldn't give up on my happiness, did you not? That's what I'm doing—not letting you go! I will grab your heart once more!"

You can't do that! If you want to be happy, then you can't choose to live as a

commoner in the slums! I pried her off of me. It was incredibly rude for a commoner to do that to a noble, but now I didn't hesitate at all, knowing this was for her sake.

"I'm a commoner! Happiness will never be attainable for you if you're with me!" I couldn't help but yell, a little riled up.

"That's not a problem! Though it's not public yet, the Sevensworths have made a request to House Valvalier to rescind their disownment of you. You're no longer a commoner, Sir Gino."

"What?!"

What's going on? I publicly humiliated the Sevensworths. Both the duke and his wife were very traditional nobles. Why would they ever forgive something that negatively affected their pride?

"Even if the Sevensworths permit it, I'm not someone you should marry. Not when I've made such a bad name for myself. I can't imagine you being happy with someone like me, Lady Sevensworth."

"That's also not something you should worry about. House Sevensworth has already put together a plan to restore your honor."

"They have?!"

"Yes, so please rest assured."

I guess it's possible for them to do that, though I have no clue why they would. But even if they somehow clear my name, she and I still can't be together.

"I...really think you should choose someone else."

Ana wore an expression of shock. "Why?"

"I...I'm not good enough for you! There are better guys out there who can make you so much happier than I ever could!"

I didn't want to say this. I wanted to be with her forever. But even so, I gritted my teeth and yelled these words at her, rejecting her. *This is for her sake! That's right! It's all for her!*

With her curse lifted, there was nothing left standing in the way of her

becoming happily married. She was the only daughter of the Sevensworths—a family with a fearsome amount of power. If anything, I was willing to bet there were a lot of people hoping they could marry her now.

Ana was unaware of just how many options she had because I was the only guy she'd ever gotten close to. She didn't know that there were so many other guys out there who could make her so much happier. Of course I wanted to marry her, but I was a loser, unworthy of her. There was only one option for me, and that was to take myself out of the running. That was the best option for Ana. The best way to make her give up on me was to break the illusion she had of me.

"Besides, I have a secret that I've been keeping from you. Once you hear it, you'll see why choosing me would be the biggest mistake of your life."

"I'm aware that you have secrets you keep to yourself, and I've no particular problem with that. I merely need to improve myself until you feel I'm trustworthy enough to share them with me."

"What?! Of course I trust you! How could I not?! The reason I never told you is because...I was scared you'd come to hate me."

"I could never hate you," Ana said, smiling softly.

It warmed my heart like a summer breeze and filled me with confidence. I was terrified of her finding out that I had the mind of an old man. What young girl in their right mind would love an old man? But this worked in my favor. I was already a pathetic guy, but I was also an elderly man on the inside. If she learned the truth, she'd definitely be disillusioned and happily move on to someone else.

"I should've told you a long time ago, but please hear me out."

I began talking about my past life, and not just how I was an old man. I also told her about how they'd found me absolutely repulsive and how I'd lived my entire, pathetic life alone. I told her every last detail about myself and described the truth about how I'd been ugly, like the kind of bug that crawled through the lowest parts of the earth. Ana silently listened to every last word with caring, sorrow-filled eyes.

“Now you understand, don’t you? The reason I had such good grades was because I had my past life’s memories. The reason I was such a good swordsman was because I used magic. The reason I was able to solve an unsolvable math problem was because it’d already been done in my past life. The reason my company thrived was because I was just replicating what I’d seen in that life.”

“I see...so this is why you lack so much confidence,” Ana said.

“That’s right. It’s all because I was cheating using my knowledge from my past life. There’s absolutely nothing I’ve accomplished by my own merit. The real me is just a powerless, useless...pathetic man.”

“That’s not true,” Ana said with a soft smile, slowly shaking her head. “From your story, I’ve realized that through all the hardships of your past life, you’ve come to lack confidence in yourself. I understand since I have a similar experience. It’s only natural to have a low opinion of yourself when you’re rejected day in and day out by the world.”

Bruce also commented that my lack of confidence is abnormal, and it seems like Ana has the same opinion.

“I shut myself away for a long time due to the horrible comments I always received regarding my appearance,” Ana continued. “After that, it became hard to interact with others.”

“Yes. You’ve had to go through so much because of the way you looked, just like me. Just like you have problems interacting with others, I have difficulties interacting with women.”

“No, it’s not just women. Even when you interact with men, you draw a line between yourself and them.”

“I do?”

“I heard about this from your sister, but you never showed any weakness to anyone in your family. Sir Anthony and Sir Justin said the same thing too.”

I don’t understand. I was just acting the way I felt was natural. It’s not like I was purposefully trying not to show any weakness.

“I was also bullied a lot, and a fear grew in my heart of being unfairly hurt,” Ana said. “That fear took root somewhere deep inside me without me even realizing. Unconsciously, I distanced myself from not just boys but other girls as well. Because of that, I wasn’t able to really make friends. I even hid my bullying from my mother.”

It’s true that girls scare me, but I’m not particularly scared of guys or my family. I can’t help but think that my situation is slightly different.

“This is just something my mother told me, but family, spouses, betrothed—those you feel close to are those you should share your worries with. She said it’s because you care about each other that you should be honest about your feelings, and that that’s what it means to be family. That’s why it was wrong of me to hide my bullying from her, and why she wanted me to have the courage to take the step forward to tell her the truth.”

I finally understood. *I’ve never had the courage to take that step forward with the people in my life. Ana might be right. I might be uncomfortable with everyone, not just girls.* Back when I heard about Ana receiving proposals from both of the princes, Anthony and the others had told me that they were there to lend an ear if there was something on my mind. When I’d refused, they’d looked surprised and maybe even upset as they asked me why. Even so, I never told them anything. I kept my thoughts only to myself and came to my conclusions on my own. I’d hidden a lot of things from my sister as well, and not just about my past life. Even when I had problems at my company, I wouldn’t tell anyone and would try to handle them all on my own. *Oh. I see now. My sense of self is warped.*

But this only furthered my determination. Ana shouldn’t marry me. Though her life had been warped by the curse, she was still only twenty. Despite that, she had matured at an amazing speed. I was sure that she’d be able to straighten out in no time, but it was different for me.

I’d been steeped in my problems for too long. My sense of self had become too twisted and had hardened like steel. Plus, I had the heart of an old man. I was too stubborn to change. I’d only slow her progress. I was a guy who’d lived a long life without ever fixing the problems inside him. There was no chance for me to bring her happiness.

“You’re right. I’ve become warped and this isn’t something that’ll be fixed in a day or two. That’s why I absolutely can’t marry you. There are so many other guys out there who could make you happy, and I want you to choose one of them.”

When I said this, a light filled her eyes as if she’d resolved to do something.
What’s she doing? Why is she kneeling in front of me?

“Please marry me. I promise to make you happy, Sir Gino. So please, don’t give up on your happiness,” she said, and kissed the back of my hand.



I was shocked because this was what men did when asking for a woman's hand in marriage. I couldn't even imagine how much courage it took for her to do it since women did not do this in this country. Just how much resolve did she have to kneel before me? How strong were her feelings that she would propose to me after I told her I absolutely couldn't marry her? My vision of her blurred as my eyes filled with tears.

"B-But I told you I won't be fixed that easily!"

I'd been just as strongly resolved to not allow myself back into her life, resolved to turn her away no matter how much she dug her heels in. I'd planned each move and thought I'd put her in checkmate, but her proposal blew everything away. She didn't have any strategy or plan. She merely filled her words with her sincere feelings.

"If you wish to change, I will make my way deep into your heart and change you. As someone who bears the same scars as you, I'm sure I can accomplish that. There's no need to change immediately. I will stay by your side forever. Of course, if you don't wish to change, that is all right with me as well. I believe you are wonderful just the way you are. So please don't give up on your happiness."

Ana said this all in a gentle voice, the complete opposite of the emotional wreck I was. Her words were so kind that they made my chest tight, constricting it.

"Why would you..." I couldn't finish the sentence through my tears.

"Because you said the same thing to me. I changed after you proposed to me and told me not to give up on my happiness. You gave me the courage to fight for it. Through the days we spent together, I was able to learn what happiness is. It's all thanks to you that I realized I'd put distance between myself and others, and why I was able to finally take a step forward and make friends. That's why it's my turn now. If you wish to change, I will help you do so, just as you helped me."

Her smile was so warm, it could melt through anything. Her words soaked into me, melting the ice around my heart. It was only now as my frozen heart was beating life back into me that I understood. *Oh, I see. I'd given up. I gave up*

on becoming happy. I gave up on being happy with Ana. My heart, now revived, began swelling with love for Ana.

“I-I do have o-one more reason. I-It’s b-because I-I I-love you!” Ana said, her eyes bright but looking far in the distance out of embarrassment. She was red up to her ears. She’d fought past her embarrassment to tell me her honest feelings.

She’s such a wonderful person. She’s so adorable. She’s the most important person in the world to me. I truly love her with all my heart.

“I do too, Ana! I love you from the bottom of my heart!”

Before I knew it, I’d yelled this and was tightly embracing her, my face burning red. Then I pressed my lips against hers.

“I’m so sorry, Ana. I’ll never let you go again!”

“Yes, please allow me to be by your side until death do us part.”

We exchanged these words after our kiss, and I couldn’t help but feel even more love for her.

I want to live my life with the person I love. Not just this life, but the next life, and the one after that. Our lips touched one another’s once more.

Chapter 9: Very Important but Unremarkable Days

Ginorious

“I’m so sorry for all the pain I’ve caused you,” I said, down on one knee with my hand over my heart. It was the highest form of apology for nobles.

“Please stand. You don’t need to apologize. I know that everything you did, you did for my sake.”

The smile she showed me was so pure, like a clear spring day. I could tell that, even after everything I’d done to her, she had completely forgiven me. *She’s so kind. Her heart is as deep as the ocean. She’s really the ultimate woman, one that’s absolutely too good for me.*

“Pardon me, Sir Ginorious. Since milady’s too kind to say anything, allow me to speak on her behalf. I will not let this go unsaid today of all days! Do you know just how much she was hurt because of your idiotic actions?!” Bridgette said, moving from her position behind Ana.

Her voice shook with anger. Though nobles didn’t have the custom of sitting on one’s knees, I’d come to learn that it was a tradition unique to the Sevensworths. Historically, it was the stance one would take when being lectured. Because of that, I sat on both knees as Bridgette laid into me with no reservations. Though Ana tried, even she couldn’t stop her.

After Bridgette’s lengthy dressing-down ended, I agreed to return to the royal capital with Ana. Now that everything was settled, since I’d yet to take a bath today, I decided to go do so at the house I worked at in the red-light district.

Though the first floor was a normal bar, the girls there would flirt with men, and if the customer wanted to take things further, they could go up to the second floor. There were many rooms up there, and each one came with a bath. Employees were free to use the baths as long as they cleaned the tubs and refilled the hot water afterward. The house wasn’t too busy around this

time, so if I went now, there wouldn't be anyone around. The baths were fairly fancy because the establishment itself was on the higher end, and as someone who loved baths, this was an absolutely great find for me. When Ana asked where I would be taking a bath, I told her.

"I-I'll go with you as well!" she stammered.

"Huh?!"

"Hm? Oh! I-I don't mean that I w-w-wish to take a b-bath t-together! I-I simply meant I will accompany you to the establishment!" Ana quickly waved her hands, her face bright red.

That took me by surprise... I think my heart stopped for a few seconds. Though I could see that Ana was red to her ears, I suspected that I might be equally as red.

"It's okay, I'll go by myself."

Even at this hour, there'd likely be drunks who'd get handsy with a girl in the bar. I couldn't in good conscience leave Ana there by herself while I took a bath.

"Oh, I see..."

"Ana?" I asked with concern, seeing her face go pale.

"Are you an absolute imbecile?! You're leaving milady alone while going to a brothel by yourself?!" Bridgette exclaimed, shooting me a death glare while holding Ana by the shoulders to comfort her.

I think there's a misunderstanding here. I've never gone to a brothel as a customer. I've literally only gone to those rooms to bathe. I explained that to them and was in turn asked by Ana if I had any feelings at all for any of the girls who worked there. She seemed relieved when I told her I had absolutely none.

I could tell she was concerned that I'd had relations with them, so I explained that not only was I uninterested in any of them, but that none of them had any interest in me whatsoever. *Hm? That's odd. I thought this would put her at ease, but now she seems even more worried.*

"I-I think I'll go with you after all. It's too dangerous," she said, tears in her eyes.

While it was true that it was a dangerous place to go for women, I worked as a guard there, so I wasn't in danger at all. But seeing Ana this concerned made me rethink my plan. *It's unfortunate, but I'll give up on my bath.*

Before long, it started to get late and the streets were becoming more lively. Ana and Bridgette needed a place to stay, but my place wasn't big enough. It was a small room with a single bed of straw. But when I asked about this, they said that they had a reservation at the most expensive hotel in the city.

They invited me to join them there, but I declined. Most likely, staying in even one of their cheapest rooms was more than an entire month's salary for me. From my experiences in my past life, I was very used to the commoner lifestyle, and I had become accustomed to living in the slums. My mentality regarding money was also in line with what the people here felt. I had a huge aversion to staying somewhere that was worth a month's pay.

However, Ana told me that it was too dangerous for me to stay here, so she absolutely didn't want me to. Though I explained that as a guard, I could deal with thieves or any other problem that came my way, she said that it was precisely because of the establishment I worked for that it was dangerous. *Does she think that one of the drunk customers might 'pay me a visit'?* But I couldn't say no to her when she looked this uneasy, so in the end, I agreed to stay at the same lodging as her and Bridgette.

Ultimately, it was decided that the Sevensworths' covert operatives would inform both the restaurant and the entertainment house of my resignation. There was nothing wrong with doing business in and of itself—many nobles in this country ran companies of their own, just as I'd done—but there was a huge problem with nobles working for commoners, so the covert operatives were tasked with hiding this fact.

In a society that revolved around status, everyone was forced to act in ways appropriate to their station. Just as it was wrong for commoners to give orders to nobles, it was wrong for nobles to follow the orders of commoners. In the event that this taboo was broken, commoners were punished for their insolence while nobles would be subject to a storm of criticism.

If a noble wanted to work as a regular employee, it had to be for a noble of the same or higher status as them. That's why it was extremely rare for nobles to work in the city. Commoners and nobles were the same in this regard—shackled by their status.

It was absolutely imperative that my work at a brothel was kept secret. Besides my name being tarnished from working for commoners, there would also be rumors about how I'd lived a life of debauchery.

Apparently the operatives' strategy was to pretend they'd come to retrieve the son of a trading company's owner, and they'd come prepared to back up this story with burly operatives ready to pose as a CEO and his guards. They'd even had Ana bring the crest of a real merchant company.

I recognized this crest from when I'd learned that the Sevensworths had a company they used to manufacture things in secret.

I was impressed by the work of the operatives and tried to praise them, but I was met with none too enthusiastic faces. Apparently, they weren't very happy about how every mission they'd taken regarding me had ended in failure. The operatives who'd been tracking me in the royal capital even bitterly told me about how I'd evaded them.

Oh, right. After I left House Valvalier, I could tell I was being followed, so I used stealth magic. It was the same kind of magic that mountain-goers in my past life would use to bird-watch.

In the end, the operatives forbade me from stepping foot anywhere near the places I'd worked, so I wasn't able to even say goodbye. It seemed that as an apology for immediately taking back the family's 'runaway son,' they'd offer to have their guards stand in for me temporarily. This was probably for the best because if I was in front of them and they asked me to my face if I was who the covert operatives claimed, I wasn't confident that I'd be able to keep up the lie. Plus, my leaving without saying a thing gave the cover-up more weight. To be fair, I doubted there was anyone so attached to me that they'd try to cast doubt on the story if I did say goodbye in person, but apparently Ana and the covert operatives disagreed. Though leaving without saying anything was rude, I didn't have much of a choice with the honor of my noble family on the line.

Immediately after arriving at our lodgings, I suggested that Ana rest. She'd traveled straight here, sleeping in the carriage, so she was considerably tired. Even so, I wanted to talk to her, even if it was just for a little bit. Since there was a very small amount of time while they were getting the room ready, I borrowed the hotel's parlor to speak with her alone.

Though there should've been so much to say, I couldn't get a word out from how emotional I felt. It seemed that Ana felt the same, so in the end, our conversation became more one of silence than of words. Even so, I was so happy that I wanted to cry. We didn't need words. As long as we were together, that was all we needed.

When a servant came to tell Ana that the room was ready, we began to leave, but as we did, Ana handed me a book.

"If you'd like, you can read this. I read it during the journey here."

I wasn't allowed to go outside today. The operatives were in the middle of discreetly erasing all traces of me, and I'd only make their work harder if I went out. So with Ana asleep, I wouldn't have much to do. Anticipating this, she'd offered me a book in order to stave off my boredom. *She hasn't changed one bit. She's still the same kind and considerate girl I remember.*

Ana was fortunate that she didn't get motion sickness when reading in carriages. She loved books and had been reading them during rides since she was young, so she'd trained herself to be okay. I was really thankful for her lending me a book. I was usually working around this time of night, so I wasn't really tired yet. I returned to my room with the book, which turned out to be about the life of Davy Tomas. We'd learned about him in our noble history class, and how his restaurants had flourished to the point where he was awarded baronet status. *Ana really reads all kinds of books.*

Davy had been an orphan, but fortunately, he was adopted by a commoner couple when he was six years old. Two years later, however, his adoptive parents were in a carriage accident and passed away. Usually, he'd have been sent to an orphanage, but his adoptive grandmother took him in. Davy worked as hard as he could to thank her, and eventually he successfully expanded his

restaurant business and earned his status as a baronet.

When his adoptive grandmother was about to pass away, Davy thanked her with teary eyes, but she simply smiled and said that she was the one who'd been saved. When times were rough from her daughter's passing, it was only because Davy had been there that she found the strength to keep going. They'd saved each other. That's what it meant to help someone else. Making someone else happy meant making yourself happy. That was the message that this book conveyed.

I couldn't stop my tears. I was weak to these kinds of family stories. I couldn't help but think about my family from my past life, who I could never see again. As I was steeped in emotion from the book, I began remembering things I needed to do. *Now that I think about it, how's Lady Kate doing?* Though I'd done my best to make sure she wouldn't be on the receiving end of the Sevensworths' wrath, it hadn't been perfect. *I'll have to ask Ana tomorrow when we're alone.*

Anastasia

I was so glad to be engaged to Sir Gino once more. I'd been so uneasy during the carriage ride here that I could barely sleep, so I was considerably exhausted, but I was so elated and in high spirits that I could simply begin dancing.

"M-Milady?!" Bridgette exclaimed with surprise. *Oh dear, I really did start dancing.* "Earlier today, you proposed to him as a man would a lady, didn't you? Though I couldn't hear you from where I stood, it was clearly a proposal. It truly took me by surprise." Bridgette smiled widely as she helped me get ready for bed.

"Huh? Isn't that what you told me to do?"

Bridgette fell into thought. *Don't tell me she forgot.* "Oh, are you referring to what I said in the carriage? It's true that I told you to speak your true feelings to him; however, I meant you should tell him your love for him. I wasn't suggesting the crazy idea of proposing to him as a girl."

"Really?!"

I wish you told me that sooner. It seems that I had a very big misunderstanding. Oh how embarrassing...my face feels as if it's on fire.

“However, it all ended well, so that’s good enough, isn’t it? I was only watching from afar, so I don’t know exactly what you said, but it seemed that your proposal was what made him change his mind. Your only real misunderstanding was when you thought the two of you were not fated to marry.”

I became so embarrassed, I covered my face with my hands as Bridgette comforted me. “That’s...true.”

The result was all that mattered. I’d just say that it was a good thing I misunderstood Bridgette. My face was burning hot at this point.

“Precisely. A normal approach wouldn’t get through to him when he’s denser than a rock. He hasn’t even realized the girls at the establishment he worked at had feelings for him!”

As always, Bridgette was unreserved with her choice of words regarding Sir Gino, showing how close they were. She was right that it was best to be direct with him. I recalled the report where a girl had claimed she’d been assaulted and needed a man to stay by her side, and then another where a girl clung to him in tears, claiming that her hand had suddenly gone numb due to a sickness so she needed someone to cook for her. Sir Gino had neither realized they’d been lying, nor that they had feelings for him.

When Sir Gino said he’d be going back to that establishment, I couldn’t hold myself back any longer, knowing he had no clue how interested in him they were. It was like releasing an innocent kitten into a den of crazed beasts. Before I knew it, I’d told him that I’d go with him. I truly regretted that outburst. *He must think I’m a very overbearing girl. If I keep acting like that, Sir Gino will come to hate me.*

Even so, I felt justified in my worry. It wasn’t my fault that he caught me off guard by suddenly stating he was going to take a bath at that place. The scene played once again in my mind and I internally wailed, the embarrassment overwhelming me. *No, please let me forget! Wipe it from my memory!*

“M-Milady?!” Bridgette exclaimed as I began furiously rolling around on the

bed.

Today, Sir Gino and I would return to the royal capital. On the way here, we'd driven straight through with almost no breaks thanks to being able to switch out our horses periodically. I planned to do the same on the way back, returning the horses we'd borrowed and taking back the horses we'd left in their care along the way.

However, this time there was no need to rush, so we decided to take our time. After all, Sir Gino and I were together again after all this time. I wanted nothing more than to take a leisurely trip with him. *Besides, I have a very large goal today. I'm going to hold hands with him!*

I'd been too comfortable with our previous situation, thinking that as long as we were engaged, we'd stay together. His sister was one example of an engagement ending, and I knew that there were many others as well. However, now that I'd experienced it firsthand, I understood what it was like.

Sir Gino was also extremely popular with the girls. Even in the slums, he'd been so popular that I couldn't stop fretting. I needed to do my best to capture his heart, and to do that, I needed to be more physical with him. Today, I'd be with him all day in this carriage, so I wanted to hold his hand. *It will be a very large task for me, but I'm going to do my best!*

The seating arrangement in the carriage was extremely important in order to achieve this goal. If I sat in my usual position across from him, he'd be too far away for me to reach. I needed to sit right next to him if I wanted my plan to work.

"Thank you very much," I said as Sir Gino escorted me toward the carriage.

Usually I'd enter before him, but I couldn't do that this time, otherwise he'd end up taking the seat across from me. I needed him to sit first.

"Please go ahead," I said.

"Hm? Okay. Thank you," he said, taking his seat.

I eyed the seat next to him, mentally telling myself that it was mine. I was nervous from trying to do something I wasn't used to, but I was going to do my

best! *I will overcome my nerves!*

“Hn!”

Oh...what a failure. Though I’d steeled my resolve and sat down next to him, I’d let out a strange sound in my effort. There wasn’t a lady in this world that made a noise of self encouragement when taking a seat. Sir Gino was looking out the window, most likely pretending not to have noticed. However, I could tell his shoulders were shaking from trying to conceal his laughter. *Oh, how embarrassing...*

Despite the amount of time that’d passed since we’d departed, I’d still been unable to hold his hand. *It’s right there. If I merely reach out a little more, I can take it, but I don’t have the courage to do so.* If there were a reason to hold his hand, like if he were escorting me, I could do it easily. However, taking his hand without any reason was a different story.

“Ana, look. There’s a bear.”

I looked out the window that Sir Gino pointed out of and saw a large bear, about three metres tall. It was relaxing, sunbathing by the riverside. It was easy to see from the bridge we were on.

“Oh my! Amazing! I’ve never seen a real bear before! It’s so big! I can’t believe it!”

Sir Gino smiled widely, not at the bear but at me jumping to my feet and leaning toward the window.

“Heh heh, you’re so cute.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. *It’s... It’s what I’ve been longing to hear. I’ve dreamed of him calling me cute again for so long.* After the curse was lifted, my body and face had changed to the point where I looked completely different from the last time he saw me. But even so, he was still the same person. He called me cute in the same low voice that he always did. *Oh no. I’m so happy, I can’t stop the tears.*

“Ana? Are you okay?”

“I’m just so, so happy. You still call me cute despite my appearance changing.” I told Sir Gino this while smiling, tears streaming down my face.

“It doesn’t matter what you look like, Ana. *You* are cute,” he said with an incredibly gentle gaze.

His words echoed in my heart, making even more tears come out. I softly placed my hand on his and held it. Though I’d been unable to before, I could do it now. He’d given me the courage to do so. *There really is no one else for me except him. I will never let go of him again.* These thoughts flooded my head as I firmly gripped his hand.

Ginorious

On our way to the royal capital, Ana suddenly began crying. I reassured her in a panic, and to my surprise, she held my hand. I couldn’t believe it! Just looking at her made even my ears hot. It was obvious to me that she was fighting against her embarrassment quite hard to hold my hand as she was.

“Ana, you’re so cute!”

“Stop right there, Sir Ginorious!”

I couldn’t hold myself back anymore and went to hug Ana, but before I could, a spear was thrust in my face as swiftly as lightning. The one who held it was Bridgette, who was sitting across from us.

Usually when riding in a carriage, Ana would be sitting across from me with Bridgette, but for some reason, she had decided to sit next to me. This left Bridgette sitting by herself on the other side, giving her space to keep a short spear prepared for defense.

During our reunion, I’d ended up kissing Ana, and after that, it seemed that Bridgette had entered her maximum level of wariness. As she held the spear, she gave me the look of a warrior ready to battle to the death.

“Sorry. Ana’s just too cute, it made me forget all reason.”

I sat back in my seat while Bridgette shot me a look that could kill, making me sweat uncomfortably. But even after that, there were so many times that Ana

showed me how incredibly cute she was, and like clockwork, I lost my restraint. Every time I did, the point of the spear—which was so sharp, merely thinking about it gave me goose bumps—found itself thrust at my face with a swift jab.

Ana had come all the way to find me, not stopping for anything and hardly sleeping. Yesterday she'd been too excited to sleep well, so now the fatigue was catching up to her, and she began to nod off in the carriage. Soon she was sleeping while holding my hand and resting her head on my shoulder. Seeing this, Bridgette rubbed her red eyes many times with her handkerchief. Ana was an incredibly important person to Bridgette as well.

As per Ana's request, we took our time returning to the royal capital, so we checked into a high-class hotel despite it only being early afternoon. We rested for a bit and then we went into the city for a leisurely stroll.

"Oh my!"

Ana reacted with admiration at one of the outdoor vendors selling wood-carved accessories. Specifically, she was looking at a bracelet. A cartoonish bear was carved into a piece of littleleaf boxwood, and a leather strap was tied through it. Not only was it a cheap item, but it didn't exactly go with fancy dresses, so it wasn't the kind of thing noble girls would normally wear. But even so, Ana liked these kinds of bears a lot.

"I'll take this," I said to the stall owner.

I was buying it for Ana and her love of bears. This was something geared toward commoners, and it wasn't even from a store but an outdoor stall. I was definitely able to afford it with what I had in my wallet.

When we returned to the hotel, we went to the bar and had a drink. There was no legal drinking age in this country, but alcohol was only served at parties from high school onward, and even then, it had very low alcohol content. It was customary for this country's nobles to only be able to drink stronger alcohol after graduating and becoming adults.

As a merchant, I'd often worked with adults, so unlike most greater nobles, I'd already experienced stronger alcohol. I'd even had a drink in front of Ana before. However, this was the first time Ana and I were having a proper drink

together. Our first chance would've been the graduation party, but due to the fiasco I'd caused, we'd never gotten to do it.

We could see the river from the most lavish private room in the bar on the top floor of the hotel. At one point, the river forked in two, forming a long and narrow strip of land in the middle before joining back into one stream. The quiet water surface reflected the setting sun, and there were white waterfowl resting on the shallow sandbank. I sat next to Ana on the sofa and gazed at the scenery as we drank wine.

Since we were essentially alone, this was a situation where I could ask about Lady Kate.

"Yes, she is well. After all, she's an important person who revealed the truth behind everything to our family. Currently, we have many of our covert agents around her to ensure her safety."

I was relieved to know she was safe. There'd been the danger of her being tortured by the Sevensworths in order to get the truth. I'd told her to come clean if that situation ever came and to prioritize her own life, and it seemed that'd been exactly what she'd done.

"It seems that she wants you to return to the company..." Ana said.

Ana and Lady Kate had been keeping in contact, and this was apparently the message she'd wanted Ana to pass on to me. Lady Kate said she would return sixty percent of the company to me, so she wanted me to return as the president. Apparently, she was happy with just keeping forty percent and becoming the vice president. The reason behind this was that the vice president was in charge of managing various jobs for the business, but she wanted to leave the development of products as well as the determination of business strategies to me.

Lady Kate was aware that I'd built my company from the ground up, and had probably come to the conclusion that it was more profitable to have me at the helm than to run things by herself. It was just like her to choose profits over status.

Ana suddenly gulped down her entire glass of wine. *Are you going to be okay? That's your second glass.* Perhaps I was imagining it, but she seemed to be

drinking faster ever since we got on the topic of Lady Kate.

“What will you do, Sir Gino?”

What would be optimal here? If I'm getting reengaged to Ana, then I'll have to begin helping out as heir to the Sevensworths. I won't have any time to really focus on my business. But if I have someone to manage the business and the odd jobs that come with it, then I could potentially do both. Even now, my company was one of the biggest in the country. Thinking about it from the Sevensworths' perspective, it'd be a huge loss to lose control of it. As long as I was even the slightest bit involved, I could grow the company even more. If I could balance running a territory and running my company, then that'd be best.

I laid out my optimistic thinking to Ana, but for some reason, she seemed displeased. Even stranger was that, seemingly out of nowhere, she brought up Lady Kate's bountiful chest.

“You must enjoy larger breasts like Lady Kate's, don't you?” she asked, puffing up her cheeks and looking away in a huff.

It was true that Lady Kate was considerably large in the bust area; however, Ana was above average too, and had curves more beautiful than anyone's. I really didn't think there was anything for her to worry about. I tried to return our discussion back to my company, but Ana brought it back to Lady Kate's chest.

“Not only does she have large breasts, but she also has an adorable face, a bright personality, and a talent for keeping up entertaining topics... I think she's a wonderful individual.”

Ana once again looked away in a huff. At this point, I had no choice but to change the topic completely. After talking for a little longer, it was clear that she was starting to slur her words. This was more than likely an effect of how quickly she'd been downing her drinks while we talked. Now, for some reason, she seemed to be in a very good mood.

“Snip!” Ana said, using her index and middle finger like scissors to catch my hand.

“Ana! How are you so cute?!”

“Stop right there, Sir Ginorious!”

Before I knew it, I’d moved to try and embrace Ana. Though we had the room to ourselves, Bridgette had been positioned in the back against the wall. As if she’d teleported, she appeared in front of us. Ana was acting so cute, I thought my heart was going to stop. I couldn’t control myself at all.

“You’re seriously trying to embrace an inebriated girl?! Are you an ill-mannered beast, Sir Ginorious?!”

I had no words in response. She was right. This was a huge taboo in regard to noble manners.

“Come with me, milady. Let’s leave this beast by himself and retreat to your room where you can rest.”

Bridgette didn’t even allow me to escort Ana back to her room and quickly whisked her away as she happily tottered on her feet.



Partway through our return to the royal capital, the Valvaliers sent a lone rider to deliver my clothes and effects as soon as possible. My adoptive father also included a letter saying that when we arrived, I should go straight to the Sevensworths and explain things in my own words. After that, I could do the same for them.

That was why when we returned to the royal capital, I did just that. Now, I was at the Sevensworths’ estate in the sixty-first drawing room, the Peacock. Inside, the duke and his wife were already waiting, but Ana wasn’t present. She was most likely resting since she’d been on a long journey, which wasn’t something she was accustomed to.

“It’s been some time, Gino.”

I felt so touched by the fact that my mother-in-law had called me by my nickname instead of my full name. Ana and I were still technically not reengaged yet, so it would’ve been proper for her to call me by my full name, but she was treating me as if I were still a part of the family. In respect for this gesture, I chose to address her as I used to as well.

“I deeply apologize for the trouble I caused,” I said, getting down onto one knee, lowering my head, and placing my hand over my heart in the ultimate show of apology.

“Looks like you’ve finally returned. Hmph, you absolute fool,” the duke said, frowning.

“Excuse me, what was that, dear? I believe there’s something else that should’ve come out of your mouth,” she said with a frightening smile. “How about let’s start with you taking a seat on the sofa and enjoying tea with us, Gino?”

At her behest, I got up and sat on the couch. It’d been a while since I experienced this. Whenever family members would gather, it was always with her management. I couldn’t help but feel strangely happy.

The duke cleared his throat before speaking. “Well... Uh... I’m sorry.”

“Why are you, the duke, apologizing to me?” I asked, confused.

“Hm? Has Ana not explained anything to you?” my mother-in-law asked.

“No. I haven’t heard anything in great detail. I’m interested to know the reasoning behind why the Sevensworths seek my reengagement and why I’m no longer disinherited by the Valvaliers, but it had been so long since Ana and I last saw each other. We already had a lot to talk about.”

That being said, whenever I brought up Lady Kate, Ana’s mood would visibly worsen, so I tried to avoid any topics where she would inevitably come up. I mentioned this to them as well.

“Oh dear, what a troublesome daughter,” my mother-in-law giggled. “In that case, allow me to explain. First, it is my understanding that this man right here told you that in the event that Ana’s curse was removed, she could become queen. Because of that, you broke off your engagement so she could marry either the first prince or crown prince. Is this correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I’d like you to forget that he said any of that. House Sevensworth would still like you to marry Ana even with her curse lifted.”

“I...can’t imagine any benefit that would bring your family.”

Regardless of which prince they chose, they’d become the next king of the country. Ana was their only daughter, so as queen, her eldest son would become the next king, and her second son would become the heir to the Sevensworths. If the head of the Sevensworths was the younger brother of the king, it would bring immense prosperity to their household. My mother-in-law was a noble through and through, so I couldn’t imagine she’d ignore the practical aspect of all of this, but she began giggling.

“You seem to not understand your worth whatsoever. What about the rejuvenation lotion?”

“What about it?”

“Applying it can make one look ten or more years younger, but the effects will reverse without regular use. Despite it having been on the market for quite some time now, no one has been able to replicate it. The lotion has a great deal of value, to the point where the royal family was thinking about having the princess marry you.”

“Huh?! The princess?!”

I could feel an uncomfortable sweat running down my back. It was one thing for the Sevensworths, who had power rivaling that of even the royal family, to turn down a marriage proposal, but for an average marquess like House Valvalier, it was hard to think that they could really say no in this situation.

“Don’t worry. They aren’t thinking that anymore thanks to Kate. After the royal family learned you threw away your status as a noble for Ana’s sake, my mother and brother realized that forcing you to marry into their family wouldn’t be met with much joy on your end. After all, the idea would be to have you marry into the family to make allies, so if they’d be making enemies instead, it’d be pointless. If you were going to become a poison to their family, then they’d determine it wouldn’t be wise to proceed with their plan.”

I sighed with relief, hearing her explanation. “So, with that said, we’ve decided it’s more strategically beneficial to have you become heir to our house than for Ana to be a part of the royal family. Of course, the fact that Ana wishes to be married to you is also a large factor. Even if it were slightly more

beneficial to have her marry one of the princes, her happiness would be enough to still choose you.”

I’d made the lotion as a way to gather funds to begin making golems, but never in my wildest dreams did I expect it to have this kind of effect now. When making the lotion, I’d imbued it with the same magic used for those that’d been approved for commercial sale in my previous life. The reason for this was purely to ensure user safety, but it also came with a magic countermeasure to having its composition being analyzed. Not even mages from my past life had been able to decode the magic; only certain specialists could.

Women back then loved the phrase “perfectly tailored to your skin.” As a result, for a certain period of time, it was popular for girls to analyze the magic and components of the lotions on the market to customize them to their skin. A lot of companies popped up that sold DIY kits so even amateurs could easily make their own.

This all came to a stop when the magic pharmaceutical council came in and complained that they’d lose business and would have to cut jobs if consumers were able to imbue lotions on their own. So, these companies put pressure on politicians and made it law that every lotion product sold came with antianalysis magic, effectively stopping the DIY trend. But thanks to that law that was only made to line their pockets, I was able to become engaged to Ana again. You really never knew how life was going to play out.

“Also, I have a report from the servants regarding Ana’s emotional state.”

“Is there something wrong?”

“She’s not stable. It seems that the scar left from you calling off the engagement hasn’t healed. I’m going to have her go to a counselor, so I think after a while, she’ll be able to recover. With that said, could I ask that you wait a little before your reengagement?”

For most noblewomen, being engaged meant no turning back. Lesser nobles occasionally experienced their fiancés changing due to shifts in the political atmosphere, though the higher their fiancé’s status, the less chance of that there was. For greater nobles, though, their engagements were pretty much set in stone. Having her engagement broken off must have been a very big shock to

Ana.

Though I'd been prepared for Ana to be hurt, I never thought that it would affect her mentally like this. Coming face-to-face with the reality of the pain I'd caused her made me realize that I hadn't truly been prepared at all. My chest was gripped with guilt. But at the same time, I felt a strange sort of happiness, because as the one who hurt Ana, I could also help heal her.

When I was living in the slums, I'd constantly thought about Ana's broken heart being healed by a new fiancé. I'd even imagined how her eyes would fill with trust for him. When I did, my body felt like it was burning from jealousy. It was so painful that I'd often slam my head or fist against the wall. Over time, this emotion running rampant in my heart became something even more than jealousy—it was a deep, deep hatred. I could palpably feel that murky emotion warping me to the point where I could easily imagine myself one day becoming someone who could choose murder.

Being happy about healing the very same girl I hurt wasn't normal. Perhaps the hatred I felt had warped me to the point where I wasn't in a normal state of mind anymore. But even so, it didn't change the fact that I was happy. I was so overjoyed and didn't want to let go of this privilege no matter what.

"I don't mind at all. Nothing would make me happier than helping Ana heal."

"I'm glad to hear that. Regarding the specifics of her condition, it seems that whenever she catches a glimpse of a girl around you, she becomes very depressed. Part of the problem is Bridgette stoking her fears, but even taking that into account, she's acting strange."

"Oh, in that case, the answer is simple. I'll pamper her and shower her with so much love that even if she catches a glimpse of a girl near me, she won't mind."

"You don't have to go that far! Things will work out through the counseling!" the duke barked, his face going red.

I'd seen the symptoms of her emotional condition back in the slums. Ana had stopped me in tears from using the bath at my workplace. Also, when I mentioned I would return to my company, it felt like she kept intentionally bringing up Lady Kate. Those were probably demonstrations of the scar in Ana's heart. I felt very bad about not realizing how she felt. *Well, that decides things. I*

won't go back to my company. I don't want to put any extra burden on Ana. I'll do everything she wants me to do.

“Oh, no, you should go back to your company. It'll be a great profit to our family if you have the majority control of your business and can grow it even bigger with just a little bit of work.”

“But I think Ana isn't comfortable with me being near Lady Kate.”

“That shouldn't be your concern. Ever since you came to the royal capital, you've been able to grow your company into one of the few great businesses in this country. Even if it's for Ana's sake, you can't turn down this kind of profit. It's too significant. Since you're going to be the heir to this house, you can't only think of what would make Ana happy. You must do everything you can for the sake of the house and all the people who work for us. You have to think about them too. As the person who stands at the top of the household, you must always consider all the people beneath you. Ana will be okay. That's what the counseling's for.”

I couldn't disagree with her at all. Everything she'd said had been perfectly logical.

After that, my days became nothing but enjoyable. When I arrived at the Sevensworths' estate, I'd be greeted by Ana and we'd talk. Then whenever I had time, we'd have tea together. This was the very same, normal life I'd taken for granted prior to ending our engagement. But having lost these seemingly mundane days once, I realized just how incredibly valuable each and every last second with her was. I loved Ana so much.



After accepting Lady Kate's proposition, I was reinstated as the president of my company. Now, I was popping into the office about twice a week.

“Do you know where the boss lady is?” asked one of my employees, a man in his fifties, poking his head into my office through the half-open door.

“Shouldn't she be out on business?”

The “boss lady” he referred to was Lady Kate. Despite being much younger

than most of the employees, they all called her that. It was normal in this world, like it had been in my past life, for guys to hate being ordered around by girls younger than them. However, this country had a societal hierarchy, meaning that while older commoner men wouldn't want to follow the orders of a young commoner girl, if the girl was a noble, they'd follow her orders even if she was five years old. It was only a problem if the girl was both younger and had the same commoner status as them.

The reason the people at the company accepted Lady Kate so easily was because I, a noble, had appointed her as in charge of everything. Commoners didn't try to get into noble affairs. But even after I became president again, they weren't about to raise a fuss against the noble who'd made that decision. One of the reasons Lady Kate had been able to do her job as president so well was because the employees had accepted the order that made her president in the first place.

"Shouldn't Lady Kate have returned by now?" Ana asked from the sofa.

I'd apologized to Ana about retaking the position of president. When I said I was coming to the company today, Ana had stammered that she'd accompany me. I could still remember the pleading look in her eyes. It was all due to the scar that I'd left in her heart when I broke our engagement. As the one who'd inflicted that scar, I knew I had to take care and not hurt her further.

At the same time, all reasoning had flown out the window at her incredible cuteness when she asked to accompany me. I had no way of fighting it, and I'd once again tried to hug her and only came back to my senses when Bridgette stopped me. But either way, that was how I ended up taking Ana with me to the company.

I'd come to the company today to confirm a stock of goods that'd come in. Ana wanted to come with me, so we both went to the warehouse. As we made our way there, I could hear laughter from the employee break room. It seemed very lively in there. I was a little curious, so I poked my head in.

"Okay then, let's start with the regular branch manager meeting. Let's go in order," Lady Kate was saying, overly exaggerating her movements.

It was obvious that she was mimicking me. The employees in the room

laughed, and Ana, who was looking inside as well, tried to hold back her giggles. The reason I'd gotten curious was because I'd heard the voice of Kate, who was supposedly not back yet.

“Interesting. Who exactly are you impersonating?”



“Urk! Sir Gino!” Kate spun around at hearing my voice. “O-Oh, th-there’s a perfectly good explanation for this... Heh heh heh...” she laughed nervously.

She’s definitely trying to play this off. “Do tell me what a person who’s supposed to be out on business is doing here in the break room?”

“Agh! Owowowow!”

Lady Kate squirmed as I rubbed my knuckles against her temples. I was doing it lightly enough that it wouldn’t hurt, but she played up her reaction dramatically. The employees began cracking up, seeing the predicament Lady Kate had found herself in.

This was another reason she’d succeeded at running the company. She was very good at capturing the hearts of others and had quickly become friends with all the employees. I gave Lady Kate a stern warning to return to work and then went to confirm the goods that had come in. After that, Ana and I returned to my office and took a quick break. She had been helping me with my work as well. We drank tea while sitting on the sofa in my office. As we did, Ana had a serious look on her face, and then not too much later, she dropped her teaspoon onto the ground. My eyes widened with surprise.

“Sir Gino, I’ve dropped my spoon,” she said.

“Oh, that’s okay. Don’t worry about it. I’ll clean it up right now. Did your dress get dirty at all?”

“No...”

For some reason, Ana looked down, disappointed.

“Ow!” I winced in pain as Bridgette tugged on my ear.

“What are you doing? Why aren’t you rubbing your knuckles into the side of her head? Don’t you feel bad for her?” she whispered into my ear.

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

She clicked her tongue in annoyance. “You absolute blockhead.”

“What was that?”

“Never mind. Here’s what *is* important. Milady is jealous after witnessing how

you treated Lady Kate, so she made a mistake on purpose so you would reprimand her. Please hurry up and do so!”

Huh? Jealousy? Ana’s jealous? “Ana! How are you so cute?!”

“Please cut it out! Who told you to do something so embarrassing?!”
Bridgette snapped at me.

When I came to my senses again, I was hugging Ana, and Bridgette was trying to rip me off of her. It was my fault that Ana had gotten hurt and become depressed. I needed to reflect on my actions and apologize, but it was incredibly surprising that she was jealous. All of that plus the love I felt for her washed over me, overpowering my mind. The thought of apologizing wasn’t even in my head anymore. All I could think about was hugging her.

That night in bed, I thought about how Bridgette, who knew Ana very well, told me that Ana was jealous, and how I’d been so happy to hear that. In that moment, I hadn’t given it a second thought, but now that time had passed, I couldn’t help but think deeper about it.

Was Ana actually jealous? Was there really a girl out there who got jealous over me? Up until now, I thought that Ana was scared of girls being around me because she was worried about her own future. I’d thought I’d been perfectly logical in my thinking, but perhaps I’d been wrong. I was starting to think that maybe the reason she’d been so against me taking a bath at the entertainment house was the same as why she disliked me being too close to Lady Kate. Maybe it all stemmed from her jealousy. *Is Ana really that attached to me?* Up until now, that possibility had been drowned out by the sobering reality of that probably not being the case at all. Bruce had told me that I had abnormally low self-esteem. Ana had essentially said the same thing as well. It was possible that the reason I was unable to believe that Ana was jealous over me was due to my warped perception of things.

But even if I did identify that I had a warped sense of things, it wasn’t as easy to fix as snapping my fingers. If the problem really lay with me, then it hadn’t simply occurred over a short period of twenty or thirty years. It was something that developed over a much longer period of time and had taken root deep

inside of me.

If you live most of your life doing bad deeds, then suddenly reform and become a good person, nobody would immediately believe the change of heart. Even if they see you doing good deeds, they'll doubt the intentions behind your actions. I was basically in the same boat. Just like public opinion of a formerly hardened criminal couldn't change overnight, my own self-evaluation wouldn't change that quickly. No matter how I might want to, I couldn't easily change something that'd been built up so solidly over this long period of time.

Regardless, I had to change the way I interacted with Lady Kate. I finally figured out the reason I acted so casually with her. Of course, her friendliness was one reason, but there was another. When I saw her, I remembered my little sister from my past life. She was very sociable, eccentric, and carefree. They were really alike.

But even so, I absolutely couldn't let Ana feel uneasy. I'd have to stop seeing my little sister in Lady Kate. I was never going to see my little sister again, so she was someone I needed to forget about. I needed to make myself understand that.



Ana looked like a holy woman as she knelt, fingers intertwined in front of her chest, offering a prayer. We were currently in the tenth drawing room, called the Star Sapphire, and Ana was kneeling on a prayer mat that'd been laid out for her. It had been a while since she'd begun.

Ana let out a long breath after she finished her meditation and turned to me, her smile as beautiful as a flower in bloom. Bridgette brought her tea as Ana moved to sit on the couch.

"Praying is practice for magic? I'm surprised," Ana said.

After I told her about my past life, I decided to teach Ana magic, starting with this practice.

"Well, to be exact, it's not prayer but meditation. The basic fundamentals for magic training begin with forming your chi and mana circuits. To do that, you need to meditate."

“It seems very similar to the stance I use in the martial art I practice, zhan zhuang,” Bridgette said, very curious.

I’d already filled Bridgette in on the fact that I knew magic and that I’d be teaching Ana how to use it. After all, it’d be hard to keep it a secret from someone who was constantly by Ana’s side. That being said, I didn’t tell her about my past life. Ana was the only one who knew about that.

“That’s because it focuses on forming one’s chi circuits in a similar way, but this is also shaping her mana circuits at the same time. Different stances develop different circuits, and the ones used for martial arts like zhan zhuang aren’t suited for mana. This concept applies to everything, not just martial arts. For example, when praying in this country, or other countries, I think they all use different meditation poses to form specific circuits.”

When magic had been modernized in my past life, they’d discovered the rationale behind meditation in religion and martial arts. In order to use magic, first you had to develop the necessary mana and chi circuits in your body. Meditation helped to do just that, so this was what I was having Ana work on.

Of course, just becoming able to form these circuits didn’t mean you’d immediately be able to use magic. Different magics required different circuits, so you had to learn the countless forms and then have the skill to precisely create each one, as well as be able to produce the respective primordial mana, which was a mix of mana and chi. It required extensive study and was impossible to achieve overnight. Unless she experienced a miraculous “awakening,” Ana wouldn’t be able to use magic for a very long time.

“So the reason devout believers can sometimes manifest miracles is because of this?” Bridgette asked, impressed.

She was earnestly asking questions because I’d decided to teach her magic as well, albeit with different training. Ana had yet to form her chi or mana circuits, so I was teaching her the most efficient method to do so from my past life. However, Bridgette had already formed her chi circuits, so it was a bit different for her. Usually, when someone who’d developed only one type of circuit tried to then develop the other, there was a chance they’d conflict and render the person incapable of using either altogether. That was why, instead of teaching

Bridgette how to make new mana circuits, I was trying to teach her how to use the ones she already possessed.

It seemed that my previous guess of Bridgette having chi circuits had been correct. It was normal for those with advanced skill in martial arts to have special circuits particular to the type of arts they trained in, so this much I expected. However, what I didn't anticipate was her having mana circuits as well, since those weren't something she could have developed through her training. So, somehow, Bridgette had mana circuits despite not specifically training for them. That could only mean she'd been born with them. Just as war beasts could use magic from birth, every now and then there were humans who were born already able to use magic.

Unfortunately, they were often hated and deemed abominations, though there were some people who craved their talents and called them "innate Magic Monarchs." Bridgette had been an orphan before she was adopted by Viscount Audran. The reason she'd led a life of misfortune might have had to do with the fact that she was born with mana circuits.

"That's right. There are a lot of people who unconsciously use magic, and then it's misinterpreted even by themselves as a miracle. But even then, there are many examples of things happening that can't be explained by just that. It's possible that God is real."

"Oh my. So there is a God." Ana smiled happily.

She certainly looks pleased to hear that. After magic training, next up was studying the old language. I used a golem to copy the information from the excavated crystal balls onto the animal parchment that this world used, and with this, I was teaching Ana both Japanese and magic.

Now that I was properly teaching her, I wanted her to learn healing magic. After she finished creating her circuits, mana and chi would start flowing in them, meaning they'd be rapidly circulating throughout her body.

Ana was a Magic Monarch fledgling with an incredible amount of mana. Eventually, when she had both chi and mana flowing through her, she would be immune to most outside magic. She'd have a high density of mana and a quick flow of it, which would make a very powerful barrier around her. In that case,

Ana would be invulnerable to not just magic attacks, but also normal healing magic as well. If she were ever injured or ill, nobody would be able to help her.

The only magic that would work on Magic Monarchs were spells of the same mana density as their own—in other words, the only one who would be able to use magic on Ana was herself. That’s why I wanted Ana to learn the fundamentals of healing magic. But even so, it seemed that Ana was interested in different kinds of magic. She was currently reading a book for recreational magic geared toward children in elementary school. I could see her very curiously reading about levitation techniques. I couldn’t fault her at all for being interested in that kind of stuff.

Well then, though it will certainly be difficult, I can try to make a super compressor capable of producing healing magic with the amount of magic density she will need. In its simplest form, mana was composed of particles that were smaller than even electrons, so it was theoretically possible to compress them with the right equipment.

“Sir Gino, am I pronouncing this right? ‘Recreational magic.’ You seem to pronounce it differently, though.”

Oh, right. The younger kids usually pronounce it like “recreation” while older folks pronounce it like “recreation.” Ana’s trying to copy my pronunciation. I’ll have to be more careful about how I say things from now on. I’ll need to pronounce words more like youngsters do. What Ana wanted to read most in Japanese were romance novels. I was sure that when she did start reading light novels and the like, there would be a lot of youngster lingo in there that she’d be curious about.

After studying pronunciation, it was time for my counseling session with Ana. Though she herself was undergoing counseling, she was also learning about it to help me with my struggles as well. Despite this being the age of civilization where they still used things like horse-drawn carriages, they did have counselors, perhaps because necessity bred innovation. Unlike the people of my past world, the people of this time were forced to contend with monsters. These life-and-death battles happened all the time, all across the globe, and knights and soldiers often developed PTSD from the encounters. Trauma

counseling was something this country took seriously, otherwise those fighters might never be able to stand on a battlefield again.

When I'd reunited with Ana in the slums, I'd been moved by my intense feelings to tell her about my reincarnation. However, it was hard to open up about every last detail. There were many things I could bring myself to talk about, but still plenty more that I couldn't just yet. I'd experienced so many intense emotions in that life, it was hard to put everything into words. Even so, I did my best to keep my emotions at bay as I tried, little by little, to share how I'd felt back then.

As I did, Ana listened to everything with a gentle smile and replied with warm words. Thanks to that, I could keep going. I could feel myself opening up because she accepted me.

By talking with Ana, the logic I'd designed to hide my vulnerabilities began to vanish, and I started to become more honest about my thoughts. Suddenly, there were so many things I could talk to her about, to the point where my own thinking began to change.

For example, I used to think that keeping people at a distance, drawing a clear line in the sand between us, was being an adult. I'd thought it was right to keep everything to myself and never let anyone in. But now, I knew I'd been wrong. All I'd been doing was keeping people at arm's length out of fear of being hurt. It hadn't been mature, but juvenile.

Our conversations helped me discard the justifications I'd built up in my head to mask my insecurities. I was slowly becoming able to be honest with myself. My thinking changed so much that I found myself talking to her about even more things that I never thought I would.

I'd even told her I had difficulties speaking with girls, but it seemed she'd already picked up on that particular problem. But despite knowing that, she didn't look down on me at all and stayed by my side. If anything, hearing me confess this seemed to make her happy, and she even said she'd help me to get better in that regard. She was such a warm person, she could melt hearts.

"Don't you feel turned off at all by being with someone who has both a childish and adult side to them?"

“Having both mature and immature sides is normal. Though both mother and father are very grown-up, they also act childish at times. Having both sides is what makes us human.”

No matter what ugly side of myself I showed her, she accepted me. Every time I felt her deep, gentle, kind side like this, all my gloomy emotions would disappear. Ana was the only one in this world who knew my miserable past, and was the only one who accepted my warped emotions that’d come from decades of humiliation. I’d always treasured her, but somehow I was now feeling that even more deeply.

Recently, I found myself thinking that Ana was my everything, and that as such, it was only natural that I give her my everything too.

“What do you think, Sir Gino? I’m sure I seem like a child to you, but are you dissatisfied with me? I’m doing my best to become more mature; however, it seems I’ve still a ways to go,” Ana said, her face filled with worry.

“No, you’re much more of an adult than me. You don’t need to push yourself at all.”

For so many years, all I’d done was live. Physical maturity was not the same as mental maturity. There were old people who would snap at you with the temperament of a middle schooler, and some middle-aged people who were as selfish as a kid in elementary school. I’d seen such instances too many times to count. That was why I didn’t care about her physical age. The most important thing was her mental maturity. In that sense, she was much more mature than I was.

“Besides, you don’t have to worry. I’ll always love you for who you are, no matter what.”

Ana went bright red and looked down. *Oh, she’s so cute. So incredibly cute.* Ana’s charm came not from her mental maturity but her heart. She was so strong, honest, and beautiful. She was a wonderful person that I couldn’t help falling head over heels for.



I received tickets to a play from my mother-in-law that was apparently part of

their plan to help me regain my honor. I went to go see it with Ana. Though she'd still only recently been doing things outside the mansion, she was much more experienced than me when it came to plays.

For the Sevensworths, operas, plays, and musicals typically weren't things they went to, but instead were performed for them in their own private theater. Ana could enjoy any of these without leaving the comfort of her home, and she frequently did.

"Sir Gino!"

As soon as I stepped into the entrance hall of the Sevensworth estate, Ana smiled brightly at me. Since we were going into town, she was wearing a simple dress in a style that the daughters of merchants would often wear. *She really looks cute in any outfit.*

Noblewomen didn't usually show their feet, so it was normal for their dresses to reach the floor. This wasn't the case for commoner women. Though their dresses didn't go so far as to show their calves, they were more focused on functionality and therefore had shorter skirts. I could see Ana's ankles with the dress she was wearing today.

"P-Please do not look so much at me."

Before I knew it, I'd been staring at Ana's ankles for longer than I'd like to admit. Ana, perhaps embarrassed, had turned red. *Oh, she's cute. So cute!* Although I was close to losing my mind over how much I loved her, Bridgette's incredibly intense glare brought me back to my senses. *That was rude of me. As a gentleman, I shouldn't be gazing at girl's ankles.*

"I'm sorry about that. You're just so charming, I couldn't tear my eyes away."

Perhaps realizing that I was referring to her ankles, she blushed even more furiously. It was said that bashfulness appeared when one showed a part of themselves that they usually hid. In some countries, it was normal for women not to cover their breasts, but despite essentially living life naked, they didn't feel embarrassed at all. The only ones who did were the women who lived in countries where it was normal to cover their chests. For Ana, having her ankles stared at must've been as embarrassing as if she were being viewed while wearing a bathing suit.

Wait. When was the last time I actually stopped and stared at a girl's body? In my past life, simply glancing at a girl was enough to make them look at me with disgust. If the wind blew their skirt up, revealing their underwear, they'd glare at me, verbally abuse me, and sometimes even call the police on me. After being treated like that for decades, before I knew it, I'd stopped looking at girls altogether, to the point that merely glancing at one filled me with self-loathing.

Despite that, I'd been looking at Ana's ankles without any self-loathing at all. This wasn't my first time seeing Ana in an outfit like this; I'd actually seen her ankles many times before, but this was the first time that I actually stared at them.

To me, girls might as well have been aliens. They were like characters on a screen, on the other side of a boundary I could never cross. Ana was the only one in that screen who'd stepped over that boundary and came right to my side. I realized how real Ana felt to me, and how I was noticing her presence even more recently.

My guess was that it was mostly due to the counseling. I could feel the warmth of her body more clearly, and I could come clean about my secrets. Every time I told her about a difficult experience I'd had in the past, the hands she comforted me with were so warm. She was real, and if I reached out, I could touch her. It was different from the heat of a monitor depicting a fictional character. I felt her existence even stronger in my heart.

I escorted Ana to the carriage, something I'd done countless times before, but now the warmth of her hand felt so apparent. I felt more love for her than I ever had before.

After taking the carriage into the city, we stopped alongside a major road, deciding to take a stroll before going to the theater.

"Where would you like to go?" I asked.

"I want to go to the same restaurant where you shared skewered meats with Lady Kate."

"Are you sure? I don't think that's really a place nobles would enjoy."

"I heard from her that you very much enjoyed eating there."

“Yeah, I guess that’s true.”

“I’d like to see your enjoyment too. I’d like to know everything about you, including the sides of you that only Lady Kate has seen.”

“Ana! You’re too cute!”

“That’s close enough, Sir Ginorious!”

Just as I lost all inhibition again, Bridgette came to the rescue to stop me. *Ana truly is too cute. Every time I think she can’t get any cuter, she proves me wrong.* It made the feeling of wanting to treasure her even stronger.

As promised, I took Ana to the same place that I’d gone to with Lady Kate. Though when Kate and I had eaten together, she’d gotten an assortment of meats piled high; I decided to stick with four skewers for me and Ana, two for each of us. I’d also asked for cutlery so Ana could eat it with a fork instead of on the skewer with her teeth.

“Oh. This is quite delicious.” A bright smile spread across Ana’s face as she tasted it. *That’s a relief. I tried choosing less gamey meats.* “Sir Gino, I’ve been selected as a chief research assistant,” Ana said, elegantly lifting her glass filled with kvass, a commoner’s drink with low alcohol content, with both hands and taking a sip.

“That’s incredible! Congratulations!”

There was a hierarchy among research assistants, and despite not much time having passed since she graduated, she’d already been selected as a chief research assistant. She was truly a genius—as if that hadn’t already been clear by her being an in-school research assistant previously. Hearing her success made me so happy, and I wanted to hear more, so I listened.

“Well, I’ve boasted about myself, Sir Gino,” she said after finishing telling me everything.

“Hm? Yes, you have?”

“Indeed. So now I’d like you to do the same.”

“You...want me to boast about myself?”

“Very much so.”

Well, I guess if that's what she wants, then I'll need to come up with something. But what? The only thing I'm really proud of is my close relationship with Ana.

"For instance," she said, "how about you begin with your proficiency in unarmed martial arts?"

It sounds like she doesn't want me to brag about just one thing. I'm not really a fan of boasting, but I guess I'll tell her about what I learned from Bruce. As I did, I felt how difficult it was for me to brag. Merely bragging wasn't very interesting for the listener. I needed some kind of plot twist or failure mixed in there. If I talked about the nitty gritty of it, then it'd end up being something that only specialists could follow, making it boring for Ana to listen to. I have no clue how to do this. Though I struggled, Ana listened to every last word with a look of great interest. Well, if she's having fun, then I guess that's good.

After we finished eating, we began walking along the main road of the city. Neither Ana nor I were very familiar with the area, so I'd asked my older brother at House Valvalier to give me recommendations. In turn, he'd told me about some jewelry and accessory stores, and a few other places we could check out.

It was extremely rare for greater nobles to do their own shopping. Whenever they wanted to buy something, they'd have someone from their estate go buy it for them. They also wouldn't bother with looking for something in their size, but rather would have the store make something custom. Ana didn't have much experience with window-shopping, so this was a new experience for her. The enthusiastic and curious way she was looking at everything made her even cuter than usual. As we deviated from the main street, we found the west marketplace, where there were a lot of outdoor stalls. Commoner girls linked arms and clung to their boyfriends as they walked along the street.

"I'd like to do that with you someday, Ana." *Oops. That wasn't supposed to slip out.*

Ana looked surprised for a second before glancing down. "F-Feel free to do so."

Then, I was so shocked, I lost all my words. *Is this really happening?! Is Ana*

really clinging to my arm even while looking away to hide her blushing?! The most a noble girl ever touched of a guy's arm was his hand. Even when being escorted, at most, they'd rest their palm on his arm, and when they were helped into carriages, they'd only really touch palms briefly. Linking arms like this wasn't something noblewomen did, especially in public.

From this country's perspective, Ana was being quite bold with her actions. Though she was beet red, I was most likely not too different. No words were exchanged between us, probably because we were both embarrassed. Even so, we walked forward, arms linked. As we did, her softness and body heat reaffirmed the fact that she was right next to me.

The only word I could think of was "happiness." Though I felt so happy I could fly, even that wasn't nearly enough to describe what I was feeling.

We had lunch at a restaurant by the river and then left for the theater. This was the first time Ana was visiting the city's theater, so she was very excited by the number of seats inside. The theater at the Sevensworth estate had a sofa set up so the family could leisurely watch the performances, no chairs bolted to the ground like in normal theaters. When Ana and I watched plays together, I found it quite strange for a huge theater to have only a lone, lavish sofa and a nearby table of snacks and drinks. It really spoke to the differences in how we were raised.

There were private rooms meant for nobles in this theater, but today, we decided to sit in the regular seats. Of course, guards and retainers surrounded us, so it was nothing but familiar faces all around. The title of the play was *The Goblin Maiden*. They said it was based on a true story, and the main character was Ana.



The main character was a girl named Annasy whose actress wore a mask covered in bumps. She was bullied for her appearance, but then, a guy named Ginova jumped in. He always came to her rescue, and sometimes they'd play together, just the two of them. Eventually, Annasy fell in love with Ginova, but she never intended to tell him.

Ginova was very handsome and popular with other girls. In contrast, Annasy

was an ugly girl that everyone called the “Goblin Maiden.” She knew they weren’t a good match, so she gave up on ever telling him how she felt.

Eventually, the two of them grew older, and Annasy’s father began bringing potential marriage partners to her, but the marriage talks never went well. As soon as they laid eyes on her, they’d lambaste her for her ugliness and call off the potential engagement. But during all this, there was one who came to ask for her hand in marriage: Ginova. Annasy was overjoyed to accept his proposal, but her father stopped them because Ginova’s family wasn’t of nearly high enough status to be compatible.

“If you wish to wed Annasy, bring a sum that’ll satisfy me,” the father said.

The amount he demanded was incredible, and not something that one could immediately scrape together.

“Give me some time. I promise I will bring you the money,” Ginova vowed before leaving.

Ginova founded a merchant company and worked himself to the bone until he was finally able to somehow save up the required sum. Money in hand, he returned to Annasy’s father to ask for his blessing. After her father was presented with the exorbitant amount of money he’d requested, he was forced to stay true to his word and acknowledge Ginova’s engagement to Annasy. But even so, that did not change the epithet that people used to ridicule her.

“I want to show everyone just how amazing you are. If I do, they’ll stop bullying you for sure.”

And thus, Ginova set up an embroidery contest. Everyone was amazed once they saw Annasy’s embroidery.

“I’d like to nominate Annasy to be my in-school research assistant,” one of the teachers said.

As soon as this happened, Annasy was showered with praise by the other students.

“You’re so good at embroidery, Annasy. Can you teach me?”

“Congratulations on becoming an in-school research assistant. That’s

amazing! Can we be friends?"

The number of people around Annasy increased, and the number of people who bullied her decreased. At the edge of the stage were a group of girls who looked at Annasy with jealousy.

"That uggo's getting so full of herself!"

"Stop it!" As the girls went to bully Annasy, Ginova stepped in to save her. "Are you all right, Annasy? I can't believe them... They won't get away with this!"

"No, don't be mad. After all, it's true... I am ugly."

"It's not true! You're cute!"

"What do you mean? I'm the Goblin Maiden."

"You don't believe me when I say you're cute? Then I'll say it as many times as I need to for you to believe it yourself. You're cute, Annasy! You're so, so, so, so, so, so, so, so incredibly cute! You're the cutest in the world!"

"I-I understand, so you may stop. Thank you... That makes me so happy," Annasy said, smiling through tears.

In the next scene, an old person in fortune teller clothes spoke to Ginova. "If you seek the cure to her curse, you'll find it in a dungeon."

"Could it be true?"

Ginova told Annasy he'd be busy with work for his company and then went to a dungeon all by himself. Despite the pain he endured, he finally obtained the recipe for the medicine that would lift Annasy's curse. When he returned with injuries, Annasy voiced her concern.

"I only fell," Ginova said with a smile.

After that, Ginova began gathering everything he needed for her cure. Sometimes he even fought orcs and ogres, but at the end of it all, despite being covered in wounds, he'd collected all the necessary ingredients. Finally, he succeeded in creating the cure. When he went to see Annasy, he came upon her father speaking to himself.

“How vexing. If only Annasy hadn’t been cursed. She could’ve been engaged to the prince.”

“What do you mean?” Ginova asked.

“I was so close to having him agree to marry her, but he said no due to her curse.”

“So, if her curse was lifted...”

“I’d break off your engagement with her and marry her to the prince, of course. It’s obvious that she’d be happier as royalty than being married to you. She’d live in luxury, wanting for nothing and with the adoration of everyone. Love fades eventually. It’s not reliable. Thinking about her future, it’s obvious that a marriage with the prince would be better for her. Oh, I know! If the curse is ever lifted, could you pretend to cheat on her and end the engagement? If you use adultery as the reason, her honor won’t be hurt when it happens. This is for her happiness. Of course you can do it, right?”

Ginova was shocked by the father’s words.

“For her happiness...” Ginova whispered to himself as he was left alone on the stage.

The next scene took place with Annasy and Ginova.

“Annasy, what do you think about the prince?” Ginova asked.

“Hm? I believe he’s a wonderful individual.”

“What would you do if he proposed to you?”

“Well, I’d of course feel honored.”

“I see...” Ginova said before leaving the stage.

“I said that because speaking ill of the prince would be disrespectful, but I hope it was okay that I lied. In truth, I don’t wish to wed the prince. After all, Ginova is the one I love,” Annasy said as she stood on the stage by herself.

The next scene was at a party, and Ginova stood in front of all of them and made a declaration.

“Annasy, I hereby end our engagement! I have a new fiancée, and her name is

Kay.”

“You don’t love me anymore. I suppose there’s no helping it. After all, I’m the Goblin Maiden. Congratulations to you both. I wish you all the best.”

Though she did her best to congratulate them, she couldn’t handle it anymore and fled in tears. When she returned home, she found a gift from Ginova—a medicine to lift her curse. When she drank it, the actress took off the mask and showed her beautiful face.

Now that Annasy’s curse had been lifted, she’d become a beautiful girl, praised by many men. Even so, she couldn’t feel happy.

“I love Sir Ginova. I...miss him so much,” she lamented while being surrounded by boys on their knees. “Oh, I know! I need to thank him for the medicine he made for me. I’ll be able to find the strength to move on if I can at least see his face one last time.”

With that, Annasy went to visit Ginova’s company to thank him for the medicine. There, she found Kay and learned that their being together was a fabrication used to end his engagement with Annasy. She’d agreed to do it in return for taking over his company.

When Annasy returned home, her father had already set up an engagement with the prince, and she could not avoid meeting with him.

“Wow, you’re a beauty. I’m so glad to be able to take someone like you as my wife.”

“Your Highness, I cannot marry you. I’m in love with someone else.” With that, Annasy left and began aimlessly wandering the city. Eventually, she came upon Ginova homeless on the streets. Upon seeing him, she embraced him dramatically.

“Annasy? You mustn’t! You need to marry the prince and become happy!”

Though Annasy begged Ginova to become engaged to her once more, he refused, and they argued.

“Absolutely not! I won’t marry you, Annasy! It’s not right for someone like you to marry a homeless person like me!” Ginova yelled in despair.

Even so, Annasy did not falter. She knelt and kissed the back of Ginova's hand.

"Please marry me. I promise to make you happy, Ginova."

"You would go this far for me...? Okay, then. I promise to treasure you for as long as I live."

Then the two of them returned to her father.

"Annasy, you fool! I will not allow you to marry that man!" he screamed in a rage.

"If you won't approve our marriage, then I will leave this house. I will throw away my family name and live with Ginova!"

"Love only lasts for so long. It won't even be a decade before it fades! I'm saying this for your sake!"

"You're wrong. We will love each other for as long as we live. Farewell, father."

Ginova and Annasy began to leave.

"Knock it off already!"

"Ack!"

Out of nowhere, Annasy's mother kicked her father in the butt, sending him flying.

"Fine! I'll approve their marriage! Please just don't step on my face!" he said as Annasy's mother stepped on him.

And then right before the curtains closed, Ginova and Annasy embraced each other and shared a kiss.



As soon as the curtains closed, there was the sound of thunderous applause, but I was crying so much, I couldn't even stand. When I looked at Ana, I saw that she was in tears too. Afterward, we went to a tea room to share our thoughts on the play. As we did, it became apparent that I'd cried out of empathy for Annasy, and Ana had cried out of empathy for Ginova.

"I kind of felt...no, I really felt bad for the person playing the duke," I said.

“It was mother’s wish. She was quite furious that this country’s prime minister was so thoughtless with his words.”

Oh, I didn’t know that. But nobles care a lot about their pride, so I guess this is her way of punishing him.

“Yes, she couldn’t believe he could say something that would result in what happened. It shows a lack of forethought, which is unbecoming a person who’s supposed to be our prime minister.”

I can’t say I really understand, but it seems that the duke really messed up. I’m sure Ana doesn’t want to bad-mouth her father too much, so I’ll change the subject.

“By the way, whose idea was it to choose that kind of title for this play?”

It was the very same epithet that people had once called Ana. This was a play being funded by the Sevensworths, so it was strange that they’d approve that very same epithet used to humiliate their daughter. I was sure that pride was important to Ana as well.

“I was the one who requested it,” she said.

“You did? Why?”

“The playwright said that a more impactful title would make the play more popular.”

It’s true that the title is hard to forget. In this country, it was permissible to mock nobles as long as it was done artistically. But even so, they would usually avoid any blatant mocking, especially in a play inspired by a true story. It took a lot of guts to boldly humiliate the premier duke’s daughter with the title of your play. Doing so was enough to make your play the talk of the town.

“But what about your pride, Ana?”

“I don’t care about it. If this play can help restore your reputation, then I’ll do anything.” Ana clenched her fist and gently smiled. It was such a lonely, but kind smile.

I couldn’t hold myself back. I just loved her so much I couldn’t help it. I was overwhelmed by my feelings and hugged Ana, kissing her on the forehead.

“I just took my eyes off you for a second and this is what happens?! Knock it off!” Bridgette frantically ran over to tear me away from Ana, leaving the meeting with the other guards from not too far away.

She scolded me angrily, asking me to think about the kind of scandal I’d cause by doing that in front of others. Seeing the amused look of those around us, Ana turned red, and we essentially fled the scene.

“Um...I’m sorry, Ana. I couldn’t hold myself back after seeing your smile.”

“I-It’s all right...”

Though she said that, she was red up to her ears and her eyes seemed unfocused. Though this country had a custom of kissing others on the back of the hand, it didn’t really have a custom of kissing people’s heads in public. This went for both nobles and commoners, so I could only imagine how embarrassed Ana was. *I’m so sorry, Ana.*



The play was a huge hit, not just domestically. International theater troupes also scrambled to perform it. Even in other countries, the Sevensworths would pay for theaters to host the play.

Up until now, men had always proposed to the girls, but due to the play’s popularity, some girls began proposing to the guys instead. It really helped that the daughter of a premier duke had set the precedent, so it was hard for anyone beneath her status to call it disgraceful and rebuke those who did it. Among commoner women, it became a huge trend to be the one to propose.

But commoners weren’t the only ones affected. In noble society, political marriages were dominant, but very slightly, the number of those who would seek out their marriage partners on their own began to increase, and a percentage of noblewomen started to propose to their men as well. This became a huge topic among nobles.

But that wasn’t the only effect that the play had. Up until now, it was normal for girls to marry who their families chose for them, even if they didn’t like them. It was just what was done in this country. But the heroine in the play went against her family’s wishes for the sake of her love, fully ready to be

disowned. In the end, love won when she went so far as to propose to him. The strength of her will and the way she lived, unafraid to eschew convention, had a huge effect on noblewomen. Many of them sympathized with the heroine, meaning they sympathized with Ana. As a result, she received invitations to have tea with all sorts of different noblewomen.

There were a lot of people who envisioned that, based off the heroine in the play, Ana would be a person who exuded majesty, but in reality, Ana was much gentler and more friendly, with an almost ephemeral beauty. Seeing this mismatch between her status and her true nature only served to have people adore her even more.

Whenever I'd go with Ana to evening parties, we'd always become surrounded by other girls, and they'd ask us nonstop questions. They all became very excited when they learned that the majority of the play was based on a true story. They'd squeal about how it was so wonderful, so romantic, and how they wished they had a love like that.

Of course, among the more conservative ladies, there were some who didn't look too fondly on these kinds of progressive thoughts. But those kinds of women were mostly middle-aged, and the majority of them loved the rejuvenation lotion that the Sevensworths sold. In order to not be cut off from their supply, they made sure to hold their tongues in public.

My two little sisters at House Valvalier were very influenced by the play as well.

"As expected of you. I'm so moved!"

"You're amazing. Simply amazing!"

My two little sisters complimented me through tears after watching the play, and now we were all having tea together with Ana. Since we were at the Valvalier estate, they had friends over as well, and they all listened intently and with awe as Ana spoke to them.

With this, the Sevensworths' plan had succeeded, and my honor had been restored. There was nobody who bad-mouthed me about what I did at the graduation party. If anything, I somehow became incredibly popular, especially

with younger girls who seemed to respect me.



Thanks to the play, the amount of criticism lobbed against me decreased, but there were still some who disapproved, the crown prince being one of them. A few years before me, the crown prince had called off his own engagement at his graduation party. Despite me doing essentially the same thing, my popularity had risen, while his had dropped. Besides that, I was also an obstacle in his plan to have Ana become his concubine. People seemed to treat me better than him despite us having done similar actions, so he didn't like me too much. With all that in mind, it made sense why he was looking at me with a very displeased expression.

"Don't tell me you're planning on becoming engaged to Lady Sevensworth again."

In the midst of a party being held at the royal court, the crown prince came along with Lady Mariott to talk to me while I was alone since Ana was once again surrounded by a circle of girls.

"Yes, I do," I said, keeping my answer brief so as to be clear with my intentions.

"And you really think you're suitable for her? For the fourth son of a penniless viscount to be engaged to the daughter of House Sevensworth?"

"It's quite the unexpected good fortune."

I wasn't going to play into his hand and admit our families were mismatched. I could tell he was trying to lead me into saying what he wanted so he could use it to stop our engagement.

"Don't you think that status should be taken into consideration with marriage?"

I was ready to back down on a lot of topics, but not when it came to Ana. *I'm not going to roll over.*

"Oh, does that mean you've finally given up on Lady Mariott? I wasn't aware."

"What are you talking about?"

“Am I mistaken? You brought up that people should be married to those of similar status, so I thought you might have been implying that you’d given up on your marriage with Baron Mariott’s daughter, seeing as you’re royalty and she’s the daughter of a baron.”

He himself was aiming to marry someone of lower status than him, but he wanted me to give up on my marriage because of mine. Talk about double standards. He hadn’t even thought about it because he clearly hadn’t expected me to fight back. I could understand why, though; he was royalty. Usually, people would hold their tongue in front of him and just wait for the storm to pass.

“Don’t worry, Lady Mariott, I’m sure you’ll find a good match,” I said to the girl next to him.

Though school had been a meritocracy, they didn’t allow for us to drop titles completely, and therefore, all girls had to be referred to as “Lady.” That being said, we weren’t at the school, meaning that the way we addressed each other changed. Unlike women who could still call everyone either Lady or Sir, guys had more complicated rules.

Typically, guys would call unmarried women “Lady,” but for someone engaged to royalty, they’d be called “Her Highness.” However, His Majesty had not accepted their engagement, so she wasn’t an official fiancée of the crown prince. Though I was calling her Lady Mariott, everyone else called her Her Highness because otherwise, the crown prince would get mad at them. That’s why I called her Lady Mariott on purpose, basically sending the message that I didn’t recognize their engagement.

“Sir Dee, I’m scared,” Lady Mariott said, clinging to the crown prince.

Hearing this, he quickly rushed to soothe her. The crown prince’s full name was Dietfried, so Dee must have been his nickname. She was quite the impudent woman to continue calling him that in public despite the king not approving their engagement. But even more than that, they were too close to each other. She clung so tightly to him that her chest squished against his arm.

Given nobles’ strict rules about touching between men and women, not even married couples would show the amount of physical contact in a public place

that these two were displaying. Though it was true that sometimes I'd lose control of myself and hug Ana, even I knew it was very much against proper etiquette.

"You're giving your opinion on royal affairs?! Know your place!" the crown prince yelled, his voice steeped in anger. Naturally, his loud voice drew gazes.

"My apologies."

"If you want to be forgiven, then give up on Lady Anastasia and help me make her my concubine."

"I decline."

"You what?! You'd defy a royal order?!"

"Not a royal order. *Your* order."

"Do you know what you're saying?! You, a mere viscount's son, are trying to defy the royal family?!"

"If His Majesty so ordered me to, then I might comply; however, your will is not the will of the royal family. Please explain to me how exactly I'm defying the royal family."

"I'm ordering you as the crown prince! Yet you still dare to refuse?!"

"Allow me to repeat myself clearly. I have no intention of giving up on my engagement to Ana."

It'd be different if the king himself had given the order, but I had no reason to listen to the crown prince's demands. But honestly, I wouldn't even listen to the king if he told me to give up on Ana. I wasn't going to let go of her again. I was fully prepared to even fight this entire country if it came to it.

"You bastard!"

"What is this ruckus?"

After hearing the crown prince's yelling, all the people around us had stopped talking to look. Most likely in an effort to settle things, the queen herself came over to see what was going on.

"Oh, mother. Please hear this, this insolent fool is standing in my way despite

me saying that I'd like to take Lady Sevensworth as my concubine. I was just about to dole out a punishment to him."

In the hush of the room, the crown prince's voice rang out loudly, making the queen go pale. Due to religion, this country did not approve of multiple spouses. The only time a concubine was allowed was when the king or crown prince's primary spouse could not produce offspring. It was strictly for times of emergency. It certainly wasn't allowed for a marriage to happen with the intention of getting a concubine, and even if it was his plan, it was something that he should've kept secret. Revealing it to everyone here was surely going to lead to backlash since all nobles were religious. The Sevensworths were no exception, and in order to avoid any needless conflict with the church, they would need to publicly deny the crown prince's claim and show that they had nothing to do with his plan.

The crown prince was currently fighting the first prince for the right to succeed the throne. When word spread about what he'd just said and the Sevensworths' denouncement, it would seem to the public that the relationship between the Sevensworths and the crown prince was shaky, which would most likely result in the killing blow to his hold on the throne. In this moment, the queen wasn't the only one who'd gone pale; I had too.

I'd chosen to call his fiancée "Lady Mariott" and also had used specific words in order to agitate him, and I'd succeeded. But I hadn't intended for this to happen. At the most, I'd wanted him to get angry and maybe grab my collar, but I'd never expected him to yell his entire plan to the queen herself. I never expected him to be that thoughtless.

"Sir Valvalier, I'm terribly sorry about the fuss. Dietfried must be exhausted," the queen said while signaling guards to take the crown prince away. They secured him by both arms and pulled him out of the room. "I'm truly sorry. Please allow me to formally apologize at a later time," she said, still pale, before leaving as well.

Most likely, she wanted to scream, but she didn't show it at all. She was truly an upstanding person. In the midst of all of this, Lady Mariott's reaction—or lack thereof—was the most curious. Everyone had been surprised as soon as they heard the crown prince reveal his plan to the queen. It was that big of a

deal, and shock was the appropriate response. However, she didn't look surprised at all. Was it possible that she'd known he'd tell the queen his plan tonight? If so, then that meant this was all part of the crown prince's plan. *Does he intend to toss away his status as the crown prince?*

I'd heard from Ana that she'd danced alone during the bird and flower dance, making a clear statement that she had no intentions of courting any of the attendees. If Ana stayed single for the rest of her life, keeping her determination, then it was possible that somewhere down the line, it might've been possible for her to become a concubine. But now that I was a noble again, she planned to marry me, meaning that possibility was gone. Hearing this, the crown prince must have revised his plans.

The reason the king didn't approve of the crown prince's marriage with Lady Mariott was that her family wouldn't be powerful enough to provide protection if needed. The authority of the king was already weak in this country, so if they allied with an even weaker house, then this country would fall apart. But as long as she didn't become queen, then there was no need for her family to support the king. If the crown prince gave up his position for the throne, then the chances of them being able to marry dramatically rose.

Up until now, I'd thought that the crown prince was an eccentric person, that he'd listen to anything Lady Mariott told him, and that he was a troublesome person who worked against common sense. But maybe he was only acting like that so that he could toss away his status. If that was the case, then I pitied him. I also pitied the queen who was trying to clean up after her child while trying to make him king despite him fighting tooth and nail to marry the girl he loved. It must've seemed like he was a fool, but I could understand how he felt, loving someone so much that he was willing to throw away his status for her.

"His Majesty has summoned you," one of the royal guards said not long after, guiding both me and Ana to a room not too far away from the royal court.

"Have a seat," the king said, urging us to sit on the sofa across from him. "I apologize for the incident this evening."

The king apologized?! No way. I, the former fourth son of a penniless viscount, am getting an apology from the king? Oh, I see. He brought us here so that he

wouldn't be seen giving me an apology.

"If your apology is meant for me, then there is no need," I said.

Now that the king himself had apologized, I had no choice but to accept it as a member of House Valvalier. There was no way I could fight against the royal family. However, it was different for the Sevensworths. They needed to make a show of anger to make it obvious that they weren't a part of the plan to have Ana become the crown prince's concubine. That was why I specified the apology for myself, and not the Sevensworth family.

"Very well," the king said, smiling.

Since he didn't press any further, it seemed he had no intention of stopping the Sevensworths from doing what they felt was necessary. He likely didn't want to stand against the very same family that was his protection.

"Ana, you've grown quite beautiful. You remind me of Jenny when she was younger."

"Thank you very much, uncle," Ana giggled.

Since we were in a private room, she called the king "uncle." He was the older brother to her mother, so they were quite informal with each other. It really made me feel how astronomically different Ana and I were in terms of status. With her curse lifted, she had a beauty that rivaled that of her mother. The king fawned over his little sister and thus her daughter, Ana, as well.

"What do you think about the marriages of the first prince and the crown prince, uncle?" Ana asked.

Wow, that's the power of blood. It enables her to ask the wildest things, like the root problem of the succession strife. Ana called the first prince and the crown prince not by their names but by their titles. Though she wasn't especially close with them, they were technically her cousins, so she could have called them by their first names. Even so, she chose not to in order to keep distance between them. She showed with her short question that she had no intention of marrying them.

"There's no room for love when it comes to marriage for royalty. What matters is political advantage," the king replied.

Unlike the monarchs in my past life, the position of the king in this country was weak, and he had to run the country while maintaining a delicate balance between noble houses. As if that weren't enough, he had a concubine, which wasn't normal. Furthermore, the queen ended up having a boy herself, resulting in the situation where both the queen and the concubine had borne sons. The battle for succession likely would've already been hard had the queen had two sons, but now two sons from different mothers were battling for the right to the throne, making it even more intense.

It was possible that with his unique circumstances, it wasn't really in the cards for the king to have normal parent-child relationships, nor a normal husband-wife relationship. From the look in his eyes, it seemed that he'd long since given up on finding the basic happiness for himself that everyone deserved.

"But I don't think Dee has come to understand that," the king feebly chuckled.

Judging by his words, he didn't feel any anger toward the crown prince for the huge problem he was causing. If anything, I could sense an apologetic attitude toward his child. It could be that as a father, he didn't want to force a marriage onto him, and wanted him to be able to keep his happiness and marry the girl he loved. But the king had his hands full trying to keep the country together.

I couldn't let my guard down. For the time being, the king and his mother approved of my marriage with Ana. However, they prioritized the stability of the royal family over everything else. If they determined that our marriage was a detriment to the country, they'd quickly change their minds.

Judging by the king's words, the princes' marriage situation was so complicated that even he couldn't interject his opinion. As the situation became more complicated, the country would become more unstable, making it easier for him to change his mind about our marriage if it came to that. That would be the perfect opportunity for either one of the princes to use Ana to win the right to the throne. It would be best if this battle for the throne were concluded sooner than later. If it lasted too long, then I wouldn't be able to let my guard down even after Ana and I got married. There might be people who'd plot to break up our marriage. In this country, it wasn't uncommon for people to get divorced for political reasons. The church wasn't very strict about divorce compared to the church of my past life, so it wasn't too hard, and it was a tool

that could be used for political purposes. *I need to mature even more. In order to continue standing next to Ana, I need to be able to out-strategize anyone.*

As expected, the duke officially disavowed the claims from the royal family. The queen herself came all the way to the Sevensworth estate and lowered her head deeply to ask him to rescind his public declaration; however, the duke could not agree. Currently, the Sevensworths were in the midst of strengthening their connections to the church, and if they didn't take this position, they'd end up with huge losses. The church and the devout nobles publicly asked the royal family to respect the divine commandments. Though it was possible to circumvent those pressures, it would be a death blow for the royal family to have the Sevensworths oppose them. With the Sevensworths publicly speaking out, it showed a clear intention to distance themselves from the crown prince.

In the wake of their opposition, the crown prince's tenuous grip on the throne became almost nonexistent. Because of that, many nobles jumped ship and began standing behind other players, including the still very young fourth prince.

The crown prince's faction shrunk significantly. With this, one might think that the first prince's faction would be put at an advantage, but it wasn't. His faction had also decreased as an effect of what happened at the evening party when Ana requested the thirteenth song to be played.

With his diminished support, the crown prince was lowered to being Dietfried, the third prince. Though this was the best chance for the first prince to make his move, his position wasn't strong enough to become the heir, leaving that spot still unclear.

I felt sympathy for the queen. She'd fought so hard for so long to make her son the king. It was said that the queen was a person who valued profit to the point of even lowering her head to lesser nobles if necessary. However, in my opinion, it had all been to protect the status of her son.

Though her reputation was for being power hungry, I didn't see her like that. She'd wanted to build up the faction of her son, and up until now, she'd been

doing her best by herself to keep it together. It was difficult to believe that someone as talented as her couldn't see that her son was a sinking ship. Even after his engagement with Lady Lillard ended and it became obvious to everyone that he would never be king, she stayed by his side. If she simply wanted to protect her power, she would've cut him loose and tried nurturing a different prince to the throne. What she had wasn't a lust for power, but a love for her child.

Though she'd desperately done everything she could for her son, he kept dragging her down to the point where even he criticized her. None of her efforts were being rewarded. As soon as he let his plan to make Ana his concubine slip, she'd known it was over. There was no way to recover. She was an incredibly talented person, and yet.

"That's just like you to sympathize with the queen, who everyone says is power hungry and has no pride as a royal. You have such a big heart. You're so wonderful," Ana said with spellbound eyes after I explained my thoughts to her.

My two little sisters from House Valvalier had become very attached to her, so Ana had been coming over for tea frequently. Ever since then, I started to feel as if she'd begun to resemble them.

Chapter 10: Ana's Cute!

Anastasia

"Gino, sit!"

My engagement with Sir Gino was set, so now we were in the grand cathedral in the city, and Sir Gino's family from House Adolni had just arrived. The first thing his older sister did when she saw him was order him to sit. Though she was very animated, the rest of his family was stiff and sat perfectly still as if they were statues.

"Ow!"

As soon as Sir Gino sat in the chair she pointed at, she dropped her fist onto his head. *She must have asked him specifically so she could do this.* Due to his tall stature, she wouldn't have been able to reach his head otherwise.

"You've got some nerve! Why'd you disappear without a word?! At least give us a warning!"

Sir Gino had not only ended our engagement and vanished, but he'd not contacted his sister at all during that time. She was angry, so she continued to lecture him, all while doing her best to hold back her tears. Sir Gino listened to every last word without saying anything. I could feel the warmth of their strong bond as siblings.

"Um..."

"What?!"

"Well, I...I love you, and I love the rest of our family too," Sir Gino said to his sister, leaving her gaping at him.

During our counseling sessions, Sir Gino had told me he'd never explicitly told his family that he loved them. He then promised that he'd try to do so, which was why he was taking the first step now. Though he'd been awkward in saying it, these were his own, genuine words.

“A-Are you stupid?! Where’s this coming from all of a sudden?!” After saying this, she ran out of the room.

Oh no, the ceremony’s starting soon. I hope she doesn’t get lost. I should go after her to make sure she comes back all right.

But it seemed I’d been worried for nothing. As soon as I exited the room, I saw her right outside in the hallway crying. She was using the sleeves of her church dress to wipe her tears away, so I gave her a handkerchief.

Ginorious

My reengagement with Ana was set. Last time, we’d gotten engaged in the church on the Sevensworths’ estate, but since that engagement didn’t go through, it’d be bad luck to do it there again. This time, we were using the great cathedral in the city. We had to ourselves this entire, massive cathedral which was about a hundred and fifty metres wide. The witness for our engagement was the pope himself. Usually he resided in the holy country of Waltdiez and wouldn’t visit the royal capital unless it was on some kind of business. That being said, he’d come all the way here just to be the witness for our engagement ceremony.

After the huge profit they earned from the rejuvenation lotion, the Sevensworths made a huge donation to the clergy to gain more influence over them. To the church, the Sevensworths were essentially VIPs. This was also why they were able to reserve the entire great cathedral, which had a capacity of ten thousand people, for themselves.

As family members of the Sevensworths, the king and his mother were in attendance as well. After all, they were Ana’s uncle and grandmother. They’d both already doted plenty on Ana before, but now that her curse was lifted and she’d transformed into the spitting image of her beautiful mother, they ended up showering her with even more attention. As they spoke with Ana, it was easy to tell from their expressions that they were fawning over her. It was also worth mentioning that these two knew that I was the manufacturer of the rejuvenation lotion.

Within the lavishness of the great cathedral, the members of House Adolni

were obviously nervous, not moving an inch from their seats. They were worse than pale; they looked like death. However, my sister was acting like her usual self and had even hit me on the head earlier.

From House Valvalier, my adoptive father and mother were also here, as was my older brother. My two little sisters were present as well, but unlike the rest of the family, they were very hyper from their excitement.

The older of the two expressed her amazement about what I'd done, while the younger one told me how much she respected me. This was all in reference to what they'd learned from the play, *The Goblin Maiden*. They must've felt like they were seeing the continuation of the story today.

The last time Ana and I had gotten engaged, I was so entranced and elated from the ceremony that I didn't truly appreciate it in its entirety. But not this time. After learning the lesson of what it was like to not be engaged to her anymore, I knew painfully how irreplaceable to me she was. Just seeing our names on the marriage contract made my chest burn up. As I signed my name, I desperately tried to fight back my emotions while my vision blurred more and more from the tears. Ana was no different. She kept a handkerchief to her eyes as she signed.

During the engagement ceremony, there was no custom of saying vows, but even so, there were some things I wanted to tell Ana no matter what, so I stood before her.

"During our first engagement, I was simply glad to not have to spend my old years alone, but not this time. I couldn't care less about being alone when I'm old and withered. I've found the most important person to me in my life, and that's you, Ana. For the first time, I've found someone who I value more than even my own life, and I want to make you happy. And I want to be happy too, right by your side. You taught me that I shouldn't give up on my own happiness, and I promise to never do that again. I won't ever leave your side or let you go. I will always be with you."

"You're the one who taught *me* not to give up on *my* happiness, Sir Gino. During our first engagement ceremony, I couldn't even imagine what a happy future for me would look like, but you showed me, and because of that, I was

able to change. Now I clearly know what I need to do. Sir Gino, your happiness is my happiness. That's why I promise to make you happy. After all, I'm not going to give up on my own happiness either."

Completing the signature on the engagement contract was very emotional, and we both had tears in our eyes, and it only became worse after our exchange. We began crying even harder, but we gazed at each other while the tears flowed out, and I hugged her and then kissed her. She didn't resist at all. If anything, I felt her hug me back and she even closed her eyes before my lips touched hers.

"Wh-What are you doing?!" the duke shrieked, ripping me away from Ana.

"Oh my," my mother-in-law said, her expression a mix of amusement and surprise.

"How nice it is to be young," the king sighed wistfully.

"Indeed," his mother mused in agreement.

Meanwhile, my two little sisters were terribly excited:

"It's just like the finale of a romantic play! Good going!"

"Amazing! I respect you so much!"

The engagement ceremony was done prior to a wedding for the express purpose of showing God your purity. Thus, it wasn't very acceptable for the betrothed to have physical contact. Seeing me do this, not only in a place as dignified as the great cathedral but in front of the king, his mother, and the top religious authority, the majority of the members of House Adolni fainted one after another from the shock. My sister was the one exception, who instead laughed.



"Th-Thank you for waiting, Sir Gino."

At that moment, Ana appeared before me in her stunning wedding dress. I couldn't help but feel nervous from seeing her so close. She was wearing a princess-style wedding dress adorned with a large number of diamonds, which sparkled like stars.

Ana used to only wear dresses that covered her neck because she was self-conscious about the bumps on her body, but now that the curse was lifted, both the bumps and green color of her skin had disappeared. Now she was wearing a much less conservative dress that exposed her shoulders and even cleavage.

Her alluring, porcelainlike skin was only further accented by the lovely bouquet of flowers she held. She exuded an aura at once pure and somehow bewitching. The Sevensworths were greater nobles and therefore allowed to wear crowns. The tiara she wore was what all Sevensworth ladies wore during their marriage ceremonies, and it almost looked like a flower ornament. It was made of platinum and had many large gemstones cut like flower petals. It was done so precisely that they looked like real flowers. Its delicate majesty really reminded me of Ana.

The tiara that adorned her shining silver hair, her white bouquet which emphasized her purity, and Ana's own beauty behind her sparkling veil inset with countless small diamonds absolutely stunned me. It was like I was witnessing a dream.

"Ana...you're so beautiful."

Before I knew it, I'd risen from the sofa and said this in a low voice.

She was so beautiful behind her wedding veil that I felt like I might lose control of myself at any given second. I desperately suppressed the impulse that told me to hold her tightly in my arms and never let her go.

Up until now I could understand when girls were beautiful, but it had been a long time since I was actually moved by it. That was true even for how I felt about Ana, both before and after her curse was lifted. I'd never been emotionally affected by her beauty, but today, it felt like it could melt permafrost. I felt a shock as powerful as a cataclysm.

"Thank you very much. This is the first time you've called me beautiful. I think you look very...handsome as well," Ana said with a sheepish smile.

She was right. I'd called her cute so many times, but I'd never called her beautiful. This might have been an effect of her helping me overcome the problems in my heart. Up until now, girls had essentially been like pixel art to

me, but now, more often than not, they felt like living, breathing humans. The more that I felt at ease with her, the more my love for her grew.

I couldn't help but feel that this was all fate. I'd been born to meet her and give my everything to her. Fate wasn't something you did or didn't believe in. It was a given.

"Here come the bride and groom!" the priest announced as I escorted Ana into the great cathedral.

There were many people gathered, partly due to this being a Sevensworth marriage. When we entered, all their eyes turned to us. Wedding ceremonies in this world were simple. The bride and groom entered together and signed an oath in front of a member of the church who served as a witness. After that, the witness would cast blessing magic, and then the bride and groom would exchange vows and conclude with a kiss. All in all, it took most likely no more than twenty minutes.

When the pope, who was officiating the ceremony, prompted me, I said, "I do," and Ana did the same. Then the two of us signed our oath. After that, the choir began singing and the pope cast blessing magic on us. After he finished chanting the spell, light rained down from the sky like snow, coming through the ceiling of the great cathedral. I could hear the church's bell begin to ring, signaling the beginning of the blessing.

There was one requirement for a member of the clergy to be allowed to conduct ceremonies in the great cathedral, and that was to be able to cast blessing magic encompassing the entire royal capital. Since ours was cast by the pope himself, this snow of light would probably extend even beyond the capital's borders.

In the midst of it all, Ana and I were bathed in a pillar of rainbow light, which reached all the way to the great cathedral's ceiling and above.

I faced Ana for the next part. It was our turn to exchange vows. We were free to prepare our own, so I chose to say something that had all my feelings in it.

"Ana, I love you, and I will always love you. Even if I'm reincarnated, I promise to you, before all the gods, that you will remain the one in my heart."

“Sir Gino, I love you from the bottom of my heart, and I promise to you, before all the gods, that I will keep loving you for all eternity.”

I couldn't keep from crying from the emotions that were bursting inside me. Ana also looked at me, tears streaming down her face. Her eyes fell closed as I kissed her, and even through my own closed eyelids, I could tell that the pillar of light had turned to pure white. It grew in intensity until the pillar and snow both stopped. That was the signal for me to stop kissing Ana, so I did and then hugged her.

“In God's name, I declare thee wed, and as your witness, I, Pope Almacheius IV, declare the birth of a new husband and wife.”

The church's bell gave a final ring, signaling that our marriage was approved. Everyone inside the cathedral stood and applauded, and the stained glass shook from the loud cheers of the commoners outside. With this, Ana and I were married! I could finally spend the rest of my life as her husband! I had no words. I was so filled with emotions...



After the wedding ceremony ended, it was time for the procession through the royal capital. It was normal for royalty to have a parade after their weddings, mostly for economic reasons since commoners would typically spend a lot during this time. Ana was also the niece of the king, so though she was low on the succession list, she was still technically royalty. It was only natural for there to be a parade for her.

“Wow, look at all these people! I think there are even more than when I got married,” my mother-in-law said as we exited the great cathedral’s grounds in our carriage.

“Indeed. There are more than even after *my* wedding,” the king said. “To think there are more people celebrating than back then. Hm...” It didn’t sound like he was very content with this.

“It’s all because of the popularity of the play. There are a lot of tourists who came from bordering towns and even other countries,” one of the king’s guards said, noticing the king sulking.

Other than at a few certain facilities, commoners were supposed to bow before the king and would at most only see his feet. However, the parade was an event for showing off, so they were allowed to look. It was probably the only chance that the fans of the play would get to see the real-life inspiration for the titular Goblin Maiden.

As the parade began, Ana and I stood in our open-top carriage and waved to all the commoners packed alongside the main road. There really were a lot of people. Even the alleyways looked crowded, and faces were clustered in the windows of the buildings. There were even people crowding on the rooftops, and some who’d even tied ropes from the roofs to hang off of them.

“Whoa, it’s the princess from *The Goblin Maiden*!” a little girl said excitedly from the shoulders of her father.

“Here she comes! She’s *the* Goblin Maiden! Wow, she’s so beautiful!”

“Whoa, the real-life Sir Ginova’s amazing! He’s so handsome!”

“Congratulations! We’re all supporting your love!”

The townspeople voiced their congratulations to us. Usually they wouldn't have the right to talk directly to royalty, but they were allowed to speak freely just for today. We responded to them by waving back. Though the epithet "Goblin Maiden" had once been a term intended to humiliate Ana, it was now used to praise her. Thanks to the cooperation of her parents, Ana had been able to change that herself. This wasn't anything to scoff at. It was an extraordinary feat she'd been able to achieve because of her strong will and unending kindness.

When I looked at Ana, the countless diamonds in her dress sparkled in the sunlight. Her silky silver hair also shone, and her smile under the sun's light was bright and radiant. *She's so stunning...*

"Ana, you're so beautiful."

But just saying it wasn't enough to express how I felt, so I impulsively kissed her on the cheek, eliciting a chorus of squeals from the crowd. It almost sounded like the ground was shaking from how many voices there were.

Being kissed in front of so many people made Ana stop waving and drop her head, which had turned a bright red. Seeing how cutely she reacted made the crowd go even wilder, resulting in thunderous applause. She seemed to reel from this intense response and became unsteady on her feet. I panicked and gripped her by the shoulders to support her, but that only made the cheers rise even louder. As I held her, I couldn't help but think how beautiful she was. That was what I was realizing today. But even more than that, she was overwhelmingly, absolutely, and extremely cute! *I'm going to protect this cute girl for as long as I live.*

Afterword

Hello, it's Shinten-Shinchi. Thank you for picking up the second volume of this series! I was only able to get this far thanks to all your support. Thank you very much to all of you who bought, reviewed, rated, and left comments, or talked about it on social media, wrote your thoughts, made videos, or discussed it during streams. Thank you so much! I couldn't keep this series going by myself. This is all only possible because of your support.

I should mention that I read all the reviews left on the more popular sites. I'm the type of person who sometimes likes to immediately read the newest book of a renowned author, but also the type who likes to read reviews first. As the author, I want to read everyone's thoughts on my story more than anything.

Canonically, Ana is supposed to have been born ugly, but a lot of the readers call her cute, and that just makes me so happy, I can't help but grin from ear to ear. Gino also was supposed to be so ugly in his past life that he thinks he couldn't possibly be the protagonist of an isekai romance novel, but even so, there are so many readers who like him, and that makes me very happy as well.

As an author, there's nothing more exciting than finding people who love the characters I found in a different world. Of course, it's not all rainbows and sunshine. There are harsher reviews too, but I enjoy them all the same. The very fact that you read what I wrote makes me so happy, so I'm more than happy to get criticism as well.

Let's talk about the differences between volume 2 and the web novel. Just like in volume 1, I added a lot of subepisodes, and the lengths of these two volumes are about the same. To put it into context, I added so much that one might even call this a different series entirely. But even so, this is what the story was originally supposed to be. I'd had to cut a lot to make it shorter for the web novel.

Someone said that in music terms, the web novel is just the chorus of a song while the novel version is the entire thing, and if you really want to appreciate it, then you need to read the full version. It was a good way of thinking about it, and that's exactly how I feel when writing this series.

Regarding what specifically was added, I added parts to show how hard Gino worked, including him going to the adventurers' guild and finding out the truth about the world, him fighting against one of the best swordsmen in the country, and him battling monsters. Gino worked so hard in this novel for Ana's sake. Ana also worked hard when she fought off the first prince's advances.

Aside from that, there are a lot of characters who didn't appear in the web novel version of this volume. The scene where Anthony and Justin join Ana and Ekatarina for tea in the city wasn't in the web novel, nor was the story about Viviana exploring the royal capital, or the peek into Gino's life in the slums, or the scene at the company with Kate, Ana, and Gino all together. These are all new to web novel readers. I also added lovey-dovey scenes between Ana and Gino, like their museum date and when they do counseling together.

Thank you as usual to the great Tokima for the wonderful art. The illustrations are so gentle and beautiful. They're all wonderful and really capture the sense of the world. Please take a look if you haven't already!

Also, I'd like to thank the artist in charge of the manga, Kazamori Inagi. The manga's officially begun, and seeing Ana's conversations with Gino and her mother is really enjoyable. The scenes feel so real in manga, and Gino's handsomeness and Ana's cuteness come across doubly strong. The design of Gino's ring is also wonderful. I encourage you all to give it a read!

Also like in volume 1, I'd like to use the afterword as a space to talk about things that I didn't write about in the story, and I'd like to talk about Gino's ring this time around. Usually he wears it on his left index finger, but when he jammed his finger, he wore it on his right instead. Though the wide metal part is black, if you look closely, you'll notice that it's decorated with silver etchings. It's made to be adjustable so he can wear it even if he has gloves on.

The stone in the ring is violet and is in the shape of a flower with ten petals.

From the black metal and the purple stone, Ana thought that it was made to resemble the black-ice flower; however, that wasn't his intention when he made it. The stone was made to form a magic circuit called a double pentagram, which coincidentally resembles a black-ice flower. The stone being violet is because the magic crystal semiconductor wafers best suited for controlling time are that color. The design on the metal is also a part of the magic circuit. Though it may resemble a flower, Gino is not nearly trendy enough to develop a delicate design like that for a ring.

There are two types of magic tools: those that are activated by their own power source, and those that are powered by the user. Gino's ring is in the latter category, and he activates it by fueling the inner part of the ring with a mix of mana and chi.

The reason Gino made it this way is because making time-manipulating magic circuits in one's body is extremely difficult to do on command. Though the stone looks like a regular violet gem at first glance, inside it are magic circuits that have been very carefully inscribed. They're so intricate that you wouldn't even be able to see them without a microscope. Since the magic circuit is on the ring, all he has to do is pour in the fuel to make the magic activate.

Theoretically, anyone should be able to use the ring to accelerate their own time as long as they pour in the necessary fuel, but for complicated magic circuits, it requires a complicated mix of chi and mana, so it takes a lot of mastery to use it.

In Gino's past life, only people who were at least graduate school level could use time-manipulation magic. So in his current world where the magic technology is much more primitive, he's the only one who can use it. Even if they stole his ring, they wouldn't be remotely capable of harnessing it.

By the way, everything in their world has their own space-time. Humans, objects, and stars have their own time running through them. The difference between something like a human and the earth is so small that it's hardly noticeable (you'd need to compare much larger masses like a star and a pebble to see a measurable difference), but all objects in the universe have their own time relative to their respective masses. What the ring actually does is manipulate the individual user's time.

My own personal wish is that you feel happy and uplifted reading this series. If you come out of it feeling like you want to be even a little nicer to the people around you, it will have made writing this story feel so worth it. There may be a third volume in the future, and if there is, I'd be happy to see you there!



2

Using a
Past Life to
Keep a Joyful
Wife

THE REINCARNATOR
AND THE GOBLIN MAIDEN'S
HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Author
Shinten-Shinchi

Illustrator
Tokima

In order to **cure** Ana's illness,
Gino **went** to a ruin
to **search** for crystal balls
which had medical documents
stored on them.


**Ginorious
Adolni**


2

THE REINCARNATOR
AND THE GOBLIN MAIDEN'S
HAPPILY EVER AFTER


Using a
Past Life to
Keep a Joyful
Wife




"Lady Anastasia
Sevensworth!"

Kate

Anastasia

"I hereby call off
our engagement!"

♫ didn't care if ♫ lived out
the rest of my days entirely
by myself.

♫ was much happier
than ♫'d ever been in
my past life.

♫'d found someone
more important than
anything to me.

♫'d found someone
♫ truly treasured.





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The Reincarnator and the Goblin Maiden's Happily Ever After: Using a Past Life to Keep a Joyful Wife Volume 2

by Shinten-Shinchi

Translated by Geirrlon Dunn Edited by Alex Chiccola

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Ebook edition 1.0: January 2025