



Tamamaru
Illustrator Kinta

8

My Quiet
BLACKSMITH
Life in Another World



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Prologue: My Friend, a Blacksmith

A few days after his wedding ceremony, Marius sank into his chair and sighed loudly.

Wedding preparations had exhausted him, but even after the ceremony, he'd had so much to do. Immediately, he'd called upon Margrave Menzel with sincere expressions of gratitude, and following that, he'd gone around and around, thanking other aristocrats and filing necessary reports.

Now that he was finally finished, Marius had decided to take a few moments and relax.

Tomorrow, he would be leaving on a trip to the empire—there, his task would be to foster diplomatic relations on the kingdom's behalf. On the surface, Marius's goal was to end the skirmishes that frequently occurred on the border of their two nations, but in truth, that issue had already been resolved. No, the real reason for the visit was to show others that the kingdom was always watching and keeping tabs on certain situations. In other words, this trip was all for show; he wouldn't have much to do in the way of actual diplomacy.

And so, while he normally wouldn't have brought his wife on a kingdom-sanctioned expedition, she would be tagging along. Ostensibly, the primary objective for the couple wasn't leisure, but it might as well have been—this trip to the empire would be their honeymoon.

"In any case," Marius mumbled, stretching his limbs, "*they* have a good family."

He was thinking back to the day of his wedding. His friend, a blacksmith named Eizo, had attended the celebration with his family. When Marius had first met Eizo, he'd been told that the man resided in the treacherous Black Forest. At the time, Marius had found this hard to believe, but now, he had no room for doubt.

Eizo had been the key to resolving the Eimoors' succession debacle, had

contributed the most during the monster subjugation affair, had successfully processed a rare material into rings (which Marius had thought to be an unreasonable demand), and had even gotten a fairy's blessing applied to said rings. Given all that, even if suspicious rumors swirled around Eizo, Marius thought it would be an act of ungratefulness to doubt his friend.

When Marius had first met the blacksmith, Eizo had been accompanied by a half-tiger beastfolk named Samya. Back then, Marius hadn't been privy to the details of their meeting, but judging by how Samya had protectively watched over the blacksmith, it'd seemed clear that Eizo had done something to earn her trust.

Then there was Rike, Eizo's dwarven apprentice. Dwarves customarily searched for a skilled blacksmith to train under; Marius had thus guided Rike to meet Eizo. Apparently, once a dwarven apprentice forged a product they were satisfied with, they would take a trip home to share the news of their success. So far, Marius hadn't heard of Rike ever leaving Forge Eizo. *Well, even a skilled dwarf would require ample time to hone their skills to be on par with Eizo's.* Marius considered this as he stared at the elaborate Nordic pattern engraved on his ring.

When Marius had seen his younger sister, Diana, mingling with Eizo's family at the wedding, it was clear that she'd grown quite close to all of them. Diana had supported the Forge Eizo family from the shadows as they'd awkwardly fumbled around during the wedding—there'd been obvious signs that the group wasn't used to such grand occasions. *Knowing Diana, she wouldn't have helped them out if she wasn't on good terms with everyone.* But above all, it'd been apparent that Diana had enjoyed herself—her happy face had left a lasting impression in her big brother's mind.

The seventh imperial princess, Anne, who'd practically stumbled into Eizo's cabin as a hostage, had also seemed to be having fun. In truth, if an imperial princess was in attendance at a wedding ceremony, a guest would be wise to try to form a friendly relationship with her, even if it meant being a little rude or insulting to ceremony etiquette. The possible advantages outweighed the stigma of potentially being disrespectful to the wedding host. Though Diana and Anne were both high up in society, between the two, a friendship with a

princess could reap more possible benefits.

And yet, despite the draw of mingling with nobility and royalty, a strong guard by Eizo's side had kept most guests away from their family—this formidable figure was Helen, a famous mercenary nicknamed "Lightning Strike." Though Helen had worn a beautiful dress, the aura she'd exuded had been, frankly, *terrifying*. Her presence had been more than enough to leave the aristocrats quivering in fear, unable to approach the group. Marius knew that Helen had put a pause on her mercenary career, and he'd worried what her possible decrease in influence would do to Eizo's family. However, her intimidation factor had still seemed to be more than substantial. *No need to fear*.

Surely, guests had wanted to befriend Lidy, an elf. Unfortunately for them, she'd also been protected by Helen. Elves rarely showed themselves in front of people, so the wedding had been a rare opportunity for people to meet one. But ultimately, no one other than the margrave had mustered the courage to brave Lightning Strike's intimidating aura and offer introductions.

This unique family had all beamed when Eizo had returned from his dance. It was as though they'd all known since birth that they were going to end up at Forge Eizo. Marius remembered their smiles all too well.

"It'd be great if I could make a family like theirs," he murmured.

The smiling face of Eizo, his unmarried friend, flashed across his mind. It was quickly replaced by his wife's smile, and Marius found his mind wandering to the thought of his own future family—husband and wife, surrounded by the yet unknown faces of kids and grandkids.

Chapter 1: The Usual Black Forest

The day after we returned from Marius's wedding, our lives returned to normalcy. The only slight difference was that two new clumps of metal were waiting atop the *kamidana*: the *hihirokane* Helen had obtained sat alongside the adamantite I'd received as payment for forging Marius's wedding rings. I'd placed these valuable treasures there as soon as we'd returned from the capital. And so, when the family completed our morning prayer, the two rare metals greeted us in kind.

After we bowed twice, clapped twice, then finished with a bow, Samya asked, "So, when are we gonna process that?"

I cocked my head. "Which one are you talking about?"

"Both."

"Let's see." I rubbed my chin pensively. "We won't be able to for a while."

Rike gave an obvious slump of her shoulders, clearly expressing her disappointment.

"First, we probably need to research the methods for processing each one," I said. "Though, I'm sure we *could* work them like normal steel...at least, to a certain degree."

Neither were soft like meghizium—both seemed hard, and I guessed that they were closer in composition to typical metals. If so, I figured that we *should* be able to treat them like normal metal. There were no guarantees, though. I'd already learned during my time with meghizium that even my cheats couldn't resolve every issue in one go.

However, I had one more reason to delay working with these new materials.

"Before that, I want to find a way to create a magical jewelstone without it crumbling away."

Jewelstones were essential for curing a sickness that affected the fairies of

the Black Forest, but the ones I could create were unstable and would disintegrate into the air after a short while. If I could form one that didn't disappear so quickly, I could provide jewelstones to the fairies as medicine—that way, they'd be able to cure their illnesses even if, for whatever reason, I wasn't available. I wanted the fairies to live peacefully, with one less thing to worry about, so I felt that this was an important issue to prioritize.

A major problem was that these jewelstones were prized like actual jewels and thus quite expensive. After all, I *was* creating a gem out of nothing but magical energy. If I and my family happened to find a reliable production method, that method couldn't leave the premises of my cabin. I would make sure that the process for creating stable jewelstones was lost to time—no one could know the details until, say, a hundred years in the future. I was adamant about this and felt like it was what needed to happen.

"It would be dangerous to leak that type of information," I said, voicing my opinion on the matter.

Anne nodded in agreement. "I would want to know the secret so badly, but if I returned to my empire with that knowledge, I'd probably never see the light of day again."

"Fair enough."

For example, anyone who found a machine that could create money out of nothing would want to safely and securely store it away. That impulse couldn't be changed, and if I were in the shoes of a person of high authority, I'd do just that. Knowing this, I'd decided that such important information would need to stay within our cabin.

It seemed unbelievable that no person in history had ever successfully created a magical jewelstone. I deduced that perhaps the technology or technique had once been known, but that the information had been abandoned to time. *Across history, a lot of innovation has probably been lost this way. I wonder if it was the same back on Earth.* Regardless, it was a bit late to become curious about my home world—I lived *here* now, and there was no way for me to go back and find things out.

"Anyway, I suppose we can just stick to our normal routine for now," I

concluded.

Rike and the rest of the family voiced their agreement. After all was said and done, they didn't hate our laid-back lifestyle (though we did our work properly, of course).

And so, we began once again. I used my magic to light the forge and firebed. It was a small spell that just ignited the area and blew some wind across the flame, so it took some time before the temperature began to rise. Rike watched the firebed while Samya kept an eye on the forge—each added charcoal as necessary. I stood behind them and observed, supervising like a “Boss” should...I guess.

I usually tended the firebed if I was making custom models, but as I'd announced earlier, we were reverting to our normal routine. In other words, we were making our usual products, so I didn't have to carefully watch over anything. Though, it wasn't like I preferred taking it easy—it made me restless to just wait there. However, this was a good learning opportunity for Samya and Rike, so I had little choice but to stand back and let them work.

As the room started to grow warmer, I rhythmically clenched and opened my hands, remembering my conversation with Lidy from a little while ago.

“I can only use the simplest of spells, but could others also learn them with some practice?” I asked. The two of us were working in the garden, and since Lidy was our resident magic expert, I figured she would know.

“I wonder...” Lidy tapped a finger over her mouth, looking deep in thought. “It is true that anyone can manipulate magical energy with practice, but particular spells rely on a person's inherent affinity.”

“Oh?”

“For example, someone who can use magic to cure deadly illnesses may not be proficient at manipulating fire.”

“So if you specialize in a field, you might become inept at other elements.”

“Or so it's said,” she replied with a shrug. “I can use whatever magic I like to a certain degree, but I can't cast extremely powerful spells for some elements.

For instance, I dislike fire and wind magic, but I can still cast small spells of those alignments—just not strong ones.”

“And those are the spells I can use.”

“Right. So it might be a bit difficult for me to teach you,” she said glumly.

I patted her shoulder. “You don’t have to worry about that one bit. Your current magic is more than enough. I was just a bit curious is all.”

“If I think of any spells that I can teach you, I’ll let you know!”

She clenched her fist eagerly, and I grinned.

Once the firebed and the forge were blazing, I announced, “All right, let’s begin our work!”

Everyone immediately took to their tasks, chattering away as we picked up the thread of our daily routine once more.

####

Two weeks quickly passed. Before the wedding, I’d been challenged by back-to-back irregularities: creating rings out of an unusual material and nursing a fairy back to health. However, in the past fortnight, nothing unusual had occurred. It was like I was being rehabilitated back into my normal lifestyle.

When I fulfilled my order to Camilo, I asked him about any potentially disruptive situations, but he merely replied, “All’s right with the world.” Marius and Julie were surely spending their newly wedded life in happiness. The concept of a honeymoon didn’t quite exist in this world—in fact, people didn’t really seem to travel or visit other places to see new sights like tourists. Wherever they went, travelers were seen as outsiders. Peddlers and pathfinders likely had their fair share of troubles. And if anything went awry, newcomers were the first to have suspicions pinned on them. *But the happy couple has the blessed rings, so I’m sure they’ll be fine.* I was truly grateful that I didn’t need to worry about stuff like that.

And so, my two weeks of normalcy passed by. Then, suddenly, a realization hit me.

“Hasn’t it gotten *warmer* lately?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Samya replied, peering up at the sky.

Our family was out on the terrace enjoying lunch when I noticed the heat. *Now that I think about it, when I leave the forge for meals or breaks, the outside air doesn’t feel as cool as it used to.* It wasn’t hot to the point where I’d get sweaty just sitting still, but I could tell that the days were growing warmer.

“Summer’s here,” Samya said.

The dense foliage blocked much of the sunlight in the Black Forest. Aside from the lakeshore, the area around our cabin was one of the largest clearings around. The clear blue skies and the shimmering rays of the sun shone down upon us, blessing the soil and plants with sunlight.

“Guess it’s that season already.”

I’d first come to this world around springtime. The rainy season followed that, and then summer. Though I hadn’t yet been here for a year, it’d been quite some time since I’d settled in. And honestly, my time here had been jam-packed with so many incidents and events that it felt like I’d been around for much longer.

“Will it get hotter?” I asked.

Samya turned to me. “This is only the beginning of summer.”

The outside temperature wasn’t scorching like it was inside the forge (our climate would be a desert if that were the case), but she’d implied that it would grow hotter still. At this rate, I would start to sweat even when completely motionless.

I sighed. “Guess I’ll dig a well.”

Sweating meant that I’d lose hydration. Sooner or later, simply wiping away sweat would cease to cool me down—I’d want to douse myself with water. Krul and Lucy would likely want to do the same. *We’ll also need enough water for drinking and tending the garden.*

Knowing this, it was clearer than the skies above that the lake water we carried back daily wouldn’t be nearly enough for my family’s needs. If we didn’t

have enough water, we could just go back to the lake for more, but to do so multiple times a day was a bit...inconvenient. And though I *was* willing to fetch some water every morning as part of my walk, I decided that it would be best to find a reliable source of water close to the cabin. Besides, if I wanted to create a Japanese-style bath, I'd require lots of nearby water sooner or later. Thus, it was probably best to secure a closer source sooner rather than later.

I relayed my well-digging plans to the family, then asked, "So what do you guys think?"

Fortunately, we had just finished our standing order with Camilo, so we had some extra time on our hands. But would the family be on board with using that unscheduled time to dig a well?

"I'm for it," Samya said. "I think it's dangerous for anyone other than Helen, Eizo, and myself to make the trek through the forest to the lake."

"Well..." Diana pondered, arms folded in front of her. "It's not like we're currently in dire need of water, but it *would* be convenient to have a well around."

Rike and Anne were of a similar mindset—the two were likely on the fence about it, but they seemed to lean more toward "yay" than "nay."

"I think a well would be great!" Lidy exclaimed, her enthusiasm bubbling out of her. *She's definitely thinking about the farming plots and our crops.* "We might even be able to plant something that requires a lot of water."

It was true—if we were able to use water more freely, she could increase her repertoire of plantable crops. I doubted that we'd have the capability for constantly flowing irrigation, though, so crops like wasabi couldn't be grown just yet.

Helen didn't seem all that interested. As Samya had said, she was tough enough to brave the forest alone and go to the lake whenever she liked. As such, she didn't feel too strongly one way or the other and likely didn't care what we chose to do.

"All right. So now the problem is whether we can find water around our cabin," I said.

Diana nodded, arms still crossed. “Exactly.”

We could go through painstaking effort and dig holes all around the clearing, only to find nothing; that’d just be a waste of energy. After observing the flow of water into the lake, I deduced that there was an underground channel or an aquifer nearby. However, there were no guarantees that it continued all the way to our cabin.

This sticking point probably accounted for Diana and the others’ hesitancy. But then, a realization struck me.

“Damn! I should’ve asked the fairies if water could be found near our cabin.”

There was a good chance they knew where the water was—maybe they could sense its presence or something. I should’ve asked them when they’d been staying here.

“Well, we don’t know how to contact the fairies,” Rike said. “So for the time being, why don’t we just start digging?”

“Yeah.” Diana nodded. “If water doesn’t come out, we’ll think about it then.”

With all of us in agreement, Forge Eizo began preparations to dig a well.

Within this forest, there were two possible methods for digging a well. The first was surface mining. Simply put, one would violently plunge a shovel to the ground and dig up a huge swath of earth. Based on weather conditions, the large pit could be dug wider or narrower to help prevent collapse or sinkholes. Then, once the digger struck water somewhere, planks of wood or rocks would be used to brace the sides. After securing the structural integrity of the pit, the digger would need to cover most of the opening to the sky, leaving just a small hole for drawing water.

The pros of surface mining were that not a lot of tools were necessary to get started, and we could dig over a large area, making it easier to locate a water source. As for the cons, this method required a lot of time and energy—it’d also be dangerous if the dirt collapsed while we were digging. And though chances of finding water were higher, there was no guarantee that we would stumble across any, and we couldn’t exactly continue digging for eternity.

The second method was called *kazusa-bori*. Scaffolds and equipment were required to bore a hole in the ground, and while the necessary tools weren't too intricate, they still required time to create. However, *kazusa-bori* was much quicker and safer than surface mining. Also, after digging the well, I'd need to think about using either a well bucket (I'd need to make that too) or a pump that could be cranked by hand. There were many peripheries to consider when using this method.

Another potential problem: neither pumps nor the *kazusa-bori* technique existed in this world, so "inventing" them could potentially change the balance of the environment and the kingdom's power on the continent. Currently, the Black Forest was considered to be a stretch of wildland that didn't have a reliable water source and wasn't suited for living on. But what if we ended up discovering an abundance of water below the impermeable layer? Having a water source was vital for ourselves and our crops, and it greatly affected our homestead. However, would this discovery allow a community to flourish here? And in doing so, could we potentially topple the balance of society and nature alike?

Am I allowed to dig for water here, even just for my personal use?

That night after dinner, I suggested surface mining and using a well bucket. No one seemed to have any particular complaints. I was slightly worried about safety, but the soil around here was firm and unlikely to collapse easily.

"When will you start?" Samya asked.

"Hmmm." I looked up, crossing my arms in front of me. A magic lantern brightened our surroundings somewhat, but it was dim enough for me to get lost in my thoughts. "I think the sooner the better. I'm willing to start tomorrow, but..."

"Fine by me."

Upon hearing her nonchalant agreement, I looked down and gazed at everyone else questioningly—no one seemed to have a problem with the plan.

That was settled, but I did need to make sure that we could complete our standing orders for Camilo alongside this project. Though I wasn't actively trying

to save money, we had a lot squirreled away right now. So, if we needed to, we could stop forging for a while and still get by. I didn't want to do that, though. Camilo was our potential business partner for decades to come, and though I hoped to decrease my reliance on others and slowly become self-sufficient here in the forest, it was best to maintain my trustworthiness until that time.

"Do we have enough for Camilo's order?" I asked.

"We brought him a ton of weapons last time, so our current stock should be enough," Rike immediately replied. Recently, we'd been able to maintain our usual output while doing other tasks on the side—it was only natural that they'd forged more than usual when that side work was absent.

"Then I guess it's not a problem. And, well, I don't even have to ask about our supply of meat."

Samya nodded in reply. Thanks to our family members who tended to eat quite a bit (the number of culprits had increased recently), we didn't have any excess meat to toss away after the drying and curing process, but our food stock had nonetheless gradually increased. With our current supplies, we could stay holed up in our house for about three months, even while eating liberally and not carefully rationing. Of course, we couldn't *actually* stay holed up since we didn't have a reliable supply of water. It's not like I wanted us to become hermits anyway.

"All right," I decided. "Since everyone has kindly given their assent, we can start tomorrow. First, we'll need to choose the well's location."

Mentally, I divvied up the work amongst our family members. *I remember doing something like this in my previous world.* Though now, I was living a hybrid life that was half work and half hobby, so it was much less stressful and more carefree.

Most importantly, this task didn't have a deadline. *Oh, how wonderful that is! No deadline whatsoever! Yes!* But I had to be careful so that I wouldn't slack off and become lazy.

After we talked a bit more about our future plans, I decided to head to bed a bit sooner than everyone else.

####

The next day, after I finished my morning routine, I decided to choose the digging spot. If we ended up finding no water, that was out of my hands, but I thought it best to decide on a location that was at least convenient.

“There’s no such thing as a spell to sense a water vein, is there?” I asked.

Lidy stared back blankly, which I thought implied that such a convenience didn’t exist. As I made to get back to work, she opened her mouth.

“There is.”

There is?!

“To be precise, it’s a spell that can point you in the direction of water,” she continued. “However, if there are obstacles like walls in between you and the source, then the water is more difficult to sense. I don’t think I can find water that’s underground.”

“I see.”

Is it like echolocation or something? Well, no use trying to figure out the principles behind magic. From my experience back on Earth, I was aware of how difficult it was to locate water, even from within a hole that was around ten meters deep. It would be much too convenient if magic could sense it.

“Still, people skilled with these types of spells could probably accurately find some water,” Lidy said. “Unfortunately, I’m not very adept at that spell.”

“No, no, that’s still more than enough information,” I replied. “I feel a lot better knowing that it’s not meaningless to dig up this entire area.”

Rike nodded in agreement. Her home forge was close to the mountains but far from a river, and I’d heard that she and her family had gone through quite the effort to dig a well.

Though she claimed to not be proficient with the water-dowsing spell, Lidy decided to use some of her magic—I hadn’t seen her use any complex spells since the hobgoblin incident. She crouched down and closed her eyes, honing her senses as she pointed the palms of her hands toward the ground.

A breeze rustled past, and it wasn’t all that cool. *Yep, it’s summer.*

“Whoa!” Helen gasped.

Lidy’s hands started to glow slightly, faintly illuminating a large plot of land in front of her. It looked as though light was leaking into the space between her hands and the ground. Finally, Lidy opened her eyes, though she remained crouched on the ground.

“By the looks of it, you can dig anywhere and hit water,” she explained.

“Huh? Really?” I asked incredulously.

She nodded. “Yeah.” Her confident gaze starkly contrasted her expression from moments before, when she’d seemed a tiny bit anxious. “This magical light should course in the direction of water. Naturally, I noticed some heading toward the lake, though it’s a bit far away. But if there was indeed no water here, it wouldn’t illuminate the ground.”

“So the strength of light indicates the amount of water, or the extent that one could sense it using magic,” I said.

“Right. Those skilled with this spell would probably produce a strong light heading to an exact water source. I’m not too good with this kind of thing, so my light is quite faint.”

“And if your light is scattered around the plot, then it means the water isn’t all gathered in one area. It’s likely distributed underground throughout this clearing.”

“I believe so.”

In other words, our cabin (and the forge) was likely built atop an unconfined aquifer. Considering what she’d said of her proficiency with the dowsing spell, she probably couldn’t sense a confined aquifer that was deeper, perhaps beneath the bedrock. We wouldn’t be able to secure seemingly infinite amounts of water, not like a forge on Earth could, but we also wouldn’t need to worry about pulling too much water and causing the land to sink or settle. And, since the ground around here was flat, landslides weren’t an issue either.

I’m still a bit hesitant, though. If water could be found wherever we dug, we just needed to find a convenient spot for the well. The fact that there was water underground here could be due to the Watchdog’s influence. *Y’know, you*

could've provided a well for me from the start. Nah, I'm probably expecting too much. The Watchdog prepared the bare minimum for me, and that should be good enough.

While I'd been lost in my thoughts, a bit of a discussion had begun regarding the location of the well.

"I feel like the garden would require water the most."

"It's better if it's near Krul and Lucy's hut. We'll need to wash them and give them water to drink."

"If it's out front, it's convenient since we can wash our prey after we cut 'em up."

"If it's near our reservoir, wouldn't it be easier for us to store water?"

While none of these choices displaced the well all that much, and I felt like it wouldn't make a huge difference wherever we placed it, each person wanted the slightest bit of edge in convenience. Ultimately, after talking it through, they all came to a compromise—the well would be dug near the terrace. A well in this location would be around the same distance away from everyone's needs, and since we could bring the water into the main house and forge from the terrace, it was pretty convenient for our workshop too.

"All right. Let's begin," I said.

Helen, Anne, and I would dig the well while everyone else carried the dirt away, and Lidy would occasionally use her magic to confirm the presence of water. I grabbed the shovel that I always used to dig during cabin renovations. Helen and Anne were already holding their shovels, but they seemed to be waiting for me to make the first move. *What's going on?*

"You should be the one to break ground," Helen insisted.

Like a ribbon-cutting ceremony. I guess it's the thought that counts.

"All right," I said. "I'll take you up on that kind offer."

I cleared my throat, praying for water, and... *Shink!* The shovel bit into the earth, steel cutting through tough soil. I'd taken the first step. *I plan to stop once we hit water, but at worst, we might need to dig about ten meters. We still*

have a long road ahead of us.

I placed the soil to the side. Lucy, perhaps waiting for me to make that first small hole, immediately came over. Then, she started to dig with gusto. The ground was firm, so she couldn't move much dirt, but I was more than happy to let my child try to help out.

"It's dangerous if you're near us, so make sure to dig a short distance away," I instructed gently.

"Arf!"

Lucy obediently stepped back and started digging furiously. Krul skillfully used her legs to push the dirt to the side. *The nickname Big Sis Krul is really starting to suit her*, I thought as everyone looked on warmly. As summer was upon us, we were in a slight rush to access more water, but the necessity of a well wasn't too dire. Besides, this wasn't even part of our usual work. Instead of feeling despair at the task ahead of us, I thought it was much better to work with a smile on our faces.

"Okay, let's start digging in a wide area around here. We should leave the loose dirt...over there." I pointed. "We'll probably need to bury part of our hole after we find water, so it's better to have the soil nearby."

If our family had been smaller, or if we'd had a more confined yard, I would've considered digging in a smaller area while keeping careful watch of the dirt potentially collapsing in on us. However, we had plenty of people and ample space. So, I planned on digging over quite a large area in search of water.

Fearing the worst, I chose a location that had a slope on one side. It was a safe choice in the event that dirt decided to collapse, and it ventilated the air quite well...or so I believed. After all, the biggest issue when digging in a narrow space was ventilation—it wasn't unusual to feel suffocated, even without digging too deep. I planned on resolving this issue with the slope, but if we felt like it was getting hard to breathe, we could immediately have Lidy send in air with her magic. I knew she could do that much—I'd seen her easily ignite the forge and push in air like a magical bellows. *I use magic on the daily because I'm their "Boss," but it's not like Lidy and the rest are forbidden from using magic at all.*

In terms of carrying out the first round of soil, I considered tying a basket onto a piece of rope and having the others haul it out. But if everyone could easily enter and leave the hole, it would be logistically easier to remove dirt. Once our roles were decided, we just needed to press forward—if anything happened during our digging, we’d just have to find a way to deal with it then.

I once again plunged my shovel into the ground.

It’d been quite some time since we’d first started digging. While the ground was tough, the custom model shovels allowed us to dig with ease. We made more progress than I’d expected. The pit was too shallow for us to make a rice field, but we’d certainly be able to secure quite a bit of water with a hole this deep. Team Excavate had dug out quite a bit of soil, and it was piled high nearby, almost like a small hill. Lucy had dug eagerly at first, but after a while, she’d gotten bored, and she was now running around with Krul. *She’s probably happy to have everyone in her field of vision. Should I reconstruct the forge so that Krul and Lucy can enter as they please? But we use fire there. It’s probably too dangerous for them.*

I peered up at the skies and noticed that the sun was almost at its apex. *Time flies.*

“Why don’t we have lunch?” I suggested. “I’ll prepare the food, so you can all wash your hands and clean yourselves.”

As I placed my shovel down, everyone voiced their agreement. Today was a beautiful day—Krul and Lucy seemed to be in high spirits. *We should eat out on the terrace. Since we’ll continue working after lunch, maybe I should make the soup a little more hearty.*

I wiped my sweat away and headed into the cabin.

We were just finishing our lunch out on the terrace when we heard a clear, ringing voice that sounded like jingling bells.

“Hello.”

The owner of the voice looked like a doll—it was Gizelle, the chief of the

fairies.



“Hello,” I said back.

Gizelle smiled. *Whoops! I don't think I asked for her permission to add a well.*

“Is something the matter?” I asked. “Ah, was it inappropriate for us to dig a well?” *If this went against the rules of the forest, we should bury it.*

“Oh, the well isn't a problem at all,” Gizelle replied. “I'm here today for a request.”

“A request?”

“Indeed.”

She gave a large nod but seemed a little hesitant. *Is it something awkward or difficult to ask?* A request that gave even the chief of the fairies some pause must've been huge. I wanted to help her out to the best of my abilities, but if it was utterly infeasible for me, I'd have no choice but to decline.

“Um, you see,” she said shyly. “There's someone who'd like to meet you.”

“I see.” I nodded. “I don't mind meeting a new person.”

“Um, they're not a person.”

“Not...a person?” I raised an eyebrow. It sounded like the being in question wasn't anything close to a human. *Maybe they're not even a beastfolk.*

Gizelle took a deep breath to calm herself down. “Yes. The master of this forest would like to meet you all.”

“The master...of the forest...”

She nodded. “Correct.”

The fairies practically managed this entire forest. For the chief of the fairies to be used as a messenger spoke volumes about the high status of this mysterious master. I hadn't expected the one ruling over the Black Forest to personally call us out.

“I don't know the details myself, but I don't think there's much to be worried about,” Gizelle added. “If they wanted to take action against you for misconduct, they would've done so ages ago.”

“You’re not wrong.”

If Gizelle’s words were true, and this being ruled over this forest, they would’ve surely noticed me the moment I popped up here. They were likely aware that I had a cabin and that I’d even tacked a few rooms onto it. If this master had any issues with me, they would’ve tried to keep me in check a long time ago—since they hadn’t done so, they’d more or less given me their approval.

Yet...

My thoughts drifted down a less optimistic path. *What if they just found out about my existence and wanted to tell me to leave the forest? What if they said they wouldn’t forgive me if I made anything more substantial than a well?* If it was the latter, I could simply stop digging, but if it was the former, I’d be in big trouble.

Guess I just need to hear them out first.

I nodded at Gizelle. “I understand. I’m not being called out right this instant, though, am I?”

The fairy shook her head. “I don’t think so. Quite honestly, I’m not sure when you’ll be summoned.”

“Huh?”

“I’m certain that you’ll receive a message soon,” she offered, “but I don’t have an exact time frame. I’m sorry.”

She sighed. *Yep, that’s the tough part of being in middle management. I’m not unfamiliar with the feeling.*

“It’s not your fault, Gizelle,” I replied. “I should be open, barring any extenuating circumstances.” I turned to my family. “You’re all okay with this, right?”

Everyone gave hesitant nods, and Gizelle breathed a sigh of relief.

“Then I shall come again,” she promised.

With a bow, she floated away and melted into the forest.

“That spooked me,” I said as I watched Gizelle disappear into the forest.

Samya raised an eyebrow. “So, what’s going on?”

“No clue.” I shook my head. “I only know that I’ll receive a notice one day.”

She followed my lead and shook her head too.

“But worrying won’t do anything,” I concluded. “Let’s just focus on digging the well. Gizelle said that it’s not a problem to continue our work.”

I heard everyone give their assent, and we soon moved back to our stations. As I continued to dig, I noticed that this clearing, where our cabin was situated, had us under direct sunlight. It was likely much warmer here than other places in the forest. Our one saving grace was the possible temperature difference when compared to other more open areas. At least convection was on our side—the breeze sure did help us out.

Lucy, perhaps remembering our “work,” had decided to once again offer her assistance, and Krul was pushing dirt to the side. The whole family continued to dig, and we did our best to not lose to Lucy.

It was just before evening, and our custom shovels were shucking away dirt with ease. The pit was getting pretty deep—much deeper than a rice field—and when I stood at the bottom, only the tops of my shoulders and my head peeked out. As such, I figured that we were probably making good strides. It had even gotten difficult to toss our dirt outside of the hole. *Maybe we’ll leave it on the side of the slope and have the others haul it out.*

Krul decided to take on this role using the small prototype cart I’d built a while back. She held the cart’s attached rope in her mouth and personally rolled it to us, displaying her eager motivation to help out. After we placed the dirt onto the cart, Krul pulled it out of the pit, giving a gentle “*Kululu.*” She stopped the cart near the small hill of dirt we’d accumulated—Rike and the others used hoes and other tools to clear the cart of soil. Then, Krul returned to Team Excavate for more soil, repeating the process. *She’s such a hard worker.*

The earth around our clearing turned out to be much tougher than I’d anticipated. Even a light tap to the side of the pit didn’t cause the dirt to crumble. Still, it was better to be safe than sorry.

“Maybe it’s best if I use wooden planks,” I said.

“Wooden planks?” Anne repeated.

I nodded. “The side with the gentle slope should be safe enough, but we should prevent the other steeper side from crumbling. If we’re in a deep hole and the dirt collapses on us, we wouldn’t have time to escape.”

We’d used the slope to repeatedly climb in and out of the pit, so it was tamped down and firm, and we’d carefully widened things so that the slope wouldn’t have any steep sides. Altogether, it seemed safe enough. The opposite side, however, was a large wall of dirt, and if all that soil collapsed on us at once, it would spell disaster. We were a good distance away from the terrace, but if the soil crumbled, it would also cause the ground beneath the terrace to become unstable. Thus, I figured it was best to add some planks for extra support.

Since the depth of the steep side had already been decided upon, I just needed planks of that length. *We might need more planks as we dig deeper, though.* I set Samya and Rike to the task of locating suitable lumber for the job. And, if we made the edges of the hole a little shallower, we could just cut the planks to fit that area. Any leftover wood could be used to stoke the fire or utilized in other projects—it certainly wouldn’t go to waste.

I took one plank and placed it vertically against the dirt wall near the bottom of the hole. Of course, it would’ve been meaningless if the plank fell on top of us, so I hammered in a long stake, which would hold the plank firmly against the dirt. Actually, it was less a stake and more a scrap of random wood, but I’d thought it might fit the bill.

And, as it turns out, it did. I hammered the stakes into the dirt, leaving a bit of space in between each one, then fastened them securely and placed my planks to create a wooden wall. *This should be able to prevent any collapses.* As the pit grew deeper, I had to continuously line the walls with more planks.

With this routine established, our work took on a rhythm. All we needed to do now was repeat the steps and keep digging.

By now, the sun was already setting, so I called it—we would continue tomorrow.

####

The next day, the blue skies were as clear as ever. When I'd wiped down my body the previous day after work, I'd noticed quite a bit of dirt caked on me. Since Krul and Lucy were likely just as dirty, I carefully washed them during our morning trip to the lake. I didn't know if I would ever do something so similarly dirty in the future, but if I had a well nearby, I figured I could remain much more clean and sanitary.

With that aspiration in mind, my shovel bit eagerly into the dirt. Everyone was concentrating today, and we were all engrossed in our digging. I thought that with a bit of luck and hard work, we might be able to find water today, so we were giving it our all. Before I knew it, the hole was deeper than Helen and I were tall, and Anne's head was about to disappear from view.

"I might just be imagining things, but it does feel a bit cooler now," I said.

"You think so too?" Helen asked.

She was digging faster than me, but I don't think this was a conscious effort to live up to her reputation as the Lightning Strike.

I nodded in reply. "I don't think I'm sweating as much as before."

"Yeah."

It's said that when one is near an aquifer or water, it feels much cooler. Underground water sources weren't affected much by the outside temperature, so that was apparently why they were always cool. But...we'd only dug about two meters deep. It seemed unlikely that we'd hit water so soon. And if there *was* water in such a shallow area, I would've noticed the damp soil when building the new slabs of foundation onto our home. *Moist dirt is a different color than the topsoil, if my memory serves me correctly.* Since damp soil was nowhere to be found, water was, at the very least, still a bit deeper.

We continued to dig without another word until the sun set. The hole was now about three meters deep, but there were no signs of water. *It'd be great if we could hit water at about five meters deep.* With that thought in mind, we decided to call it quits for the evening.

The next day, after we dug another meter deep, I felt something different at the tip of my shovel—the dirt felt a bit heavier than usual. When I raised my shovel for a closer inspection, I noticed that I had dug up some clay. In other words, with a bit more digging, we would likely find some water!

When I told Helen and Anne the good news, they started digging faster still. Since our goal was in sight, they couldn't help but grow eager. The sound of heavy soil being scooped up echoed in the air as we eventually started digging up a sand-like substance.

"Let's dig wider and see what happens," I suggested.

Once we started seeing more of this sand-like dirt, we decided to pause for a minute, climb out of the hole, and check out our progress. *The pit really does feel much cooler than the surface.* I'd barely even sweat while in the hole.

Since it was about time for lunch, our family decided to eat near the soon-to-be well. (We also wanted to make sure that Krul and Lucy didn't fall into it.)

About halfway through the meal, Samya called out, "Oh!"

We all glanced toward the pit and saw that something had changed—a bit of muddy water was now pooling at the bottom. Our family instantly erupted in a loud cheer. We still had much to do, but I breathed a sigh of relief knowing that we'd met one of our goals.

Chapter 2: The Well

We watched on until lunch ended—water continued to slowly collect in the bottom of the pit. Currently, it was only around half a bucket’s worth, and it looked muddy, so I didn’t even attempt to do anything with it. *Not exactly a lot, but it is there.* We perhaps had enough for Lucy’s drinking water for the day. *Or maybe not even that. It is summer after all.*

“We’ll dig a bit more before we secure the sides,” I said.

Lidy nodded. “Sounds good.”

We didn’t require as much as a strong-flowing spring would provide, but we needed a good amount of water, enough to make digging the well worth it. I wanted to dig a bit deeper and break into even more water. That way, we’d ideally always have enough for daily use. And then, there was the matter of the Japanese-style bath... Well, I wouldn’t say no to more water.

“Rike, could you and the rest gather some rocks?” I asked. “I think we’ll use them to form the bottom of the well.”

“Got it.”

“And after, we’ll have to fill in some parts of the pit that we dug up.”

For now, my goal wasn’t to create a perfect well, but to create a hole that could contain clear water. I had to make sure that trash like dead leaves couldn’t fall inside. We could place a lid over it for safety, and I considered making a roof and a well bucket at a later time.

Most of our family members were confident in their arm strength, so we probably didn’t need a pulley system—we could just tie the bucket to some rope and haul water out of the well manually. But, if strength was required, it would take energy. We’d be in trouble if collecting water sapped the vigor from our daily work. Most importantly, it was vital that people like Lidy (who didn’t have much arm strength) could draw out some water by themselves. I was sure that this situation would be extremely rare, but if Lidy was left at home alone

for some reason, it would be awful if she couldn't gather water from the well by herself. *This is an issue I'd like to solve pretty quickly.*

Nonetheless, our priority right now was to increase the water we could obtain. Helen, Anne, and I grabbed our shovels and headed back down into the pit.

"I've never excavated a historical place or ruins before, but I wonder if this is how it feels," I said.

"Oh, I have," Helen replied. "We've been digging for a really short period of time, but I think the feeling's kinda similar."

She puffed out her chest. As an active mercenary, she'd likely received similar requests from researchers and the like.

"Huh, that sounds pretty interesting."

"It'd be great if there was a convenient ruin nearby," she said, "but researchers always pick over places like that of their own accord."

"Makes sense."

It would've been interesting if some relatively safe ruins existed within the Black Forest—ones ideal for excavation—but I doubted that such a place existed. Barring beastfolk and fairies, we were probably the only people living here. Normal humans certainly didn't think it was safe to reside in the forest. As such, the likelihood of another person building something and letting it fall to ruin was practically nonexistent here, so stumbling onto some crumbling vestige of civilization near our home just wasn't going to happen. And, as Helen had stated earlier, if there had been a convenient ruin nearby outside of this forest, then researchers who looked into stuff for a living would've already discovered it.

I'm just a blacksmith living in a weird location. I was a bit interested in exploring the ruins of a different world, but I can wait until the opportunity presents itself.

Anne had been listening to our conversation, and at the mention of ruins, she perked up. "Speaking of, I've heard that a new ruin was found in the kingdom pretty recently."

Only then did the realization hit me—there *were* quite a few researchers wandering around the capital.

“Wait, could that be why there’s been a sudden influx of metals like adamantite and meghizium?” I asked.

“Ah, well, it’s a possibility. If so, it means they hit the jackpot in terms of ruins. But all of those precious metals would go to the kingdom, not onto the market or in the hands of merchants.”

I nodded. “Makes sense. I guess it all belongs to the kingdom.”

“I didn’t think there were still good ruins out there,” Helen said.

Each excavation site was different. Some were total losses with no potential value, while some were seen as jackpots, chock-full of gold, silver, and jewels (which had once probably been used for stuff like military funds). These “jackpot ruins” were generally quite large and filled with stagnant magical energy, meaning that numerous monsters prowled about. However, these jackpots had so much treasure that were well worth the risk—a nation could often line its treasury from even one such find.

“Which is why it’s difficult to limit the number of researchers seeking out ruins,” Anne explained. “The rewards can potentially be astounding.”

It seemed like the empire was also benefiting from these finds to a certain degree. But people had been on the hunt for ruins for a while. The big, easy-to-find ones had already been drained, and in recent years, it was becoming increasingly difficult to find ruins that were filled with valuables. *Maybe, next time we see Camilo, I’ll ask him where the nearest set of ruins is. I feel like he’d know.*

“Why don’t we begin digging again?” I suggested.

“All right,” Helen and Anne agreed.

I dug my shovel into the damp ground. As we continued to explore farther down through the sandy soil, more water seemed to seep out. Since the water was uncontained, there wasn’t any pressure or flow behind it—as such, it didn’t exactly spew out, but it seemed like we could get quite a lot anyway.

“This seems deep enough,” I declared. “Why don’t we create a frame for the well and see how it goes?”

Helen nodded. “Sounds good.”

The well pit as a whole had a rather large surface area, and we didn’t need that much space for collecting water. The section of ground in front of me seemed to be able to supply enough water, so I planned to demarcate this area for the well proper and fill in the rest of the pit with dirt. However, we didn’t want to bury the excess space just yet—on the off chance that it actually wouldn’t supply enough water, I didn’t want us to have to dig out the pit again, as that would only increase our workload.

So, I decided to frame up a sort of temporary holding tank—a cistern—for water. Its surface area wouldn’t take up the whole pit and would only be as large as I wanted the well to be. By observing the amount and rate at which water collected in the cistern, I could discern whether a well that large could collect enough water for us.

Because the size of the well could potentially need to be altered, I wouldn’t layer on the stone just yet. Instead, I repurposed some of the planks that’d originally been stabilizing the steep side of the hole (since we were no longer digging, I didn’t fear us being crushed under a collapse). Using these, we constructed a temporary cistern at the bottom of the hole, one that would be open and able to collect water on rainy days—a more permanent cistern would have planks that fit tightly together, but that wasn’t my goal here. I slotted the boards loosely next to one another, holding them in place with more stakes. *It’s honestly just a dirt stopper.*

Now, all I needed to do was wait and see how much water we’d get. Our well had ended up being around five meters deep. *Pretty impressive.* Back on Earth, this was equivalent to the height of a two-story building. *So, yeah, definitely impressive.*

I didn’t mind if there were leaks, or if the planks broke, but I just couldn’t shake off an uneasy feeling. *Is this really okay?* I stood at the bottom of the cistern, stewing in this apprehension for a moment. If someone fell from this height for whatever reason, it would be awful. Impact would cause grave injury

or, at worst, death. *We need a safety measure.*

I looked up at the others and called out, “I guess I’ll put up a fence until we can bury the rest of the pit.” They all agreed, and so, we started to build one. We gathered more planks and stakes and fit them together. I used two sets of planks: one as tall as my waist, and another as tall as my shins. We secured them snugly, so even if someone bumped into the fence with gusto, they wouldn’t break through and fall into the well. Lucy would also be protected by the shorter planks.

Working together, we finished the fence in a flash. Though it’d been quickly constructed, it was pretty sturdy—it didn’t even budge when I gently knocked into it.

“Everyone’s getting used to projects like this,” I remarked.

Anne chuckled. “After working on so many of them, it’d be weird if we *didn’t* get used to them.”

She was the seventh princess of the empire who was staying at our place as a “hostage,” but it seemed like she’d gotten accustomed to working with her hands. *She’ll have to return to the empire one day. I wonder if her people will react poorly to seeing a princess who’s used to tending fields and doing hard labor... Nah. In fact, even the emperor will probably approve—he’ll think it’s fine that his daughter can do the work of a commoner, at least to a certain degree.* I secretly chuckled at the idea of the emperor observing his daughter’s strength.

After we reached a stopping point, I turned to my family and told them that work was over for the day. We returned to our house, chatting about how much fun it’d been to work together and dig the well.

####

The next day, after I completed my morning routine, we all grabbed our tools once more and gathered in front of the incomplete well.

“Now then, I wonder how much water we’ve got.”

I peered down and saw that there was indeed water in our simple cistern. The water had been murky and brown, but it was now a lot clearer.

We all headed down into the pit. Essentially, we were just looking for quick confirmation that our project had succeeded—we'd still have to pile rocks at the bottom later. Technically, we didn't *all* need to go down, but everyone was curious about how the cistern was faring.

Since water wasn't gushing forth, there was probably no need for us to worry about it flooding the well. When we got to the bottom, it was clear that quite a bit had pooled up. I gently submerged my hand, and the water felt cold to the touch.

I'd brought a wooden bucket with me, and I scooped up some water. When I peered inside, I could see the bottom of the bucket, proving that the water was clear. I showed the water to Lidy, who fidgeted for a short while before scooping some of the liquid into her mouth.

We all stared at her nervously. If the water was no good after all this digging, I wouldn't know what to do. I understood that it was a bit too late to be worried about that, but I couldn't help but feel anxious.

Lidy swallowed and glanced around us. I felt like I heard someone gulp anxiously.

She smiled gently.

"The amount and quality of the water are both fine," she said. "We should proceed."

There wasn't any loud cheering like when we'd first seen a puddle of water at the bottom of the hole, but we all high-fived each other. Our next major celebration would be when the well was fully completed.

"All right! Let's stack some rocks!" I said. "Then we gotta fill in this pit."

"You're raring to go," Samya observed.

I flexed my biceps and showed her my eagerness. Everyone laughed. Though we were in the middle of the dangerous Black Forest, we all peacefully went back to work. Before I lined the bottom with rocks, I used my bucket to scoop out all the water in the temporary cistern. It felt like a waste to throw it all away, so I poured it into some water jugs. Krul, who was in high spirits, happily carried the jugs out of the hole.

Once much of the water was removed, I dismantled the temporary cistern. As it'd been bare-bones, I was able to take it apart in no time. *And we can reuse these materials.* We then piled rocks in the bottom of the pit, stacking them up in a wall-like fashion to create a permanent stone cistern (the bottom of the well) in the same shape and size as the temporary wooden one. This was quite a cheery affair, with comments like “How’s this rock?” and “Nah, this shape fits better” interspersed among the conversations. With all of us working together, the stones quickly piled up.

I figured that if we lined the bottom of the well with rocks, it would allow small gaps and pathways for the stored water to flow. While the quantity and quality of the water seemed to not be an issue, I didn’t think it’d be best if the water remained stagnant. Abundant water was great, and having a free-flowing source only added to that—with the rocks placed like this, the water would always be moving. Besides, if there were any inconveniences as a result of this type of construction (like the rocks not keeping enough water contained in the bottom of the well), I could add a layer of tight-fitting wooden planks over the stones, which would decrease the amount of water flowing outward.

With the stone portion of the well built, the space for the well had been demarcated. Now, we had to fill in the unused part of the pit. We dumped in the sand and dirt we’d dug up, packing it around the bottom of the well. Once we added enough dirt to reach the height of the stacked stones, we could construct the rest of the vertical well shaft using wooden planks. I didn’t expect to have water stored at the top of the well, so having a stone bottom and a wooden shaft was fine—the wood’s primary purpose was to keep the sides of the well from collapsing.

We added dirt to the pit up until the height of the stacked stones, then called it a day. That amount of progress was more than enough. And, even without being totally finished, the well could now be used as a source of water. *Though, it might be a hassle to descend into the pit every morning to get water. Didn’t I see something like this on TV back in Japan? Also, the deeper the well is, the harder it’ll be to scoop out water. I should create some tools soon to mitigate that problem.*

The next morning, I went to take a look at the well before I started my

morning walk to the lake. As expected, water had accumulated, and the water level sat below the height of the stacked stones. We had plenty in the well, so there may have been no need to go to the lake, but my morning routine allowed Krul and Lucy to walk outside, and they couldn't wash their bodies by the cabin.

Though I was constantly on my feet for work, I thought it was best to keep my walking routine as well. Above all, my two daughters were eagerly waiting for this daily commute. Krul had two water jugs tied together with a rope slung around her neck, and Lucy was beside her, furiously wagging her tail and carrying a smaller jug in her mouth. I couldn't disappoint my daughters by telling them that we were no longer going to the lake every day. Frankly, I didn't have it in me to say those harsh words.

And so, I internally pledged to continue going to the lake every morning—I'd probably do it until my legs could no longer take me there. *By that time, maybe Krul will drag a cart behind her and bring me to the lake.* With my mind filled with thoughts of simple happiness, my two daughters and I started our morning walk.

Once the family was up and ready to work, we divided into two groups: one that would make a wooden fence, and one that would bury the unused portion of the pit. Planks would be placed vertically atop the stone portion of the well to form the shaft, and stakes would be inserted to fit them tightly together as we worked our way up. We needed to be much more precise here than we had been with the temporary cistern—otherwise, the planks wouldn't be able to hold back the filled-in dirt, and the whole well could collapse. Luckily, my cheats allowed me to cut and place these planks with ease.

I left Anne and Helen to construct the fence. They were chosen not because of their strength, but for their height. Since they could build the fence up to a certain height without the help of stepladders, I thought it would make our lives much easier. The rest of us would tackle filling in the pit. By pure chance, Helen and Anne wouldn't be filling in the hole they'd excavated, but I thought that might just be the desired outcome anyway.

We continued work on the well while also managing to sandwich in an order

for Camilo. (According to him, “All’s right with the world,” and it seemed that the newlyweds were also quite happy. This was good news—I couldn’t stand it when problems popped up so frequently.)

Over the course of a few days, we finished constructing the well’s shaft and buried the rest of the pit. We built the top of the well (the portion that stuck up above the ground where buckets were kept) and even crafted a wooden lid for the top so no one would accidentally fall inside. A bucket tied with some rope was placed on the side. While there wasn’t a pulley or a roof for the well, it still looked splendid in its own right. We all gave a round of applause upon its completion, and Krul and Lucy trilled and barked with joy.

“I guess we made it in time,” I mumbled, wiping away some of my sweat.

As I looked around, I saw that the leaves of the trees were greener than ever—a clear sign that we were in the middle of summer. If we’d been hoping to finish by the beginning of summer, we were a little too late, but it wasn’t like temperatures would suddenly drop by tomorrow. We’d dug the well in time to enjoy cool water in the midst of summer.

“You should do the first scoop, Eizo,” Samya encouraged.

“Thanks for the offer—I think I will.”

After removing the lid, I threw the bucket down into the well. *Splash!* I wiggled the rope to scoop some water into the bucket before pulling it up. Its weight made the rope go taut, and after I tugged for a little while, the bucket appeared before my eyes, filled to the brim with clear water.

“There’s still some stuff I want to add to it, but for now, the well’s finished,” I announced.

Lucy approached my side, so I splashed her with some water from the bucket. She seemed to like that and she shook her body, splattering water everywhere. Shrieks of surprise and joy filled the air.

In any case, it seemed we had no need to worry about our water supply in the future. Of course, this didn’t mean that we could waste as much water as we liked, but I was grateful to have a source of cool water in a world where air conditioners didn’t exist. Samya wanted to try scooping up some water, so I

handed her the bucket.

As I watched her tugging up the water, I said, “Though I didn’t really expect it, I am glad that *hot* water didn’t spew out.”

Samya paused her rope-pulling. “Does that ever happen?”

Hmm. If Samya doesn’t know about that phenomenon, then I guess the Black Forest doesn’t have any natural hot springs.

I nodded. “I don’t know if there’s any in the kingdom, but in the Nordic region, there are places where you can get pretty hot water from the ground. We could even take a bath in it.”

“Huh.”

Samya wasn’t too keen on water. I wasn’t sure if this was due to her catlike traits or her personal preference. Back on Earth, I’d seen videos of tigers swimming around in lakes, so I assumed that to be the norm here as well. I’d never seen it for myself, though, so I couldn’t be certain. At the very least, she cleaned herself every day. Diana had told me that, so I was confident it was true.

“We have hot water like that in the empire,” Anne said, watching Samya’s progress with interest. “I even went there once. They said the hot water was good for wounds or certain illnesses, and if there was a place you wanted healed, you could pour it over that area.”

“I would be tempted to just dunk my entire body into the water,” I replied.

“There are springs reserved only for the imperial family. I’m sure you could bathe there.”

If it’s reserved for the imperial family, that implies... Well, she’s smiling, so she must be joking. She’s kidding...right?

I forced a smile. “If we all decide to go there as a family, I’ll make a request.”

“Sure,” Anne replied with another smile.

####

The next day, we made the decision to add tools and equipment to the well.

The sooner the better was the general consensus, so we decided to work on that first before fulfilling our order for Camilo.

The deciding factor for this choice apparently came yesterday after some swordsmanship practice—my family members reported that it was refreshing to have access to the cool water right after exercise. I decided to make the pulley and the bucket while the rest of my family was tasked with creating a roof over the top of the well. My cheats *could* be used for stuff like this outside the realm of smithing, but they wouldn't be as good.

I decided to make the entire contraption out of wood because steel was much too heavy. Since I planned on making a beam on top of the well to hang the bucket, I prioritized lightness over durability. I thought back to my previous world—while wooden pulleys required some work and maintenance over the years, they more or less withstood the test of time and didn't break easily. Above all, wood was easy to fix and materials were all around us.

So, I selected a few blocks of wood from the pile outside that seemed to be a perfect size and then got started. I decided to work outside of the forge—it was much too hot to remain indoors.

Put simply, I needed a thick double-cross frame with a disc in the middle (which contained the gears to spin the entire contraption). All I'd need were my cheats, a blade, and a chisel to swiftly create this mechanism. I gazed at the rest of my family, who were energetically putting up pillars and cutting out planks for the roof.

All right, Eizo, time to get to work.

I was in the shade. It was still hot outside, but because I felt the occasional breeze, it was much better than staying indoors. Everyone else was working under the shade of the terrace and our cabin, so I wasn't hogging all of it. Thanks to my abilities, I created the framework pretty quickly. The entire mechanism wasn't too complex—I just needed to make sure the pieces fit together well and wouldn't easily fall apart. I also opened a hole at the top of the mechanism to make it easier to remove or add a roof.

"Kululu."

I looked up when I heard Krul's voice and saw that they were putting up some

pillars. They'd divvied up the work amongst themselves—the ones not supporting the pillars were digging holes or cutting out joists. *It's only natural they'd get used to this kinda work if they keep doing it.* It seemed the group could tackle this project quite easily. I decided not to think about why I expanded my cabin so much that my family would be used to working like this.

After I created a large circular disc for the pulley, I added my axle through the frame. I spun it around and utilized my cheats to refine the circular shape. Once that was done, I carved a U-shaped incision all around the outer circumference of the disc—this was where the rope for the well bucket would rest. I'd just wrapped my rope around the incision when Lucy came over and started sniffing the pulley.

"You curious?" I asked.

"Arf!"

She gave a gentle bark. Recently, Lucy's curiosity had only seemed to grow, and she often went around sniffing items that everyone touched, or gingerly touching them with her front paws. Since she was smart, if I ever told her that anything was dangerous and she shouldn't approach it, she obediently backed away. Even if I wasn't watching over her every move, she never put anything in her mouth unless she received explicit permission.

Especially within the forge, there were numerous dangerous items (or to Lucy, items that would cause her to receive a scolding if she went near them). Our pup had apparently gotten the hint and didn't approach the forge much, though it could've simply been that it was too hot for her.

Since the pulley wasn't dangerous, I let her do as she wished. She gently rotated the pulley with her snout. Apparently pleased, she continued to turn it with her front paw. After she did a few more spins (looking like she was about to dig something up), she seemed satisfied and ran back to the well roof.

Yep, she's still a kid, all right. As I watched my adorable daughter leave, I got to work making the bucket. This was much simpler than the pulley, and I finished it much quicker. My dagger, which could easily cut through logs, combined with my cheats to make the task a cinch. I made two buckets—one for each side of the rope. The bucket we were currently using was something

that we'd just had lying around, and I didn't want to attach it to the well because if we ended up requiring a bucket for something else (say, in the forge), we'd be short one. This wouldn't be an issue if we had time to disconnect a bucket from the well, but if we were in a rush, it was best to just have enough buckets, each with a specific purpose.

Meanwhile, the pillars for the roof had been secured, and once a joist and a rafter were added, it would be done. Unlike our cabin, sheds, or storage spaces, we didn't need to worry too much about it being waterproof. We had a simple roof that was just planks of wood tied together, but it was effective. If there were any issues, we could just fix it at a later date.

I placed a log vertically through the joist above the well and suspended the pulley. After grabbing the rope we'd been using for the well thus far, I released the bucket from its knots, inserted the rope through the pulley, and tied both ends to each bucket. Even if one bucket accidentally took all the rope, it wouldn't cause the other bucket to fall into the well, rope and all, and become difficult to retrieve.

Since this was a fixed pulley and not a movable type, it wouldn't decrease the workload to lift the bucket, but it also wasn't solely dependent on arm strength. One could simply use their weight to scoop up the water, and I guessed that this would be a bit easier.

"Aaand I think I'm done," I said.

We now had a pulley and a roof. The sun had begun to set, and a magnificent well sat right before our eyes. The well was beside the terrace, and our cabin and forge were just a short distance away. I was starting to have a lovely residence that seemed unfitting for the middle of the Black Forest.

"I don't think we ever had a shortage of water when drawing from the lake, but now we're prepared should anything happen," I said.

"Yep."

It's better to be prepared than not. Being well prepared gave me the belief that I could tackle any problem, and that put my mind at ease. In order to live a stress-free life of normalcy, it was better that we be ready for anything that could come our way. And now, with the completion of the well, we were able to

have a reliable source of water. It couldn't be helped that my family was now talking about various plans that they had in mind.

"Hello."

Suddenly, Gizelle's voice echoed through the air. With all the work we'd been doing, I'd almost forgotten about our last chat. She had said something along the lines of "The higher-ups would like to have a meeting with you." She hadn't used those words exactly, but that'd been the general gist. At least, I thought so.

"Hello," I replied. "Are you here because of what we discussed before?"

Gizelle gave an apologetic nod. "They would like to meet you right now, it seems. Are you able to spare some time?"

"Sure. We just finished much of our work, so I think we can all go along with you."

I glanced back at my family and everyone nodded. Just in case, Rike and Lidy went inside the cabin to grab a lantern. *Would we get teleported or something?* I'd only been using minor spells in this world, and I'd never seen anyone use such magnificent magic. *I feel like the attack spell that Lidy used against the hobgoblin was the most impressive.* I couldn't help but feel a little excited.

Once Rike and Lidy came out with the lanterns, Gizelle spoke in the same ringing voice, but her tone was louder and clearer.

"It seems they're fine. You may come out now," the fairy said.

Come out now? Wait, that means... I realized that I'd misunderstood Gizelle's words. She had said that the master of the forest would like to meet us, but she'd never stated that the master had *called* for us.

In other words...

In the next moment, a large flash of green light appeared in front of us, and a clothed woman gracefully emerged from the breathtaking glow. Her green hair had slight waves, and her skin was pale. She kept her eyes closed.

With the light behind her, her illuminated figure made it seem like she was enveloped in a divine aura. On Earth, if one were asked to envision a Western

goddess, nine out of ten imaginations would come up with something like her.

She slowly opened her eyes, and her green irises fixed on me.

“I am grateful that you have heeded my request, human child,” she said.

Was this her majestic aura? I wouldn't have called it overpowering, but it made me want to willingly follow her requests. While I was lost in my thoughts, Gizelle reacted differently.

“Heh heh,” the fairy giggled.

She immediately fell silent, but I saw her shoulders trembling. The goddess (or so I called her) looked at Gizelle dubiously.

“Whatever is the matter, fairy chief?” the goddess asked.

Unable to contain her laughter, Gizelle answered, still giggling, “These people are always like this. They're not a problem. They won't be bothered or be inclined to blab to others.”

“Is that so? Then I suppose I can take that offer.”

The goddess(?) rolled her shoulders, and we could only stare in shock. She noticed our gaze and bowed her head.

“Thank you for giving me your time today.” She spoke in a highly dignified manner. “My name is Lluisa, and I am the master of the Black Forest. I am what people call a dryad.”

All I could muster was “Oh, hi.”

Chapter 3: The Number One Client in the World

Within this world, there was a dense area of wooded wildland known as the Black Forest. The ancient trees of this forest boasted thick trunks covered in black bark, and they stood tall and proud, making the area seem dark even in the middle of the day. Bears, boars, wolves, and other dangerous creatures prowled about, and even monsters made the occasional appearance. People claimed that if a normal person carelessly entered the forest, they would never be seen again, which had caused the area to earn its ominous nickname.

And the ruler of the forest was apparently...this lady. She seemed completely different from what I'd imagined—she didn't look like a "cackling master of the dangerous forest" at all. It seemed like she was also aware of the image she projected, since this (self-proclaimed) spirit had first tried to speak in an intimidating tone.

Lluisa took notice of our shock. "Sorry, have I surprised you all?" she asked.

"U-Uh, sorta," I replied.

It didn't seem right to awkwardly deny her claims, so I gave an honest response and a nod. *I'm meeting yet another woman.*

Lluisa smiled and chuckled. "I may not look it, but I'm the Dragon of the Land. To be precise, I'm just a small fragment of that being. There are many of us—pieces of the dragon—who present ourselves in front of others like what I'm currently doing. Those of us who live in forests are known as dryads."

It seemed she was just introducing herself, but her response seemed to be in answer to my thoughts. *Can she read my mind?* Samya could also smell a person's extreme emotions, so it wouldn't be odd if this Dragon of the Land could do something similar. Lluisa's title was in reference to the dragon who was said to make up the land of this world. It was widely believed that the Dragon of the Land had fallen into a deep slumber many years ago, and the current world had been built on top of it. According to my installed knowledge, this legend was seen as common sense to the people of this world.

Credibility of this legend aside, this world's gods had arrived after the land's creation, meaning that they were immigrants and administrators. In other words, Lluisa was part of the original being that made up this world. *So the deity of this land is a goddess as well...* This was similar to my previous world, where the term Mother Earth was used often, and it implied that a woman had blessed the planet's soil. Of course, back then, I'd never had the chance to actually confirm if this phrase was a figure of speech—was Mother Earth really a lady? In this world, that was apparently clear. Though she was a spirit, Lluisa had a small fragment that made her akin to a god, or perhaps even a greater deity.

Right? That's what it seems like, right? My family and I don't know how to react. When I glanced over, I saw that two of us seemed rather calm: Krul and Lucy.

Lluisa approached my two daughters and began to pet them. "These two really are cute up close." Krul and Lucy happily responded to her touch, so I was confident that the dryad didn't mean any harm.

Petting my daughters probably wasn't her goal for today. Still feeling awkward, I timidly cleared my throat. "Um, excuse me."

"Ah, apologies. Let's get to business, shall we?" Lluisa stopped and turned toward us. "I'll be frank with you—I'd like to make a request."

"A...request?" When I saw her smile, I felt a bit of fear, though she didn't exactly look intimidating.

"This forest, compared to other places, has a high amount of concentrated magical energy. You know that, don't you?" Lluisa asked.

"I do. I found that out not too long ago."

I'd only learned of it when Lidy had told me. Samya, Rike, and Diana weren't too knowledgeable about magic, and they were clueless when it came to the density of magical energy in this forest.

"Well, the high magic concentration is because I'm here, and I'm a part of the Dragon of the Land," Lluisa confessed. "But let's set that aside for now."

I wasn't sure about the true nature of magical energy, but I was aware that

the law of conservation of energy didn't seem to apply here. Perhaps the power of the Dragon of the Land played a role in that. *I probably don't need any more information about this for now, though.*

I just stayed silent and nodded.

"The thicker the magic in the air, the more likely it is to remain stagnant, which results in the creation of monsters," Lluisa explained. "I'm sure both you—Eizo and Lidy—are aware of this."

I nodded once more. "We are." The concept of stagnant magic had been a huge part of the campaign that had introduced me to Lidy in the first place, and that same campaign had ultimately led her to come live with me.

"Thanks to Gizelle and her fairies, we're able to suppress the creation of monsters quite a bit," Lluisa said. "However, we're now in a spot of trouble."

"A spot of trouble?"

Lluisa nodded. "I'll give it to you straight—I need you all to subjugate a certain monster for me."

I heard Lidy gulp at these words.

When told of the monster subjugation, I thought back to my incident with the hobgoblin. My battle with the big black bear had certainly been dangerous, but the hobgoblin had been a different beast entirely. Despite soldiers around me helping, if I'd made one wrong move, I could've died. I'd only been able to handle it with a bit of luck. I was sure that Lidy's nerves also twinged when she remembered that battle.

"A monster?" I asked.

"Precisely. Ah, but I don't mean Lucy, of course." Lluisa glanced over at our pup. "Not you."

Lucy wagged her tail happily and barked in response. *If the issue was Lucy, I would've resisted, Dragon of the Land or not. I would've fought back, even if I couldn't so much as scratch my opponent with Diaphanous Ice.*

Regardless of my family's history of defeating monsters, I felt like the master of the forest or the other administrators of this area were better suited for

taking out a corrupted magical beast.

“Why can’t you or Gizelle handle this monster?” I asked.

“If I used my power, it would change the topography of this area,” Lluisa replied. “Of course, if push comes to shove, I won’t hold back, but that’s more of a last resort. Gizelle and her fairies aren’t suited for combat.”

Gizelle gave an apologetic bow. *Nah, if that’s the case, then I don’t mind. It can’t be helped.* There was always the right man for the right job. Lluisa was probably too powerful and unable to hold back her strength. Even if she meant to simply flick her opponent away, she might end up creating a ten-meter-long crater as a result. In that case, her reluctance to fight was understandable. However, as she’d stated, if she was left with no other choice, she wouldn’t hold back.

“Makes sense,” I said. “Can I inquire as to why you didn’t ask the beastfolk?”

“I’ll be frank...” Lluisa paused for a beat. “It’s because you all are the strongest within this forest.”

The dryad gazed at me. Barring Rike, who wasn’t adept at fighting, I had Helen the Lightning Strike by my side, and though I was a blacksmith, I was able to hold my own against her (at least for a little while). I also had an excellent swordswoman, Diana, who’d earned the nickname the Rose of the Duel Grounds, and Anne, a half-giant who could trump us all in pure power as she swung her greatsword. Combined with Samya, a beastfolk with excellent scouting skills, and Lidy, an elf who was proficient with magic and the bow, the only thing we lacked was a healer. All of us together could likely chase off a military unit if needed. It might be a tough battle if an enemy came at us in overwhelming numbers, but for any other scenario, Lluisa was right to rely on us.

“Okay.” I nodded. “I’ll hear you out.” *I want to believe that she came to us because she thought we were fit for the role.*

Lluisa gave a carefree smile. “Then allow me to explain. Magical beasts can be roughly divided into two groups: living creatures that are imbued with stagnant magical energy and magical creatures born out of this energy. Both you and Lidy are aware, correct?”

“Right,” I replied.

Lluisa gave a satisfied nod. If the creature was in the first group, they would likely keep the traits of the being that they originally were. But beings of the second group, those born of stagnant magic, seemed to simply resent living creatures. *Or so I’ve heard.* The rest of my family apparently weren’t aware of this fact, and they listened with interest.

“I see,” said Anne. She seemed especially intrigued by this topic. As a princess, she likely hadn’t needed to worry too much about the differences between magical beasts. *I guess the empire didn’t educate her on this topic.*

“This time around, I need you to subjugate a creature in the latter group,” Lluisa said. “A powerful monster has emerged, one that resides in the depths of a cave. While you need to go deep inside, the path leading to it is pretty wide, and the cave has areas where you can fight while maintaining a formation.”

“Are you sure we shouldn’t head there immediately?” I asked. “If something so powerful has appeared, there’s a chance of a mass outbreak of monsters, isn’t there? If so, it’d be quite troublesome to stop them all.”

Lidy gave a firm nod of agreement. I remembered this bit of knowledge from when I’d served in the campaign as part of the expedition unit. After all, a corrupted swarm of monsters born of stagnant magic was the reason the elves had to leave their home village behind.

And our scenario was even more extreme because the monster was inside the Black Forest. Even if a subjugation unit could be formed, it would probably be difficult to dispatch here. A war of attrition would ensue, and that would likely wear down the soldiers. *That’s likely why we’re receiving this request.*

“I see.” Lluisa nodded. “So you’re aware of that too. For whatever reason, an outbreak of monsters hasn’t occurred yet. Judging by the magical energy I’ve sensed, perhaps only one powerful monster has emerged in lieu of a mass spawning. In any case, while we don’t have all the time in the world, it’s not of utmost urgency—if you don’t slay the beast tomorrow, it’s not like all will be lost.”

“Hm.” I placed a hand on my chin.

“I’d be ecstatic if you could accept this request, but what do you say?”

If it wasn’t a mass outbreak, there was no need for immediate panic. *No matter how powerful this monster is, if it’s alone, there’s a limit to the damage it can cause.* Still, this didn’t mean that we could just leave it be—it would, without a doubt, continue to wreak havoc if given the chance. If this was simply the course of nature, there wasn’t much we could do, but seeing as the master of the forest had personally come to us to make this request, that likely wasn’t the case.

I was indebted to this forest (or so I’d like to think), so I was willing to accept. However, I wasn’t sure if I could drag my family into danger.

From behind me, Diana spoke up, “You’re planning on saying yes, aren’t you?”

I turned around and met her slightly weary expression. As I looked at my family, I saw that they were all sighing.

“You’re probably thinking something along the lines of ‘I’m indebted to this forest,’ no?” Diana asked.

I jolted. “Ugh.” She’d seen right through me. “I’m sorry for always dragging you all into these messes.”

“Bit too late for that, don’tcha think?” Samya grinned and slapped my back. It hurt a little, but I felt like she was pushing me forward. *That’s a relief.*

“We’re all part of your family, and we all live in the Black Forest,” Rike added, a smile on her face.

Everyone else nodded. *All right, then, I’ve made my choice.*

“Will you accept my request?” Lluisa asked.

“I’m sure you heard us, but yes,” I replied. “We accept.”

“Great. Thank you.”

The dryad seemed relieved from the bottom of her heart. It may have been a bit too early for me to judge, but she seemed like an unexpectedly honest person. *Now then, we’ve got to make preparations.* We probably didn’t have a week to dillydally, but I wanted to at least take the entirety of tomorrow to get

ready. It was much better for us to remain calm and be prepared for any issue that could come our way instead of hastily running out and getting into trouble.

“Do you know who our opponent will be?” I asked.

There was a beat of silence. *If our foe is overwhelmingly dangerous, even for a fighting force like my family, then it might be best for Lluisa to handle it, even if that requires changing the topography of this forest.*

“A troll,” Lluisa answered. “They’re a subspecies of ogre.”

A troll, huh? Back on Earth, I think they were known for their size and power, but they were weak to sunlight or something. What about the ones from Finland that look like hippos? Are they fairies? Spirits? They’ve got “troll” in their names too, but I guess I can disregard them. Judging by how Lluisa decided to dispatch us, the “strongest within the forest,” against this troll, it was safe to assume that they were a troublesome existence in this world too.

“What kind of characteristics does it have?” I asked. “Any strengths? Weaknesses?”

“Let’s see,” Lluisa murmured. She tapped a finger against her chin. As a fragment of the Dragon of the Land, she should’ve been closer to a spirit than a person, but her gestures and mannerisms seemed very human. *Or maybe she’s just matching us.*

“It’s large and powerful, but weak under sunlight,” Lluisa said. “I think those should count as characteristics.”

“I see.”

Some stories in my previous world told of trolls turning to stone beneath sunlight. I think a globally popular manga series even explored this vulnerability with demons. However, it seemed that the trolls of this world only weakened under the sun.

What about bringing in a ton of shields with mirror finishes, reflecting daylight into the cave, luring the troll out, and subjecting it to the sun? Nah, that method was much too costly. It might’ve been a good plan if parts of the troll’s body would petrify—that would sharply decrease its abilities—but for a simple strength debuff, it just wasn’t worth it. *Or maybe I should bet it all on that. No, I*

shouldn't jump to conclusions right now. We'll have all of tomorrow to plan, so I'll think of something after careful thought. A few brute-force plans crossed my mind too, but I decided to look the other way for now. I felt like we should call it a day.

I turned my attention back to Lluisa. "Could I ask for you to come back here in two days' time?"

"Of course. Again, thank you," she replied. "I'll see you in two days."

At that, the dryad enveloped herself in a bright light and disappeared just as abruptly as she had emerged...or so I thought. Suddenly, she popped into existence once more, right in front of me, and beckoned for me to approach her. I obediently followed her request.

"Eizo," she whispered in my ear, "I know why you're here and where you're from. In other words, the Dragon of the Land knows. And yet, you haven't been chased away from this world. *That's our answer.* And you're free to take it."

For a split second, I didn't know how to react. All I could comprehend was that she'd told me something extremely important.

"Th-Thank you," I replied with a slight bow.

I wasn't sure if I was supposed to hear these words in this current situation, but it seemed like, for whatever reason, I wouldn't be ejected from this world. That was a bit of a relief.

"Now then," Lluisa said with a nod.

She waved toward us, then cloaked herself in light and disappeared for good this time. We were left with Gizelle.

"I'd like to give you my well-wishes too," Gizelle said apologetically while bowing her head. "It would've been great if we fairies could handle this by ourselves."

"No worries at all," I replied. "There's always the right man for the right job, and this kind of work is our forte." My main job was as a blacksmith, but it seemed what we did as our side business (sort of) honed our attack powers quite a lot.

“Thank you,” Gizelle replied, lowering her head once more. “Then please excuse me.” With that, she floated away. *I think she said it was improper for fairies to appear and disappear like Lluisa.*

“All right, then let’s eat!” I called out.

I was feigning energy, but as I spoke loudly, words of agreement quickly bounced back. We all headed into our cabin, putting the nighttime forest behind us, and closed the door.

The main topic during dinner was indeed the troll. While details of our battle would be hashed out tomorrow, it was only natural that we would be talking about the particulars of this beast.

“Eizo, you and Lidy have subjugated a monster before, haven’t you?” Helen asked.

“We have.” I nodded. “It was just before we went to help you out of the empire.” That felt like ages ago, but in reality, not much time had passed since then.

“How was that experience?”

“We had to handle a mass outbreak. While Count Eimoor’s battalion was handling the small fry, our unit aimed for the head of the enemy forces. Lidy used her magic, but when that beast got backup, I felt like I had to prepare myself for all sorts of eventualities.”

“Even you?”

“Yep. It was a tough battle.” I felt like that fight had been a close call. I hadn’t sustained any major injuries, mostly because I’d been told that even a single blow could kill me—if I had fractured a bone, I would’ve swiftly felt the curtains close on my second life. So, I’d dodged enemy attacks like my life depended on it.

“I guess the good news is that monsters don’t have a stench,” I remarked.

Corrupted monsters created out of stagnant magical energy weren’t exactly living organisms. They could growl and breathe, but blood didn’t flow in their

veins. This meant that we couldn't hope to bleed one to death or smoke it out of its den. But if it didn't have a body or metabolism to sustain it, a beast wouldn't have a strong odor. Back on Earth, some works depicted trolls that were terribly stinky. *If a troll was (somehow) aware of that characteristic, wouldn't they try to kill themselves?* As it was, no such trait was present in the trolls of this world.

However, this didn't mean that the monsters had no smell whatsoever. When a monster defeated its prey, its victim gave off an almost rotten stench. I wasn't sure about the current state of the troll we had to face, but if it had only recently emerged, then hopefully it hadn't killed much, so the smell of its den shouldn't be absolutely unbearable...or so I hoped. When I mentioned this tidbit, as I'd expected, the other ladies (except for Lidy) seemed to feel a bit more reassured, and their excitement grew.

"But we won't know what it's like unless we see it for ourselves," I said. "Seems like Lluisa doesn't know either."

If there'd been a bestiary or some guide for me to check, I would've taken a look at it beforehand, but of course, nothing like that existed here. So, we'd skip rehearsal and go straight to the real thing. Besides, if I did read a guide that happened to be wrong, things would be much more dire than a simple "I'll sue you for property damages and charge you with presenting information under false pretenses!" *I guess reading the guide comes with pros and cons.*

"We should discuss those details tomorrow," I said. "And once the sun rises, we should develop a formation for the fight."

"Yeah," Helen agreed with a nod.

Dinner was cleared away quietly.

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The next morning, I undertook my usual morning routine of carrying water from the lake. The creation of the well hadn't halted my habits. It was a good excuse for me to stretch my legs, and I only planned on relying on well water once we ran out of lake water. That way, we wouldn't have to worry about lacking water when we needed it.

When I peered into the well, I saw that we had quite a bit—there seemed to be no need to worry about our well drying up, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Outside was Lucy, energetically wagging her tail as a greeting. She carried a small water jug around her neck. *I might just be imagining things, but I feel like the jug looks a tad smaller on her than it used to. Lucy's getting bigger.* She no longer looked like a puppy, but even so, I found her adorable. I petted her head and she wagged her tail even faster. It seemed like Krul had grown as well. *Is Krul still a child?* She carried two large water jugs around her neck with ease and nuzzled me with her head.

“I know, I know. You’re a good girl too.”

“Kulululululu.”

I stroked her head and took my two daughters to fetch some water. Once that chore was complete, I had everyone gather their equipment and assemble on the terrace. We were the only “garrison” in this forest, so even Helen with her lightweight armor looked rather bulky. Next was Diana, who wore a breastplate and shin guards. No one else had any armor, and our lack of defense was a bit concerning. Still, I was confident that our current equipment put us at the top of the Black Forest in terms of power. *But...*

“Maybe I should’ve made some armor,” I said.

Diana gave a small sigh. “We won’t wear it much, though.”

“Right.”

Armor wasn’t really useful to have in the forest. It wasn’t completely meaningless, but mobility was the priority instead of defense. When Helen went out to hunt, she didn’t wear any armor either.

It might’ve been useful for our trips to the city, but we only went there once every two weeks for a few hours. *It doesn’t seem worth it, right?* So, I’d never gotten around to making armor for our family. However, it seemed obviously necessary for fighting against the troll. *If there are instances in the future when we have to fight a large, corrupted black bear, it seems wise to prepare some armor for everyone. Krul and Lucy included, of course.* But there was nothing I could do at the moment. These thoughts would need to wait for another day, and I had to focus on the issue in front of us.

“We were told that the inside of the cave is pretty spacious,” I said.

“Are we going to bring the entire family along?” Anne asked.

I folded my arms in front of me. “I did think about leaving Krul, Lucy, and Rike here.” Rike looked at me. “But in terms of carrying around and transporting luggage, as well as sending people back should any of us get wounded, it’s better to have more people. Krul is the most efficient at carrying stuff anyway. I think we need them all to come along, even if we have them wait at the entrance of the cave.”

“Which means...”

I nodded. “Even if we just leave Lucy here, I feel like she’d tag along, and in an absolute worst-case scenario, we can’t just keep her tied up. I think we *all* need to go.”

Had I left Lucy and tied her to a pillar, I felt like Gizelle and the other fairies would take good care of her, but there were no guarantees of that. And it didn’t feel right to just leave my daughter in their care.

“So the entire family from Forge Eizo’s heading out?!” Samya asked, leaning forward. She seemed happy that everyone was going together. Out of everyone, Samya and Rike had been with me the longest.

“Yep,” I replied with a nod.

Our entire family would go. They were under my care, and I provided for them by making a living as a blacksmith—I was responsible for their safety and comfort. This time around, though, I’d need to protect everyone more directly. But, my own fighting capabilities aside, I’d been a *programmer* in my former world. And in this one, I was a mere blacksmith, so I lacked definitive power.

I lowered my head. “I know it’s too late to say this, but I need you all to help me out. I don’t think I can handle this alone.”

Silence filled the air, but it was soon drowned out by overlapping voices.

“You really *are* too late. That was my goal from the start.”

“We’ll be fine! I know I’m not much of a fighter, but I’ll do anything else!”

“That’s right. You should rely on us during these times, no?”

“I can support everyone as well. You have nothing to fear.”

“Who do you think I am? I’m actually a bit excited to fight again, so don’t worry about it.”

“I’ve always wanted to experience a battle like this, just once.”

“Kululu!”

“Arf! Arf!”

Each family member replied with their thoughts. Desperately fighting back the emotions that were about to spill from the corners of my eyes, I raised my head. *Now then, I’m done being hesitant.* Since I’d already made my decision, all that was left was to complete it. We would slay this monster so that we could return once again to our quiet, peaceful lives.

Chapter 4: Subjugating the Monster

“What’s normal in the military?” I asked. “Do the archers stand at the front, and once they fire, they step back while the spearmen make a wall out of their weapons and gradually press forward?”

Helen nodded. “Yeah, that’s how it usually goes.”

Our enemy was a one-man army, so it seemed possible for us to attack with only a select few people.

“Hm, how should we go about this?”

I picked up a piece of plank from the ground nearby (which was probably a leftover scrap from the well construction or something), cut it up into smaller blocks with my knife, and used the blocks like chess pieces. The floor of the terrace became the board, and I laid the pieces out, using a larger block to indicate the troll. I placed two smaller blocks a short distance away.

“I guess Samya and Lidy can be our archers.” I pointed at the two blocks. “But we’re inside of a cave.”

“It’s probably difficult to fire at a diagonal,” Lidy said.

I nodded. “Yeah.” *And launching an arrow at a high angle is likely impossible. They can probably only aim straight ahead, but there’s no guarantee they’ll get a clear line of fire.*

Helen moved her finger from the two blocks to the one larger block. “Even if we can’t get a hit, it’s better to keep our enemy on edge and have it expect arrows to come at any moment. It’ll probably become even more difficult to shoot once we enter battle, but I want you both to take aim if you’ve got the chance.”

Needless to say, the possibility of friendly fire made it difficult for ranged attackers to do anything when allies were in close combat. Even so, the fact that Helen had made this request to Samya and Lidy implied the trust she held in these two archers. Samya and Lidy nodded firmly. I was sure that these two

wouldn't mess up so easily.

"And I guess we just charge in?" I asked, placing four more blocks behind the pair that were supposed to represent Samya and Lidy.

Helen glanced at the blocks and said, "Hmmm. I don't think friendly fire will be an issue, but I'm more concerned about range. Diana, are you able to wield a spear at all?"

The one who could get the most range out of her strongest weapon was, of course, Anne. She was a giantess who was proficient with a greatsword. Her blade was likely as long as a short spear. While Helen used shortswords that lacked range, she more than made up for it with speed. She'd been able to slice up the big black bear in a flash, living up to her name as the Lightning Strike. These two didn't need spears—one had enough range while the other had the agility to step in and back off as needed.

This meant that both Diana and I had to bring spears. But if we couldn't wield them, we'd be pure, meaningless deadweight. *And I'm probably not being asked this question because I used a spear during the monster subjugation.*

"It's not like I can't use it at all," Diana replied.

"Then let's have you bring it along," Helen said swiftly. "It's best if you can fight at a distance. You and Anne just need to perform feint attacks or catch the monster off guard."

Diana and Anne nodded at these orders. *Yeah, it's best to leave this stuff to the pros.*

"Does that mean that you and I will fight the monster up close?" I asked Helen.

"Yep," Helen replied with a grin. "Let's work together, partner."

I was the one who'd accepted this request. I had planned to volunteer to take the most dangerous position from the start, and with the strongest mercenary by my side, I had nothing to fear.

"All right," I said. "Why don't we practice our formation?"

We all faced each other with determined expressions. Once Helen had moved

the blocks around and explained her plan, we set up a large log (material that was just lying around) in our yard to resemble the troll.

Time to start training.

Helen and I stood in front of this supposed troll with Samya and Lidy behind us—Anne and Diana brought up the rear. This was our formation. Rike, Krul, and Lucy, who would be waiting at the entrance, were watching over us. I told them that they could play around if they pleased, but Krul and Lucy were intent on watching our practice and stayed put. Helen had her dual shortswords and a mace; I had a spear and my *Diaphanous Ice*; Samya and Lidy had bows; Anne had her greatsword and a javelin; and Diana had a longsword and a spear.

We slowly approached our “troll.” Once we were within firing distance for the arrows, Helen gave her signal, and Samya and Lidy came out in front. Helen and I immediately stood behind our archers. Forming a slight arc, the two arrows flew in the air and punctured the head of our troll. *It’d be so simple if the troll died by those two arrows to its skull.*

“Stand back!” Helen bellowed, ordering Samya and Lidy to back off.

The two did as they were told while Helen, Anne, Diana, and I jumped forward. As we approached the log, Helen gave another order.

“Duck!”

Helen and I crouched down as Anne immediately threw her javelin. This attack wasn’t to hit the troll in a vital area, but to simply catch it off guard. If the troll staggered here for even a moment, Samya and Lidy would use that as their chance to fire another set of arrows. If the troll continued to charge toward us, we wouldn’t use our archers here. The javelin that Anne threw pierced the log. It didn’t completely penetrate, but the weapon sank deeply inside. If this had been an actual battle, it may not have been a fatal blow, but it would’ve certainly dealt some major damage.

However, we can’t fight by assuming that all of our attacks will land perfectly. While everything had hit so far, it was best to act as though none of them had—in other words, the troll was uninjured, without a scratch.

“Charge!” Helen roared the moment the javelin hit its mark.

In the next moment, she disappeared from sight, as though displaying the origin of her nickname. In a flash, she closed the gap to the troll. The other three front liners, including myself, spread out and chased after Helen, charging toward the troll. All the while, Helen continually changed her position, slashing repeatedly against the surface of the log.

I felt bad having Helen hold back here, but if she didn't, the log would've immediately been sliced into little bits. *If she dices up the troll in seconds during the actual fight, well...* I couldn't wish for a better outcome. But of course, the monster wouldn't go down without a fight, so we all charged, assuming that we would join the battle.



With a loud *vwoom*, Anne's greatsword swung through the air as though cleaving the space in front of her in two. Her blows were heavy, slicing the log in half. She almost seemed to be crushing our opponent instead of slicing it.

"Aaaand stop!" Helen ordered.

Diana and I were about to thrust our spears into the sliced logs, but we froze in place without following through. I hadn't moved all that much, but it was nonetheless exhausting to dash around with a spear and sword. I caught my breath with a few heavy huffs, then glanced at Helen.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"If all goes well, we'll decimate that monster in seconds."

"Right." In my eyes, any normal opponent would've already died at least four times under our assault.

"But, we can't expect everything to go smoothly. It'd be best to test things out some more. We've got plenty of arrowheads, don't we?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah—I forged some in my spare time. I think there's a fair few made."

"Then let's practice having the archers shooting the target and supporting us front liners while we attack. After seeing them take aim just now, I feel confident that both Samya and Lidy can land their arrows. But if they do hit us instead, it'll hurt. Maybe we should round the edges of the arrowheads, that way no one gets gravely injured or anything."

We all agreed with Helen's suggestion, and I peered up at the sky. *Today is another beautiful day.* The sun shone down on us, and while it still wasn't at the apex of the sky, I felt like it was cheering us on.

Before we broke off for lunch, Samya and Lidy practiced firing arrows from the back line while the rest of us stood in front. We prepared a few dulled arrowheads and handed them to our archers. Diana, Anne, and I surrounded a newly prepared log and moved around.

"Hup!" I thrust my spear forward while carefully stopping it just short of the log.

Anne was right beside me swinging her greatsword. I had to keep her range in mind, so I couldn't let my guard down. Since the log wouldn't attack, Helen took that role—she would strike with a wooden sword just as we finished swinging our spears, or else try to hit us when we least expected it. Her timing was impeccable, and she served as a pretty troublesome enemy.

Suddenly, I felt a heavy impact on my spear, and I realized that Helen had just tried to knock my weapon out of my hands. I immediately released the spear and grabbed *Diaphanous Ice*. This was also part of the training. It wasn't wise to awkwardly brace a weapon for a strong incoming strike, as I could injure my hands. Instead, if I felt like my spear was no longer of use, I needed to swiftly switch to my other weapon. It was like a scene from a movie back on Earth—if a character ran out of bullets for their rifle, they would immediately switch to their handgun.

Helen was able to land these dangerous attacks on the three front liners without breaking a sweat, proving that the nickname Lightning Strike wasn't just for show. The words “Wouldn't she be just fine dealing with the troll on her own?” had crossed my mind, but I knew that things weren't so simple.

As for Samya and Lidy, Helen didn't provide them any orders. Each archer would need to take aim at their own discretion. The moment a wide gap opened between Anne and me, a sharp sound would whiz through the air, followed by a dull *thunk* that indicated an arrow had struck the upper half of the log. Because the arrowheads' points were dull, the arrows didn't pierce the log and instead just fell to the ground. Our archers must've been taking extremely careful aim—not a single arrow struck any of us as they finished firing.

The sun was now a bit past its highest point, and it seemed like the perfect opportunity to take a break. I was starting to get hungry too.

“Why don't we take lunch?” I suggested.

“Okay!” they all called back.

Though we'd only been training, everyone had still been a little tense and nervous. Our meal seemed to have a calming effect, and we all relaxed almost instantly. Krul and Lucy, who'd been watching us practice, happily ran around.

“Speaking of training, what was it like when you and Lidy went along on the subjugation campaign?” Helen asked me, stuffing her cheeks with her lunch.

Krul and Lucy had finished eating (Krul normally possessed an especially small appetite), and they’d scampered around some more before settling under the shade in our yard for a nap. I glanced at Lidy, who nodded in response, so I swallowed my soup and then spoke.

“We weren’t in a large cave back then. Above all, there were a lot of goblins. I let the soldiers handle that, though.”

Lidy nodded. “Eizo and I went for the large one.”

“Yeah. At first, I thought your spell defeated it in one shot.”

Her magic had been impressive. I’d had to stop myself from shouting, “Did we do it?!” Ultimately, yelling out wouldn’t have changed the end result.

“In the end, I couldn’t get it,” said Lidy.

“That beast really spooked me to my core.” I took a sip of tea from my cup. “But I managed to kill it off, mostly with my spear. However, I landed the final blow with my sword. As it leaped back, I threw my spear, then slashed at it with my sword until it fell, allowing me to land the final blow.”

“Huh.” Helen was definitely interested. “Which means the final blow has to land. It won’t just die from grievous injuries.”

“Seems like it. I don’t think these types of monsters have hearts or anything, but it disappeared once I sliced its head off. The goblins also disintegrated when the soldiers stabbed at the general area where their hearts should’ve been. The troll should go down if we target those vulnerabilities—I don’t think it’ll have a unique weak spot that we have to identify and hit.”

“Yes. If you take away the fact that it doesn’t require meals, doesn’t breathe, and has no blood flowing in its body, the monster will act like a normal living creature,” Lidy added. “I’m not sure if we can consider being a ‘normal creature’ a vital vulnerability. But I suppose these weaknesses are universal for living beings.”

“I see.” Helen frowned, then nodded and folded her arms in front of her.

Monsters born from magical energy were truly odd creatures. *Technically, they aren't even alive—they just act like they are.*

“If there’s something similar to a vampire, though,” I said, “I have no idea how they’d work.”

“A vampire? You mean the ones in fairy tales?” Helen asked.

I nodded. “Yeah.”

I hadn’t even known that vampires appeared in the fairy tales of this world, so frankly, I’d just blurted out something potentially incongruous. I’d said it casually, though, so Samya hadn’t sniffed out a falsehood—when I glanced at her, I saw that she hadn’t reacted at all to my words but was instead tucking into her third slice of meat. Since Lidy didn’t say anything either, I guessed that Helen’s statement was accurate.

Thankfully, no one else mentioned anything about vampires, and Helen continued strategizing about our attack plan. “So, if you had to land a killing blow to the monster during the campaign, then I guess we’ll have to do the same thing to the troll.”

“Probably,” I said. “And if we need to decapitate it, I think Anne’s skills would really shine.”

Anne glanced at me, a spoon still in her mouth. *My, Princess, that behavior is quite unladylike!*

I stood by my assertion, though. It didn’t matter how thick our opponent’s neck was; if we were able to get it on the ground, it wouldn’t stand a chance against Anne’s greatsword. Her weapon was a custom blade of my creation. Combine that craftsmanship with the strength of a half-giant and the actual weight of a greatsword, and no troll would stand a chance. In my previous world, I’d had a chance to see an executioner’s sword up close—one that’d been used in the past to decapitate “witches”—but Anne’s blade was much larger than even that.

“It’ll be my and Helen’s job to stop the troll,” I said. “But we just might need to rely on you for the final blow.”

Anne nodded. I suggested practicing that in the afternoon, and Helen gave a

nod of her own. *Once we clean up from lunch, we need to train more. We have to be in perfect shape!*

With our meal behind us, we went straight back to training. This time, we used a variation on the strategy we'd developed before lunch.

An arrow had pierced the top of our target dummy (another log), and I thrust my spear into the bottom. Diana was on my other side, also attacking the log. A breeze whipped past us as Helen leaped forward and delivered a kick. With a heavy *thud*, the log fell to the ground. Diana and I swiftly removed our spears and skewered the upper half of the log. Moments later, Anne approached us with her greatsword, heaved back, and swung down toward the area where the troll's head would've been. As the ground shook from the impact, the target dummy's "head" was crushed to dust.

This concluded our first round of postlunch practice.

"You guys move well for your first coordinated attack," I observed. "Maybe you're used to working together because you go out hunting."

"Oh, you could be right," Helen replied as she caught her breath.

During our morning training, we'd all moved around well; I hadn't anticipated that the household's regular hunting trips would boost our teamwork. I glanced at Samya and Lidy, who were collecting the arrows that'd pierced or bounced off the log.

"Guess I gotta do my best," I said. "I don't wanna drag you all down."

Only Rike and I skipped out on the hunting trips—even Anne had gone out a few times (she took the role of beater). Thus, if there were any problems with our formation, it would likely be me since I wasn't used to working with them as a team.

"Would it be better if there was more distance between me and the troll? Should I head to the back?" I asked.

"Hmmm." Helen folded her arms, causing her armor to clang. "Since you can fight against me, Eizo, I want you to stand in the front as much as possible."

“I see.”

I wasn't sure if we could call this military might, but if I were to rank our family members by their fighting prowess, I was likely next in line after Helen—of course, that was all thanks to my cheats. In terms of close combat, Diana would be third, though Helen had once told me that the gap between second and third place was quite large. If that was true, then our attack power would decrease immensely if I stepped back.

“Since we can win by taking its head, the team should probably adjust our formation based on your movements, at least to a certain degree,” Helen explained. “It might make our actions a bit awkward, but that would be far better than having you sit in the back.”

“Makes sense.” If the pro said so, it was best to follow her lead. Listening to the opinions of experts seemed like the best thing to do.

“All right, let's try this again!” Helen shouted, clapping her hands.

“Kaaay!” we all wearily called back.

We resumed our positions in the formation and continued to practice until we ran out of logs. Helen knocked the log over in a different direction every time, initiating unique scenarios—we were prepared, even if the log didn't fall or if we had to defeat our enemy with our spears. And though I didn't want to imagine it, we also tried out a few variations that had our comrades down and unable to fight. As we continued to practice, one thing became clear.

“I sort of expected this, but our formation completely collapses when you're out, Helen,” I remarked.

“Well...” Helen grinned. “I probably shouldn't say this about myself, but it *is* me, y'know?”

We'd run some scenarios that excluded Helen, as if she'd been knocked out of commission. When not in formation, she would take the position of the troll, but we could never lay a finger on her. Every time, we'd been left with no choice but to retreat. Helen had also attacked us when Samya and Lidy had been practicing shooting arrows, but she'd likely been holding back.

“I don't know how many chances we'll have to fight it again,” said Helen, “but

if I go down, I think it's best to retreat and regroup."

"Agreed," I replied.

"If that time comes, be sure to collect me, all right?"

"Of course. I'll come for you even if it means pushing my limits."

"Heh," Helen chuckled, her cheeks red.

I gathered everyone near the demolished training log. The tip of it had been crushed. Samya, Helen, Krul, Lucy, and I sat directly on the ground while everyone else took a seat on the log.

"We should come up with a plan for retreat," I said. "If Helen falls, we'll need to get out of the cave immediately."

Everyone nodded. I wasn't sure just how much human speech Krul and Lucy understood, but they cried out in what I interpreted as agreement. I smiled.

"Next up is Diana, Anne, and me," I said. "If any of us go down, we should retreat and regroup at a safe distance."

Everyone nodded once more.

"Let's see... What else?"

"For everything else, we should use our appropriate judgment," said Helen. "But if it seems like things are really getting hairy, we should back out. As long as we're alive, we can always try again."

I gave a firm nod. *My thoughts exactly.*

Glancing up at the sky, I realized that the sun was already setting. Night would soon be upon us. *I guess time's up. All I can do now is pray that things will go smoothly tomorrow.* I told everyone that practice was over for today, and once I got confirmation from everyone, we all stood and headed into the cabin to wash up.

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The next morning, we had a light breakfast. This wasn't planned or anything—it's not like we had a lighter meal because we thought it'd be easier to move around later. Everyone was just too nervous to eat a proper meal. Well, almost

everyone. Helen, who was an expert in this field, was stuffing her cheeks as usual. I could only look on in admiration.

“I’m impressed. Do you ever get nervous?” I asked.

“Hm?” Helen finished chewing, then swallowed and said, “Oh, yeah. I’m nervous like the rest of you. Never fought against this kind of opponent before. But I’ve learned to separate the nerves in my mind from the ones in my stomach.” True to her carefree response, she grabbed her second loaf of unleavened bread. “When on the road as a mercenary, you have to eat when you can. Oftentimes, I wasn’t sure when I’d get my next meal.”

“Fair enough.” She seemed much more relaxed now that she lived with us, but we couldn’t forget that she’d been part of a professional mercenary company. Not eating for days was definitely an occupational hazard. It made sense that she’d developed the ability to chow down under any circumstance.

Though I took on a lot of requests as a blacksmith, I didn’t need to have the mindset of a soldier who was constantly on the battlefield. But, it was a bit reassuring to have a pro like that by my side who was always prepared for anything.

“It’s not good to get *too* anxious, but it’s even worse to underestimate your opponent.” Helen turned to the rest of the family. “I think you all can ease up a bit, though. If you remember what we practiced yesterday, I’m sure it won’t be that big of a deal.”

She swiftly dunked her second loaf of bread into her soup, polishing everything off, and I felt the tense atmosphere relax just a hair. The reassurance of an expert certainly was effective. *Did she bolster the new recruits like this during her mercenary days? Or maybe she was once cheered up by similar words.*

With her breakfast finished, Helen promptly stood and said, “All right—time to prepare.”

The sounds of our claps reverberated throughout the forge as the family prayed to the *kamidana* while outfitted in full combat gear. My wishes for today were for everyone to come home safely and to successfully defeat the troll,

though needless to say, my family's well-being was the priority. A moment of silence filled the room—we prayed stoically, not moving an inch. While we all thought that we'd be fine, none of us could disregard the one-in-a-million chance that things would go awry. After praying, we bowed, and Helen's breastplate clanked as she moved. *Actually, all the armor is rattling around.*

When I raised my head toward the *kamidana*, I thought I saw the goddess statue twinkle for a split second. No one else reacted, and this area wasn't illuminated by sunlight, so I chalked it up to my mind playing tricks on me. But it also felt like I'd received a blessing. I became oddly confident, as though I *knew* everything would turn out fine. *It seems like I've been bestowed the best kind of luck. Maybe I should reflect sunlight onto the kamidana during our morning and evening prayers.* I smiled wryly. If I could come up with useless ideas like that, then apparently I'd started to relax, at least a little.

"Our hearth's been put out, right?" I asked.

"It has."

"And did we make sure to lock our doors?"

"Yeah, I did. And I have the keys, Boss."

I ran through this checklist with my family every time we left our cabin. Since I was determined to return home with everyone safe and sound, I performed this routine as usual.

We'd stepped outside of the cabin and into the morning sunlight. Krul and Lucy came out of their hut and sat beside me. I wasn't sure if they sensed my nervousness, but they looked more tense and serious. Diana gently petted Lucy's head, and Anne gave the same attention to Krul. It hadn't even been five minutes since we'd ventured outside, but it felt like longer—the heat was already seeping into my body. *Did I bring water with me?* I tried my best to recall whether I'd included my canteen with our supplies.

Suddenly, right in front of us, a woman appeared out of thin air.

After I recovered from the startle, I saw that it was Lluisa, the master of the Black Forest who claimed to be part of the Dragon of the Land. She was also the

one who'd personally requested that we defeat the troll.

After a quick greeting, she got straight to business. "Good morning. I'd like to guide you all to the troll. Are you ready?"

No one spoke a word, but we nodded firmly.

Lluisa smiled, seeming satisfied. "Thank you. Let's head over then, shall we?"

We nodded again and started following Lluisa. Thus, our family began the journey, determination crystallizing in every step we took.

We trudged through the Black Forest while wearing our full gear—something the hunters never did. Treks among the trees usually had us feeling wary of any wolves, boars, or bears that may want to pounce on us, but today was a little different. The loud *clangs* of our armor may have served as bear bells to chase creatures away, but the biggest deterrent was Lluisa. No normal creature would try to pick a fight with the forest's master. Perhaps monsters corrupted by stagnant magic might try, but since Lluisa had been able to sense the troll, she certainly would've clocked any nearby monsters above a certain strength. I figured we could leave all that to her.

It was also worth noting that she didn't teleport us to our destination—we walked. According to Lluisa, she could teleport herself just fine, but a few troublesome problems would pop up when she had to move other beings. *Like maybe she has to fill out a permission form to be allowed to teleport others, one that requires the approval of her boss. But I guess that's just a silly thought that would've been true of the work culture back on Earth.*

"Um, Lluisa, I'd like to ask you something," I started gingerly, "but I'm not sure if this is a good time."

"Oh? Ask away."

Her reply was awfully casual, though I didn't think that was an attempt to ease our tension—she was likely always like this.

"Animals can be corrupted by magic and turn into monsters. Beasts can also be born in areas thick with stagnant magical energy. Is there any way to prevent the formation of monsters entirely?"

“There is not,” Lluisa answered.

While Gizelle and the other fairies were putting in their best efforts daily to ensure that the forest didn’t house any overwhelmingly stagnant magic, it was impossible for them to erase every single bit of it. Our Lucy was an excellent example of a creature who had been changed by the Black Forest’s magic.

“We’re currently dispatched because there’s a troublesome monster on the loose, but what do you do for other less severe cases?”

“Hmmm.” Lluisa pondered for a moment, seemingly trying to find an answer.

She probably knows why and is just trying to decide whether she can reveal it.

Finally, she relented. “I guess I can tell you guys. I don’t do anything.”

“Huh?”

I gasped, stopping in my tracks for a second. Her blasé reply had been rather shocking. *She just leaves them be?*

“Most monsters like that eventually run into wolves and get killed,” Lluisa explained. “Weak ones might even be taken out by deer. And while this is an especially rare case, if one runs into a beastfolk, they’ll slay it.”

I turned around to glance at Samya, who was following close behind me. Her eyes widened at Lluisa’s words, and she shook her head. It seemed that she, at the very least, was unaware of this.

“A beastfolk runs into a monster maybe once a decade, perhaps even less,” Lluisa explained as she noticed my reaction. “It’s not strange for Samya to be unaware of this. I don’t get involved with that either.”

I shrank back a little while Samya pouted. *But a monster weak enough to be killed by a deer sounds a little misleading.* This forest had an aggressive species of deer called horned deer. Samya had mentioned that they were a bit of a pain to deal with, but that also meant the forest had deer that were strong enough to defeat monsters. *Maybe that’s why the horned deer are here to begin with.* Like a large living creature, the Black Forest had its own self-defense system, and horned deer were probably part of it.

Lluisa chuckled. “Even if the monsters turn out to be a little stronger, bears

can usually take care of them.”

“I see. The bears around here *are* strong.”

Lluisa nodded. I wasn’t sure if the bear I’d run into had been corrupted, or if it’d just been really strong, but I’d had to face it in a one-on-one battle. That was the first time that I’d ever thought about death in this world. The second bear I’d fought had gone down much easier, but I also hadn’t been alone—Helen had been by my side, so the battle had gone much more smoothly. Regardless, there was no doubt that bears were powerful enemies.

Animals that became corrupted and transformed into magical beasts perhaps still clung to their fear of death (I wasn’t sure), but I knew that monsters born from stagnant magic certainly didn’t feel that way. If a black bear killed a thing like that, taking its life was probably a bit of a disappointment. I couldn’t help but sympathize a little.

I thought about the monster we were heading toward. I knew why we’d been selected for this mission, and we’d received quite the roundabout explanation. However, simply put, even a bear couldn’t defeat the beast we would soon be facing. In other words, we’d be taking on an opponent that was stronger than a bear. I’d expected as much—we’d trained all day yesterday with that in mind—but the reality of the situation was slowly starting to sink in. The chirps of birds and cries of animals echoed through the forest as we marched onward.

I’ll fight off the threat to the forest so that this normalcy won’t be destroyed.

We trekked through the forest for a while longer, then received notice that we would soon arrive at our destination. As such, we decided to take a small break—it was a good time to rehydrate too. We all had our own canteens, but right now we took water from a small barrel that Krul was carrying. It was best to prevent a situation where we ran out of water.

Krul was in charge of our resources this time around, and aside from water, she was carrying clean strips of cloth that could serve as bandages, medicinal herbs that would staunch blood, and the torches we’d use inside of the cave. I’d even packed some dried meat, though I doubted we’d need to break it out. Food would only be necessary if the battle dragged out to the point where

taking a meal was vital for our survival. In that case, we would retreat and rethink our strategy. *And maybe we can eat some on the way home if we get a little peckish.*

I gulped two swigs of water, then took a breath. “Whew.”

Though this was the middle of summer, it wasn’t as hot as I’d expected—we’d been walking in the shade and there was a breeze in the forest. However, it was still impossible to march forward without breaking a sweat, and that meant we needed to hydrate.

“We’ll get there soon,” Lluisa said encouragingly. “Just a little bit longer. Hang in there.”

“Kaaay,” came our languid response. *This casual atmosphere is at least better than the stiff tension we’d been feeling this morning.*

“I didn’t think there was a cave so close by,” I remarked.

Apparently, this cave wasn’t a hole that bore through the middle of the mountains, but more like a crack in the ground. We’d been told that we wouldn’t need a rope to go down, though. *Makes sense. If a rope was needed, then even monsters would require tools to get in and out of the cave...unless they were a spider or something.* Since we could go right in, it was safe to assume that the entrance allowed us to enter and exit by foot as we pleased.

“I didn’t either,” Samya replied, gulping down water. “We’ve never stumbled across it during a hunting trip. Though I guess that’s not unusual. We wander around while hunting, but we don’t cover a ton of ground. Since we’re currently headed in a straight line to our goal, we’ve actually gone pretty far from the cabin.”

“Yeah, I see that now.” The objective of hunting was to find prey, so the team usually decided upon a location and then searched the area for game. If they had to come back the next day to collect the meat, it was ideal to stay near the cabin. All of this felt very logical.

Now that I thought about it, we’d likely gone a lot farther than I’d initially thought. Though some of us were wearing armor, we were able to walk at a quick pace thanks to Krul—she was carrying the heavy stuff. *Oh yeah, I*

remember now. When the family went out to look for the rainbow ore, Samya had mentioned that she'd never gone so far into the forest. I guess this is a similar type of situation.

After resting up for a while, we resumed our march. We walked deeper in the forest, and the birds' chirps and the animals' cries gradually decreased. Eventually, I was no longer able to hear the warbling twitters above us. The group had been engaged in small talk for a while, but suddenly, we also fell silent. Only the sounds of our footsteps echoed throughout the silence of the Black Forest.

Moments later, a shiver ran down my spine—I felt a presence that was completely different from anything we'd encountered so far in the forest.

Must be close.

"We're here," Lluisa finally announced.

There was indeed a gaping hole in the ground and it was much larger than expected. If the hole was this wide all the way down, Krul could've jumped down with ease. *But she'll be staying here, guarding the entrance like a good girl.*

We came to a stop at the mouth of the cave, grabbed our torches from Krul's back, and lit them up. When I raised my torch to peer inside, I saw that the tunnel sloped down from the entrance diagonally.

I turned to Helen, and just to be safe, I asked for her assessment. "Well? What do you think?"

"I think we can get through," she replied succinctly.

Then I guess we can all head down. I gazed at each person's face in turn, and they nodded. Then, I turned to Rike, Krul, and Lucy.

"All right, we'll be going in."

"Please be careful," Rike urged, her expression filled with worry.

"Kululululu!"

"Arf! Arf!"

At that moment, even the perpetually smiling Lluisa became stern. “I’m sorry, but I’ll need to wait here as well. Once you’re inside, I’m sure Lidy will be able to find the way. I may not be in the position to say this, but I wish you good luck.”

“That’s fine. Thank you, Lluisa.”

We set off, raising our torches and stepping into the mouth of the cave. As we parted, some waved their hands and others waved their tails.

It went without saying that the inside of the cave was dark. We couldn’t see anything beyond our torches, and the air inside was chilly. The environment must’ve been great on hot days, but I couldn’t shake off the feeling of creepiness. Helen and I stood in front, with Diana and Anne in the middle and Samya and Lidy guarding the rear. Lidy, who could sense the stagnant magical energy, gave us directions. She slowly and carefully honed her senses, trying to feel out the presence.

“Turn right there,” she ordered loudly at a fork in the road.

We did as told and stood still, carefully confirming our surroundings. Lluisa had told us that there weren’t any small monsters like goblins hiding away, but we couldn’t be sure about when they’d start to emerge from the stagnant pool of magic.

Just then, the flames of our torches wavered toward us, flickering in the direction we’d just come from.

“Seems like air flows out from the inside,” I said.

Helen raised her torch, peering into the darkness. “Yeah.” Her flame danced in the direction of the cave’s entrance. This was a good thing—airflow meant that we didn’t have to worry about asphyxiation.

Slowly, we proceeded deeper into the cave. The trust we had in one another allowed us to shake off the accumulating anxiety.

As we went farther in, the breeze became more chilly and damp to the touch. I’d been told that these types of caves allowed magical energy to pool, stagnate, and fester. *During the campaign, I’d also felt this type of breeze, and it’d been in a cave too. I guess this kind of terrain makes it easy for energy to stall.*

“If there weren’t any monsters lurking in here, this would be a great place to chill our food,” I noted. “I’d especially love to find some ice we could take home.”

“Why would we wanna cool down our food?” Helen asked.

“It preserves things and makes them last longer.”

“Huh.”

The Black Forest was large. Perhaps, if I were to search, I could find an ice cave somewhere with an even lower temperature. It would be great for food storage, and we could harvest chunks of ice to preserve resources back at the cabin. The only downside was that such places were apparently the ideal spot for monsters to appear.

We were quite a ways away from the city. Our garden provided us with some vegetables, and the hunting trips supplied us with meat, but we mostly subsisted on preserved foods or salt-cured items. If we could somehow access some ice with which to store our meals, I felt like we’d gain access to a greater variety.

“Food tends to last a bit longer in the winter, don’t you think?” I asked. “It’s the same logic.”

Helen looked thoughtful. “Now that you mention it...”

“And some foods even taste better when cold.”

“Oh?”

I preferred some types of fruit cold, and ice cream could only be created in freezing temperatures. If only I could get my hands on the necessary ingredients and materials, I would definitely consider making some.

We kept traveling deeper into the cave, remaining vigilant of our surroundings but continuing the light chatter.

Anne, overhearing our conversation, soon chimed in, “We had an icehouse in the empire.”

Well, she did live in the imperial palace.

“An icehouse?” Samya asked, seeming confused by the new term.

“Yeah. We stuffed a room with snow and ice harvested in the winter, then took chunks of it out during the summer,” Anne explained.

“And you had something like that at home?!” Samya yelped.

“I did.”

“Wow!” Samya gasped in awe.



“It seems like you didn’t have one at home, Diana,” Anne said. “But seeing how calm *you* are, Eizo, perhaps you had something like that?”

Diana gave a small shake of her head. If even a comital family of the kingdom didn’t have access to one, it was clear that an icehouse was quite an expensive piece of equipment. Not everyone had the luxury of storing winter perishables until the summer.

And as for me...I’d owned one. A large fridge with three doors. *Thinking back, I actually bought a new one not long before coming to this world because my previous one broke down.*

Since I couldn’t reveal all that, I said, “I didn’t have one, but I knew someone who did.”

It seemed like they all thought I was a pretty high-ranking nobleman, so I figured this excuse would suffice. I wasn’t sure if my fib worked, or if Anne had other thoughts on her mind, but she gave a simple “I see.”

After walking a little farther, Lidy suddenly piped up nervously, “We’re there.”

Just ahead was another fork in the road, and we’d been about to check out our surroundings. Near the entrance to the cave, Lidy had needed time to pinpoint the right direction, but as we’d ventured deeper inside, she’d gradually been able to guide us more quickly. Now, she was able to direct us before we even reached a fork. It seemed like we’d finally come face-to-face with the monster. Just in case, I had Samya step in front and use her keen nose to sniff things out.

“There’s no smell,” she said. “But I can sort of sense its presence.”

Monsters killed any living beings. However, they didn’t need to eat. If a creature carelessly wandered inside and fell victim, there would be a stench emanating from its body. Likewise, if the troll were killed by a creature, Samya would be able to sniff out the animal. No smell and a tangible presence meant that the troll was still alive and well—it likely hadn’t killed anything yet either.

“Let’s go over things one last time while we’ve got the chance,” Helen whispered.

We'd already wandered around creating quite the clamor with our armor, but there was no need to purposefully shout. We nodded and scanned the area once more for anything sinister. Then, after a short while, we all looked at each other and nodded once more. Everyone fell into the formation we'd practiced yesterday.

"All right. We'll proceed as planned." Helen took a breath, then gave the order. "Forward!"

We didn't roar loudly, but with faces full of determination, we stepped onto the battlefield.

Chapter 5: A Small Army

We shifted our formation and proceeded onward. Helen and I were at the front, Samya and Lidy were behind us, and Anne and Diana brought up the rear. We all fell silent as we walked together, at the same pace, looking like a small army ready for battle.

We crept through a narrow passage. It was dimly lit, though I wasn't sure where the light was coming from, and I could vaguely make out a wide, open area right in front of us.

"Ugh."

I wasn't sure who'd spoken—could've been me. We'd all felt the same displeasure, and an utterance like that simply couldn't be suppressed. Our reaction wasn't due to a foul stench, but because of a definitive presence just ahead. *Something* was nearby. We didn't need Lidy to tell us; we were all sure of it.

"Torch!" Helen's sharp yet calm voice rang through the air.

We all tossed our torches onto the floor of the cave. The flames continued to illuminate the ground, but suddenly, the ambient light of the area grew brighter. I glanced around and spied a plant akin to moss that was faintly bioluminescent—it also seemed to reflect any light that glanced off its surface. This luminous moss amplified our torches, lighting up the walls and floor. I'd been prepared for a battle in a darker area, so I was grateful for this.

The space around us looked like a large hall. The luminous moss didn't seem to grow much on the ceiling, so I wasn't able to gauge the height of this area, but it was indeed wide. Our light didn't even reach the back wall. The ground was a bit bumpy, but it was flat enough for us to run on and brace ourselves.

In this space, a large body loomed over us—the troll. Craggy skin enveloped its hefty, overweight body, and it wasn't wearing anything. The monster was taller than Anne, and it held a stone club that it must've taken from

somewhere. While it didn't have a nose, it had holes for nostrils, and it bared a maw of crooked teeth. I was shocked to see that it didn't have eyes.

"It's not that it weakens under the sun, but it's at a disadvantage in the bright light because it has no eyes," I said.

Eyes allowed one to quickly perceive prey at a distance or to sense predators early on. Night may have been a different story, but if this troll were to bumble about in the middle of the day, it would be clobbered in a second. Since it was a monster created from stagnant magic, and not a flesh-and-blood living being, I wasn't sure if its lack of eyes was due to an evolutionary process. Instead of seeing us, the troll was likely able to sense its enemies in some way. The hobgoblins had possessed the same ability.

Luckily, we had a saving grace in our fight against this beast, something it had in common with actual living creatures—weak points on its body that we could stab.

For whatever reason, the troll simply stood there. It was positioned diagonally in front of us, but that wouldn't be an issue for our archers.

"We're near the enemy!" Helen reported. "Prepare to fire!"

We had no obligation to wait for our opponent to ready itself, so Helen gave the order as she sighted and confirmed the troll. Helen and I dashed to opposite sides while Samya and Lidy stepped forward with their bows at the ready. I heard a *clack* behind us, indicating that Anne was preparing her javelin. Our two archers drew their bowstrings taut, the creaking noise signaling that they were taking aim.

"Fire!" Helen roared.

Two arrows zoomed through the air and flew toward our target. Their aims were true—both hit the troll's head, and the arrows sank deep into its flesh.

"GREEEEEE!" the troll screeched loudly, a high-pitched shriek that was unfitting for its large body.

If it staggered and fell after one volley of arrows, that would be a bit underwhelming, but also the perfect scenario for us. However, that sliver of hope was quickly crushed as the troll's nostrils twitched and it pointed its bald

head at us.

“GRAAAAAH!” the troll cried.

Upon closer inspection, it didn’t have any earlobes either; the monster was likely perceiving us through scent alone. With a loud *thud*, it turned in our direction.

“Tsk, stand back!” Helen ordered with a click of her tongue.

Samya and Lidy quickly did as they were told. The troll took a rumbling step toward us.

Once she saw that Samya and Lidy were behind us, Helen shouted, “Duck!”

Helen and I quickly crouched, and a loud *swoosh* cut through the air above our heads. A streak of silver lanced toward the troll and pierced its stomach—a javelin. The troll shrieked once again, and our ears were subjected to the deafening noise.

“Front lines, forward!” Helen commanded. Then, unable to suppress a weary complaint, she said, “Wish we could do something about all its yelling!”

I rose, spear in hand, and marched toward the troll. “I agree with you, but I think we’ve gotta bear with it.”

“That sucks!”

Helen stepped forward with me, matching my pace. I figured that if we still had the energy to complain, we were fine. The troll used its free hand to grab the javelin and yank it from its stomach. It wasn’t a living creature with blood in its veins, so there was no bleeding out. I’d expected as much. But what I didn’t expect was for the hole the javelin had created to quickly heal in front of my eyes.

“It’s regenerating using the stagnant magical energy!” Lidy shouted from behind us.

The hobgoblins had also required magic to heal, but they’d never recovered so quickly.

“Tch, this is troublesome,” Helen griped.

I nodded and shouted back, “Lidy, how much magic does this monster have left?!”

“Its supply decreased just a little when it healed itself!”

I was grateful to hear her response. This meant that we had a method of defeating it.

“It regenerated quickly, so I can’t be certain, but it seems like it doesn’t have an unlimited amount of energy in reserve,” I said.

“What do you wanna do?” Helen asked.

I met her gaze and saw that she wanted to leave the decisions to me. We could probably retreat for now and rethink our strategy. Though we had a few options, now wasn’t the time to dawdle and take my time.

“We’ll defeat it here and now,” I declared.

Helen’s expression split into a wolfish grin. “Roger.”

The healed troll charged at us. It was nimble for its size, but we had trained the entirety of yesterday against the Lightning Strike. It wasn’t much, but that confidence won over any sense of fear that I had.

“Stop!” Helen swiftly ordered.

We obediently followed her direction as the troll approached. It was almost right in front of us now. Immediately, she bellowed her second command.

“Charge!”

The moment the words left her lips, she disappeared from sight. She was much faster now than during yesterday’s training as she closed the gap to the troll. This monster seemed to only move around in the dark, so it likely perceived its opponents through scent and feel while launching swift attacks. But Helen was much too quick for that; she didn’t stay still long enough to be sensed.

Two flashes of blue light streaked toward the troll, and it was barely able to react before its right arm, which held the club, was sliced off from the elbow down. The severed arm immediately disintegrated into the air.

“Yes!” Diana cheered.

That attack wasn’t a killing blow, but it did prevent the troll from using its biggest weapon. *And that’s more than enough.*

Or so I thought...

“I’m starting to feel like that’s not the case!” I yelled while rushing forward.

The troll shrieked in pain again, and with a sickening *squelch*, a new right arm sprouted from the stump of its elbow. Lidy gulped nervously. While I’d seen something similar in anime back in Japan, witnessing it up close in person was completely different.

“It used an immense amount of its energy!” Lidy reported.

Monsters used their stagnant magical energy to regenerate and heal. When I’d fought against the hobgoblins, they’d easily healed any minor scratches. But losing an arm certainly wasn’t “minor.” As such, the troll had required a ton of magic to immediately regenerate. The javelin that had pierced its stomach had surely cost the troll a good amount of magic as well. This might’ve also been the reason goblins weren’t appearing around us—there wasn’t enough magic to produce them. Of course, I’d never consider the possibility of testing out that theory.

I wasn’t sure just how much magical energy was available for consumption, but the troll would likely continue to regenerate until it was completely depleted. *I’d like to avoid a battle of endurance.* I felt irritated by how naive I’d been back at the cabin. I should’ve come a bit more prepared, with food and all. Everyone on our team was strong, and I thought I had quite a bit of power, so I’d honestly expected to win this fight easily. Somewhere inside of me, I may have underestimated what I was up against.

I shook my head. Now wasn’t the time to repent for my actions; I had to focus on the monster in front of me.

“Helen!” I yelled.

“I know!” she shouted back.

The troll swung its left arm with a shriek—Helen swiftly dodged the incoming

limb and sliced it off. This time, she severed the arm from the shoulder. I thought that the troll would immediately try to regenerate, but it instead raised its remaining arm to attack Helen. However, a sharp *twang* sounded, and an arrow sank deep into the arm. I wasn't sure if the arrow had been Samya's or Lidy's, but it was safe to say that yesterday's training had been effective.

With another shriek of agony, the troll stopped its attack. *Can we really do nothing about its cries? The sound is more grating than nails on a chalkboard.* Helen wasn't about to miss this opening. For the third time, she sliced off an arm. With an earsplitting howl, the troll regenerated both of its arms at once, but I felt like it now lacked its initial intimidating aura.

Right after the troll regained its limbs, Diana and I thrust our spears into it. There was only a bit of resistance as our spear tips sank into its body. After a moment, Diana removed her weapon and stepped back. Helen seemed capable of easily slicing through the troll's arms, but if any of us were to get hit by a fist, we would be gravely injured. It was ideal to attack the monster while maintaining our distance.

I knew this fact, but nonetheless, I stayed close to the troll, repeatedly stabbing with my weapon as much as possible. Yes, I was in danger of being clobbered, but judging from the speed of its swings, I determined that I'd be able to dodge. And if I could avoid its attacks, I wanted to damage the beast as much as possible. If a limb was hacked away, there would be no need to fear it—the troll would be required to deplete its magical energy to regenerate any lost body parts. It was a bit of an endurance test, but if we wanted to exhaust its magic, the most effective way was to repeatedly slice away.

I plunged my spear deep into the troll and let go before immediately unsheathing *Diaphanous Ice* at my waist. In addition to the two streaks of blue lightning from Helen's blades, my sword also entered the battle.

The troll became slightly sluggish as it regenerated the hole that Diana had created and tried to remove the spear that I'd left in its body. Helen used that moment to slice away its left arm and leg, while I severed the right arm that tried to grip my spear.

The troll, now off-balance, staggered, and I used this opportunity to slash at

its right leg. I must've not been in an ideal position, as I couldn't fully sever it, but I left a deep gash.

Helen breathed out sharply. "Hmph!" she grunted, severing its head from its neck.

The troll, who had remained standing until now, couldn't handle this heavy blow. It fell to the ground.

"Anne!" Helen bellowed.

Anne sharply exhaled and swung down her greatsword. The troll no longer had most of its limbs—or its head—and its right leg could no longer move properly. It couldn't dodge the oncoming attack. Anne's sword sliced straight through the troll's torso, around where a living creature's heart must've been.

"Keep your guard up!" I yelled in warning. "If we actually defeat it, the entire body should disappear!"

We all nodded at each other and kept our vigilance high as we surrounded the torso that was now sliced in two. We gulped nervously and watched on, but only the lower half of the torso disappeared.

Which means...

The torso regenerated with a disgusting *squelch*. Instantly, Anne swung her greatsword down again, slicing the body in half once more. I wasn't sure why, but only the upper half regenerated, starting with the head.

Helen took care of that with incredible speed, perhaps eager to never hear those earsplitting howls again. *And honestly, I can only agree.* The torso was diced up again and again, and its full body never regenerated. At this point, the match was already decided; the moment the troll tried to grow back a body part, we simply had to slice it off again. It might've tried to launch an attack with its arms, but we could've left that up to Diana's spear or Samya's and Lidy's bows.

The troll attempted to regenerate multiple body parts at once, but Anne struck his torso, I got his arm, and Helen swiftly took care of his other arm and head. The monster literally couldn't lay a finger on us.

“How long is this thing gonna keep regenerating?” Helen grumbled.

She’d severed its head multiple times already, so I couldn’t blame her for complaining. It didn’t matter if the match was already decided or if this battle was still ongoing—we couldn’t leave until the troll vanished like smoke. Our only saving grace was that it had no blood, so its dead or severed body parts disintegrated into the wind. If this had been a normal monster, each severed limb would remain, surrounded by a sea of blood. *But, even without the blood, it’s not like I relish this scene.*

“Hup!” For the umpteenth time today, Anne swung down her greatsword and sliced the torso in two.

It felt like her movements were now coming at a slight delay. This battle had truly become a test of endurance: the troll’s regenerative capabilities versus our stamina. Honestly, I wasn’t sure which would win out. I swung *Diaphanous Ice* and severed another arm that had started to grow.

Suddenly, I noticed that something had changed.

“Is its regenerative speed slowing down?” I asked.

“Seems like it.” Helen once again chopped off its head, which had been growing back, but with a longer delay.

Hm...

“Lidy!” I called out.

“Its magical energy is decreasing rapidly!” she replied.

Just as I thought. The troll used the stagnant magical energy around it to regenerate. If it was running out of energy, this ability would naturally slow down.

“We’re close!” I yelled.

“Yep!” Helen bellowed as she tried to sever the head that grew back.

However, the pro mercenary gave a confused gasp—her blade had been stopped. To be precise, she only managed to slash a deep gash into its neck. Up until now, she’d been able to decapitate the troll’s head with ease.

“Damn it!” Helen growled as she drew her blade back.

The gash in the troll’s neck slowly started to heal.

“What’s going on?!” I asked.

“No idea!” Helen replied.

Did Helen make a mistake because she was tired? That seemed unlikely. She’d been able to slice through the troll several times today; even if she was a little weary, hacking through should be no problem. *But I’m sure we can sever its limbs in this state.* I swung my blade with confidence, but *Diaphanous Ice* was also stopped halfway through the troll’s arm. Try as I might, my blade wouldn’t sink any deeper than that. Like Helen, I withdrew my sword and stepped back from the arm. And just like the head, the wound I’d inflicted slowly started to heal.

Helen and I proceeded to slash away at the troll’s head and arms numerous times, but we weren’t able to successfully sever any limbs. In fact, the gashes that our blades left behind seemed to become more shallow and superficial.

“This—” I glanced over at Helen, who nodded in reply. We were likely thinking the same thing.

“It’s grown resistant to our attacks!” Helen yelled. “At this rate, we’ll only gradually back ourselves into a corner!”

Aside from Helen and I, everyone looked bewildered and unsure of how to proceed.

“Anne, try crushing it!” Helen ordered.

The princess seemed confused for a moment before quickly nodding and swinging her greatsword. This time, however, she didn’t use the sharp edge, but the flatter, broader side. With a loud grunt, she managed to crush the troll’s regenerating arm. And, thankfully, its head hadn’t completely grown back, so we weren’t subjected to any of its grating cries.

“I knew it,” I muttered.

Until now, our critical blows to the troll had been slashes with our blades. If the monster had managed to build resistance toward these attacks, then only a

different style—like Anne’s crushing blow—could seriously wound it. In other words, crushing the troll was now a “super effective” attack. However, Anne needed to swing down her weapon several times to put all of its limbs out of commission, and that would then build the troll’s resistance toward being crushed. Eventually, we would need to strike with our arrows and spears, but then the troll would become strong against piercing attacks too.

“Damn, what do we do?” Even while I was trying to think of a strategy, the troll continued to regenerate.

“We’ve come this far.”

I wasn’t sure who said it, but I had the same exact thought.

“We need to retreat!” Helen yelled across the otherwise silent cave. She whipped around to face us. “Lidy, it’ll take time for the monster to completely regenerate, yeah?”

“Yes!” Lidy nodded firmly. “It used up quite a bit of stagnant magic, so we should have at least a day!”

“All right! Then we’ll rethink our strategy and find a solution! Retreat!”

We all nodded at Helen’s orders. *Feels like we won the battle but lost the war.*

And so, we turned to leave the cave, gloomy thoughts plaguing our minds.

Making our way out was a relatively smooth affair. We weren’t stuck at forks in the path and we didn’t need to worry about other monsters. We ended up not running into anything except the troll during our round trip in the cave, but even if something else had crossed us, it would’ve gotten decimated in an instant. We gradually saw a light in front of us that didn’t come from the torches. Four shadows were waiting outside: Rike, Krul, Lucy, and Lluisa. When they spotted us, they seemed relieved, but only for a moment—upon seeing our faces, they became a little perplexed.

“Was it no good?” Rike asked gingerly.

I nodded. “Midway through the fight, our blades couldn’t slice through the troll. Seems like it’s gained a resistance to slashing attacks.”

I saw Lluisa raise an eyebrow.

“Have you experienced anything like this before?” I asked her.

She tilted her head to one side. “No. I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a troll like that.”

“Is that so?”

She nodded. “If they could do stuff like that, even a sleuth of big black bears wouldn’t be able to defeat one, right?”

“Ah, right.”

“An enemy that can build resistance to certain attacks... If something like that had ever appeared in the forest, I would’ve taken care of it personally. But I’ve never encountered anything similar.”

“So, are you saying that it’s mutated?” I asked.

“It seems likely,” Lluisa replied.

We were at a loss for words. *How can we possibly deal with this? Should we just let Lluisa handle it? But that doesn’t seem right.*

“Wait a sec,” I said, grabbing the attention of everyone around me. “Crushing it was effective, right?”

“Yeah.” Helen nodded. She’d seen it up close.

“And we need to minimize the amount of times we strike, so it can’t get used to a specific attack style. I wonder... If we use a weapon that can crush it in one blow, or a few blows, then—”

“Right!” Diana exclaimed, clapping her hands together. “We might be able to beat it!”

“But the issue is whether or not we can make something like that,” Helen said.

“Who do you think I am?” I grinned. My skills came from cheat abilities, which I sometimes felt bad about, but I now needed to make a weapon to save lives. *Cheats? Sure! I’ll use whatever I can to attain the result that I want.*

“I think you can do it, Boss!” Rike said brightly, causing everyone to chuckle.

I joined them, then gave a sigh. “Should’ve brought along some of my repair

tools.”

If I had a simple firebed and a few metal plates with me, I might’ve been able to quickly forge something. But our plan had been to retreat if our weapons broke, so I hadn’t brought anything. Heck, I’d barely packed any food. If we had had enough supplies to last us for even a day, we could’ve maybe sent Helen and Krul back to the cabin to pick up some more stuff for us. But there was no use crying over spilled milk—since we now had a plan, we just needed to act on it.

“All right, then,” I said, my resolve firm. “Lluisa, I’ll see you tomorrow...probably.”

“Huh? R-Right,” she replied.

And so, we headed home. We couldn’t win today, but now that there was a plan, we didn’t feel as pathetic as before.

“All right, let’s get busy.”

By the time we returned to our cabin, the sun was already starting to set. We’d left at the crack of dawn, explored the cave, battled the troll, and come home, so it was no surprise that the whole day had passed. I left Krul and Lucy to Diana and Lidy; immediately, I entered the forge and lit the firebed, using my magic to swiftly send wind from the bellows. My (and Lidy’s) magic couldn’t raise the temperature quickly, though, so while we waited, we discussed our plans.

“How large should it be?” I asked.

“As large as me, you, and Anne can handle,” Helen answered.

“So, what’s the heaviest thing we can wield?”

Helen, Anne, and I headed over to the plate storage area. We grabbed stacks of metal, piling more and more onto our arms until we hit the limits of our strength. Helen was able to carry the most, I was second, and Anne was third by a close margin. The Lightning Strike seemed more slender than me, but her arms were packed with muscle. I knew this, of course, but I always wondered where she stored all her strength—in the past, I’d even asked her.

“It just depends on how you use your body,” she’d replied.

I didn’t think that was the only difference between us, but now wasn’t the time to pry further.

“All right, let’s make ’em!” I announced, rolling my shoulders.

Everyone else seemed to be in high spirits as their enthusiastic voices rang out, “Okay!”

We should make these in one go while we’ve got this energy.

“This is the shape I’m planning on making,” I said, drawing a rough sketch on a sheet of paper. “What do you think?”

I showed everyone my diagram. The shape I had in mind was an elongated version of the head of a flyswatter. It would be ideal for hitting and smashing, and I felt like any other shape would make it awkward to wield. And since it was purposely designed so that we could crush the troll several times in swift succession, I frankly didn’t care about how it looked. These weapons would probably be useless in any other scenario, so I planned on melting them down after the troll was dead and reusing the metal for plates.

Rike cocked her head to one side. “Why’s it not shaped like a club or mace?”

“I *did* consider making something like that.”

Clubs and maces were ideal when it came to dealing heavy, crushing blows to an enemy. In this instance, the weapon would have to be long like a spear, and its head would need to be adjusted to deal fatal strikes (like adding terrifying spikes to the end or something). All of this had been up for consideration. But, our objective this time around wasn’t to crush bones or to apply the heaviest impact—it was to squash and destroy the troll’s flesh. Thus, we needed a weapon that could cover the largest surface area possible, and a shape similar to a flyswatter would be perfect for that.

I explained my thought process to Rike.

“Got it.” She hit her palm with her fist, a glimmer in her eyes.

“Also, I think we’ll only be using these clunky weapons one time—we can melt them down after.”

“We’ll be fine!” Rike insisted, leaning forward.

It felt reassuring when she was so energetic during times like these, and I was eager to start working while Rike’s infectious optimism was still buzzing inside me.

“All right, then let’s start!”

I needed to make three of these odd weapons—one each for Helen, Anne, and myself. I wasn’t really worried about appearance or precision. They just needed to be large and sturdy—that was all. This project also allowed me to use my cheats to their fullest. Though we had a little bit of time, it didn’t mean that we had enough to dawdle. I tried to move around and make everything as fast as possible, but even with my cheats, it took time for me to hammer away at the large plates of steel. Ultimately, I had to borrow Rike’s assistance.

Rike happily complied with my request, though, saying, “This is all part of my training!” *I have to make sure I don’t rely on her too much and take her kindness for granted.*

Time continued to tick by.

“Boss! You’re so fast!”



As she complimented me, Rike's hammer also swung at a rapid pace. She was clanging away on the spots I indicated, but at this speed, I had no time to verbally give her commands. So, I used my hammer to relay instructions, but I had to do so quickly—Rike had to observe my hammer indications and adjust her strike midair as she was swinging down. This was, of course, an extremely difficult task.

When we made entry-level items, we generally split our focus into two categories: quality (about thirty percent of our focus) and speed (seventy percent). But, for this weapon, it was more like ten percent quality and ninety percent speed. We didn't have a moment to lose.

Rike managed to keep up and go all out. When I thanked her later, she replied, "I can't fight, so this is how I can support you guys."

She really is the best apprentice ever. I truly felt this from the bottom of my heart. While we hammered, I had metal sheets heating up in the firebed. Once they were at the ideal temperature, we pounded the sheets and stuck them together, trying to pack as much bulk onto the weapon as we could.

Once the crushing head was complete, we finished it off by adding a cylindrical hilt and wrapping the hilt with leather to create a grip. *One down, two to go.* This weapon had been created specifically for this battle, and it would take quite a bit of time to finish forging all three.

The last was completed in the middle of the night—I forced everyone to go to sleep while I finished it up by myself. As I was wrapping the final weapon's hilt with leather, the door connecting the forge to the cabin opened. I glanced up and saw Samya's face peeking through.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "You should be asleep."

Tomorrow, she'd be keeping the troll in check with her arrows while Team Smash approached the monster for close combat. Precision and concentration were vital for archers—she should've known that being sleep-deprived was her greatest enemy.

"Eizo," Samya said as she entered the forge. "Why have you chosen to fight that thing? Have you not considered leaving it alone and asking others for

help?”

I continued wrapping leather around the hilt. My answer was quiet in the nighttime forge. “Firstly, this forest is important for my work—I can’t do my blacksmithing well anywhere else. But above all...”

“Above all?”

“This is the home of my family. It’s only natural for me to want to protect that, don’t you think?”

I gazed at Samya as I said those words. I hadn’t come to the Black Forest of my own volition. However, I’d spent quite a bit of time here, and above all, it was the home of my first family member. I felt it was natural to protect this place and lend my assistance when needed.

“I see,” Samya replied, looking down. I felt like there was a hint of happiness in her tone, but maybe I was being a bit conceited. “Then I’ll get some rest for tomorrow!”

With that, she shut the door (a little violently) and was gone.

“Ha ha ha!” Helen bellowed. “This is great!”

Before we left, Helen was swinging around the huge weapon in our yard. (Coincidentally, the thing looked like the signature oversized sword of a certain manga character back on Earth.) *Maybe I should’ve made it heavier.* I didn’t dare vocalize that thought, though; Helen likely had her limits if she wanted to maintain speed. Obviously, if she was able to attack swiftly while lugging around that huge weapon, her strength far exceeded any normal person’s.

We made our trek back to the cave by ourselves. Once we arrived, Lluisa was waiting for us at the entrance.

“I’m sorry to make you wait,” I said.

“Not at all,” Lluisa replied. “The concept of time is more or less lost on me.”

“Ah, I see.”

As part of the Dragon of the Land, she must’ve lived in perpetuity—if we were a day late in our quest to defeat the troll, that was probably well within her

margin of error.

Just like last time, Rike, Krul, and Lucy would stay back with our supplies. We unloaded our weapons and other resources from Krul and then began making preparations. This time, we'd packed enough food to last us a day, along with some tools: a portable firebed, some charcoal, a small anvil, and a hammer. These would allow me to repair the crude weapons Rike and I had made yesterday.

Though we unloaded everything, we wouldn't bring much inside the cave—just some sparse provisions in case we needed to eat or drink something small to regain our stamina. I also told Rike that she didn't have to prep the tools for immediate use. Ingredients for a full meal and tools were for emergency situations only (like if we had to camp out overnight), and in an ideal scenario, we wouldn't use them at all.

Frankly, I felt that if we got stuff ready, we might jinx ourselves. I wasn't completely superstitious, but my thought process was akin to wishing for good luck—if I didn't prepare for the absolute worst-case scenario, then maybe it wouldn't happen.

“Well then, good luck,” Lluisa said, as serious as ever.

We nodded. The cheers of Rike, Krul, and Lucy echoed behind us as we ventured into the cave to battle once more.

Since we were now prepared for anything that came our way, the troll didn't stand a chance. The huge beast loomed in front of us, just like during our initial encounter, and by now, it looked completely regenerated. We struck first, firing our arrows. However, it seemed like the troll wasn't actually in perfect condition, as it struggled to move. It sluggishly made its way toward us but stopped once we let loose the second set of arrows. We weren't kind enough to give it time to fully recover. Helen was wielding a weapon heavy enough to test the limits of her strength, but she still moved as nimbly as ever.

“Hmph!” she grunted, swinging down her weapon and crushing the troll's leg.

The monster once again howled deafeningly and then lost its balance. Anne and I awkwardly brandished our clunky weapons, but we both still managed to

swing down and land our blows.

“And...hup!” My weapon careened down, making a low *vwoom* sound.

Anne and I managed to take down an arm and the remaining leg. Helen’s onslaught still wasn’t over—she swung several more times for good measure. With every loud *thud*, the troll’s body grew smaller and smaller. Eventually, our attacks smashed the monster to smithereens, and parts of its body were scattered every which way. *I think I saw a similar scene once in an anime, but the victim was a robot.*

I was extremely grateful that this monster didn’t spew blood. If we were covered in blood and sludge, it would’ve dealt a blow to our psyche. The screaming was already traumatizing enough.

Eventually, our smashing crushed the troll to dust, which disappeared into the wind. The only bit left behind was one small lump of flesh. The lump wriggled around, then eventually stopped, melting away without leaving a trace.

“Lidy!” I called.

“Right!”

She immediately lowered her bow and closed her eyes, honing her senses. Samya and Diana slowly approached her side, while the rest of us spaced out evenly around her and scanned our surroundings. Without her confirmation, we still couldn’t let our guards down. I couldn’t detect any enemies, but I wasn’t a pro like Helen—I could only roughly sense foes with my cheats, so I wasn’t sure just how reliable my abilities were.

For several moments of intense concentration, Lidy didn’t move an inch. Then, she heaved a loud sigh.

“How is it?” I asked softly.

“I can’t sense anything,” she replied. “The stagnant magical energy here has completely dissipated too.”

Which meant...

“We did it!” Lidy squealed in the loudest voice she could.

I followed suit and erupted into loud cheering. The troll subjugation was a

success, and all of a sudden, I realized that I was somewhat exhausted. Everyone else must've felt the same way—I watched Anne fall to the ground and Helen rush to her side. I, too, dropped to the ground, rolling around from sheer elation as happiness filled my heart. I let out a loud, *loud* sigh of relief, then stood back up.

“Let’s make our triumphant return!” I declared.

Chapter 6: Our Small, Triumphant Return

When a monster born of stagnant magical energy is killed, nothing of its corpse remains. Our fight to the death was fresh in our minds, along with the feeling of victory (though, ultimately, we'd just surrounded the troll and beaten it to bits). We weren't in the army this time, so there was no grand ceremony to be held. Only Lluisa, Gizelle, and the other fairies would be in the know. Still, the fact that we'd desperately fought to protect this forest remained true.

We grabbed our torches and started walking to the entrance of the dark cave. All of us were desperate to leave this place as quickly as possible, but we still took a small break on our way out. We weren't as tired as yesterday when we'd been forced to retreat. However, our previous escape had been fueled by plans to regroup, so there'd been no time to waste feeling tired.

During our break, we drank some water and ate some of the dried meat we'd brought along as emergency rations.

"I know it's a bit too late to say this, but in terms of food and water, my initial planning was kinda lacking," I admitted.

Helen nodded. "Yeah, guess so." She glanced around, maintaining vigilance while she munched on meat. "We should've brought enough food, provisions, and repair tools to last us at least a day. But I slacked off there too. Shoulda pointed that out myself. Sorry."

"No, I was the one who made the decisions. Next time, we should be better prepared. Or not, I don't know."

Laughter filled the cave. In all honesty, I wasn't keen on accepting these dangerous missions; the fewer the better. I was just a blacksmith, after all.

"We really showed off our power this time around," Anne said with a sigh. "Of course, we didn't really give the troll a choice in the matter."

This battle had been one monster against many of us, and at least in this type of scenario, we'd shown that we could defeat a strong foe without sustaining

any major injuries. Since Lluisa now knew about our power, I was a bit anxious to see how she might react to it.

“If my father knew of a small squad that could defeat that large monster without sustaining so much as a scratch, well, he wouldn’t leave them alone,” Anne confessed.

As Lluisa had said, we were the strongest group in the Black Forest, certainly the most powerful in this area. I could imagine that the emperor, who juggled so many problems at once, would never let an asset as powerful as us run wild.

Anne’s expression hardened into resolve. “I would never tell father about us, though.”

“There isn’t much use worrying about stuff like that now,” I said. “Whatever happens, happens. Worst case, we might have to rely on Camilo or Marius, or even...the margrave.”

Everyone nodded, and at that, we ended our break. We pressed onward. Judging from the light of our torches, it didn’t seem like too much time had passed, but I had no idea what it was like outside. It was during these moments that I truly realized the importance of portable watches. Back on Earth, my work hadn’t really relied on time—I’d toiled night and day—but I’d bought myself a watch anyway, seeking to make sure that I wasn’t too detached from society. I’d used one of my pay bonuses to buy something nice from the brand that sponsored a racing team, and it’d been convenient to check the time on a whim.

Eventually, we started to see the light at the end of the cave, indicating that the exit was near. We quickened our pace as the light grew larger and larger, and we soon saw numerous figures. Lluisa, Rike, and the rest of my family were obviously there, but I also saw that Gizelle and the other fairies had gathered around.

Noticing us, Lluisa stepped forward. “How was it?”

I’d already planned out my response. “We defeated it, of course.”

Lluisa smiled broadly. “Thank you! As the master of the Black Forest, you have my utmost gratitude!”

“We fairies would like to thank you too!” Gizelle exclaimed. Both the dryad and the fairies showered us with applause.

“Welcome back!” Rike said.

“Kululu!”

“Arf! Arf! Arf!”

As our family members greeted us excitedly, it truly felt like I had returned home. I glanced up at the sky, still surrounded by the applause of the fairies. The sun was already past its apex, but there was still some time before it'd set. We'd gone straight to the cave this time, and using our experience from our first round—combined with Helen and the others' assistance—we'd been able to defeat the troll quickly. I would've surely struggled if I'd had to face the monster alone. *I've gotta show my family my gratitude.*

When I saw Helen's armor gleaming under the bright daylight, I noticed that there were numerous small scratches along the surface. It seemed that she'd been dodging all the attacks gracefully...but just barely. Also, since we all had ventured into the cave, every one of our attack squad was covered in dirt. The well would have its chance to shine when we returned home.

We hadn't sustained any grave injuries, though we were dirty and exhausted. Even so, our faces were glimmering with triumph. We all lined up in front of Lluisa, which caused everyone to quiet down. I took a step forward and stared Lluisa straight in the eye.

“Your request has been fulfilled now, correct?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” Lluisa replied with a smile.

“Hooray!” Samya yelled as she high-fived the family members behind me. The fairies once again cheered with joy.

The dryad was all smiles as she casually added, “And since you fulfilled it, I suppose I must give you a reward.”

I'd completely forgotten. She was letting me live here despite knowing about my background, and I felt like that was more than enough of a reward. But I couldn't say so in front of my family. This and that were two separate things, so

I decided to obediently receive our payment.

“First, I’ll bestow upon you a reward that might not be so useful,” Lluisa said with a mischievous wink. She then turned stern and declared solemnly, “I shall give you all the title ‘Black Forest Protector.’”

I assume that title is the result of our accomplishment. As Lluisa spoke, Gizelle and the other fairies lined up in front of me. I even saw Reeja and Deepika in the mix. The fairies carried a set of dark metallic brooches shaped like heater shields, which were all engraved with a tree motif. Each fairy bowed before pinning the brooches to our chests in turn (though since Helen was wearing her breastplate, she had hers affixed to her shoulder).

“With this brooch, I’d love to say that you won’t be attacked in the forest, but that’s sadly not the case,” Lluisa explained. “But the fairies and spirits of this forest will make sure to listen to your requests as much as possible, and you will be well respected, even in other forests. If you ever run into dryads or treants from other places, try showing them this brooch.”

At first, I assumed the title was just a name, a formality, but it seemed to have its own merits. I didn’t think I’d need to use my title in other forests, though—at least I prayed that I would never need to.

“Our lazy blacksmith got unusually fired up and made these brooches,” Gizelle said, chuckling, “so please don’t sell them or throw them away.” She grinned, then floated back to the rest of the fairies.

She must be referring to the lazy blacksmith Deepika and Reeja told me about when I made their weapons. They said the fairy blacksmith would be happy to have less work.

Gizelle’s request wasn’t really necessary—I didn’t plan on discarding anything this precious. These trinkets were proof that we’d completed our task, and if the lazy blacksmith had given their all to make these brooches, I was even less likely to toss mine away.

I turned around, curious to see how Krul and Lucy would receive their symbols—the fairies had placed two pendants around their necks. Lucy looked prouder than usual and she puffed out her chest.

“As for the rest... Hm, I wonder which I should start with.” Lluisa placed a hand over her chin. “All right, let’s go with this one. I should show you why I’m called the master of the forest.”

Lluisa wore a mischievous grin and had a twinkle in her eye. She was more casual and easier to talk to than I’d expected from a master of the forest—perhaps that fact made her feel self-conscious. *It seems like she wants to act the part of a deity right now.*

“As you’re aware, there are spots of water around your house,” Lluisa said. “Why don’t I tell you about a place where you can get *hot* water?”

Lluisa proudly spoke as though she were displaying her master-of-the-forestness in all its wonderful glory. Lucy barked and looked just as proud—it almost seemed like the two were competing.

I gasped in awe at her offer. A hot water vein implied that we could create a hot spring. My family didn’t seem to grasp the weight of this information, since they weren’t familiar with the concept of a hot spring, so they just stared blankly. *As a person from Japan, I’m more than happy with this info.* Rike had stated that there was a hot spring near her family home, but she likely didn’t go to the springs often, so she couldn’t process the significance of having one. I had mentioned that I wanted one by winter, so if we could locate a spot now, it meant that we had plenty of time to plan before starting the build.

“H-Huh?” Lluisa stammered.

She seemed troubled by the unexpected lack of enthusiasm. Everyone fell silent. *What should I do here?*

Samya turned to me. In an attempt to break the awkward atmosphere, she asked, “Will you be happy with a source of hot water?”

I nodded. “A hot spring warms you up in the winter, of course, but it also feels nice to take a dip and wash off your sweat in the summer.”

“Is it a tradition in the Nordic region?”

“Uh, well. Sure, I guess.”

It wasn’t like this world didn’t understand the concept of taking a bath. But

precious fuel was required to heat up large amounts of water. While high-ranking aristocrats may have had the chance to do so often, commoners rarely got that opportunity. Consequently, the concept of taking a hot bath hadn't spread much.

"I'll gladly accept your offer," I said to Lluisa.

"I'm relieved to see that you're happy," she replied, looking slightly more relaxed.

In any case, I was truly elated—I looked forward to breaking ground on the hot spring and building a bathhouse.

"And the last gift might, perhaps, be a bit more satisfying," Lluisa said.

Helen was unable to suppress her curiosity. "Hm?"

The rewards we'd received thus far were of little use to a mercenary. The title (rank?) we'd been bestowed seemed a bit more useful for her than information about a hot spring, but still, receiving something physical would be on another level. I didn't think we were being greedy; we were simply accepting a fitting reward. This could be seen more as a business transaction.

"I couldn't acquire any gold coins," Lluisa said. "So I shall give you a few jewels."

The dryad stuck out her hand and revealed a number of red, blue, and green gems. I'd honestly expected something more, like a rare or precious metal. So, in a sense, this was a bit of a letdown, but payment in currency was nothing out of the ordinary for us. Money was money, and these jewels were definitely worth their weight.

"Though I'm the master of the forest and a part of the Dragon of the Land, I'm only a small portion of a larger being." Lluisa winked. "This is about all I could get for you."

I'd need to go to Camilo for details and to have him appraise the value of these gems, but they seemed quite expensive. The "unsatisfying" nonmonetary rewards (and the fact that I'd received approval to live here) were more than enough for me, though. I considered turning down these jewels, but I felt an ominous pressure on my back that prevented me from doing so.

“Then I’ll gratefully accept,” I said respectfully.

I immediately passed the gems to Diana, who was behind me. Anne peered at the valuable stones with sparkling eyes. *Maybe I can get a rough estimate of their value from her later.*

“I’m sure you’re all tired,” Lluisa said. “I encourage you to return home and rest for today. I’ll send over Gizelle or someone else to tell you the location of the hot water vein at a later date.”

“That’s fine by me.” I nodded. “It’s not of immediate need anyway.” A map or a verbal indication would’ve been enough, but maybe it was inconvenient to convey the details that way.

Lluisa extended her hand to me. “Thank you so much for completing this request.”

I grabbed her outstretched hand and shook it. Another round of applause echoed through the air. Amidst the cheery claps, Lluisa took the opportunity to whisper a few words that only I could hear. Though, *whisper* may not have been an apt description—I didn’t see her lips move. But I heard her words clearly.

“I’ve got some things to tell you. I’ll see you again tonight.”

Before we left, I made sure to tell Gizelle that she was welcome at the cabin any time, sick or not.

“I’d love to visit!” the fairy chief replied with a smile.

“Sounds good.” I turned to my family. “I know you’re all tired, but why don’t we hurry home? We can still use our torches, but it’s better if we get back sooner rather than later.”

No one had any complaints with this suggestion—they all just nodded. We waved to the crowd before turning and heading out, the applause buoying us toward home. I looked up at the sky, and it seemed like we’d be able to get home right before sunset. We moved quickly, but we made sure to remain wary of our surroundings. We’d just fulfilled a request from the master of the forest, but that mattered not to nature and the beasts living within it. If they deemed us prey, we would be attacked.

Had Lluisa guided us home, this wouldn't have been an issue, but I was reluctant to ask. I'd probably end up feeling guilty. *And it'd be even weirder if I declined Lluisa's offer but had the fairies accompany us.* So, it was best to return home with just my family.

We continued to walk through the quiet forest. Much like our journey to the cave, we were graced with a cool breeze, and the foliage offered ample shade. This helped our stamina quite a bit, but the powerful rays of the summer sun made it clear that the day was still, in fact, quite hot.

I wiped away my sweat and grumbled, "This is when I start missing the cool air from the cave."

The troll's hideout had been cool and chilly to the point where I'd thought we were in a different season. In my previous world, I had known the pleasures of air conditioning, so I yearned for something that was similarly convenient and helpful. *Well, at least, I think so.*

"Would you rather abandon the cabin and move into the cave?" Diana teased as she walked beside me.

My shoulders slumped. "A blacksmith who lives even deeper within the Black Forest... Inside of a cave, no less? That's way too suspicious."

"Yeah, I don't think I would've ended up in your household if you had lived there," Anne remarked.

Normally, just the idea of entering the Black Forest alone would make a person hesitate. If someone were forced to venture deeper into the woods to meet me inside a cave, the number of potential visitors would decrease drastically.

Helen, walking on Diana's opposite side, nodded at Anne's words. If even the Lightning Strike would think twice before meeting me in the cave, then practically no other human would even attempt to visit me.

I shook my head. "It'd be troublesome if people seeking custom models couldn't come to us at all."

"And, in a cave, you never know whether it's night or day out," Samya added as she stepped in front of me and looked far ahead. Lucy was by her feet,

sniffing in the same direction. “That’d be rough.”

Could there be an animal nearby? Judging by how relaxed Samya looked, whatever it was, it probably wasn’t a predator like a wolf or a bear. If it had been a dangerous herbivore like the horned deer, she would’ve undoubtedly recommended that we take a detour.

“I can use my magic to make some light, but it would be a bit tough for me too,” Lidy admitted.

“And I’d get lost while carrying materials,” Rike said.

“Yeah.” I nodded. “On top of all that, we’d have to live everyday fearing that a troll might emerge from the stagnant magic. That would suck. I’d much rather fight bears.”

Samya chuckled. “Ditto.”

The rustles of the leaves were drowned out by our laughter, and we managed to make it home without any fuss. The sun had almost completely set. As nightfall enveloped the area, the Black Forest turned even darker.

We gathered at the terrace, completing our triumphant return to the cabin.

“I just want to tell you all that I’m sorry to have dragged everyone around with my selfish wishes,” I said. “Thank you.”

Though it didn’t feel quite right to be so stiff in front of my family, this was my way of ending things. I recalled another anime where the main character was a porco—the chief of the bandits said something similar in that story.

“I’m truly glad that we all returned home without anyone suffering any major injuries,” I said. “We’ll worry about the small stuff later, but for now, we’ve completed this mission. Thank you for your hard work!”

A small cheer rose amidst the darkening forest. Krul and Lucy’s joyful cries also joined the mix.

“Let’s unpack, then we can all get ourselves cleaned up,” I said. “Tonight’s dinner will be a bit grand.”

“Okay!” everyone replied (with Krul and Lucy calling out their agreement as well).

We unloaded the luggage carried by Krul and then got ready to wash up. With a loud *splash*, I poured water from the well over my head. The cold water, which seemed uncaring of the hot summer temperature, trickled down my skin, cleaning and cooling my warm, beat-up body. *It's just the body of a thirty-year-old man with the heart of someone who's forty.* I then took a damp cloth and scrubbed my wet body before dumping water over my head again and drying off with a different cloth. We didn't have a bath, but doing this much was still refreshing, and it got the job done. *But now that I know I can build a hot spring nearby, I can't help but feel enticed.*

I finished up my washing and turned it over to the women of our family (which was everyone other than me, including Krul and Lucy). They would take turns bathing while I made dinner.

Feeling a bit lonely at the lack of company, I changed into a fresh set of clothes I'd prepared ahead of time and visited our storage shed before entering the cabin. Though I'd mentioned that we would have a grand dinner tonight, we were still in a cabin that stood isolated within the Black Forest. I couldn't exactly go to the city to buy food, so I made sure to use plenty of spices from storage to liberally season the vast quantity of meat I would prepare.

I wouldn't just add extra pepper to make a pastrami-like dish tonight—no, I decided to prepare dishes of various flavor profiles with different spices. This way, it would turn into a luxurious feast. Instead of just grilling the boar meat, I decided to slather some miso on it; the dried deer meat was stewed in some wine. I also baked plenty of unleavened bread. Even though I had several things cooking at once, there were still moments when I stood around waiting with nothing to do.

In that idleness, my thoughts wandered. *What if I had nigari and soybeans? I could make tofu with the well water. Or if I dug as deep as that cave ran, we might be able to create a cool storage shed.* I purposely tried to steer my thoughts toward potential lifestyle improvements, but eventually, the real question on my mind could not be ignored: *what is Lluisa gonna tell me tonight?*

Judging by how she'd spoken, it seemed like she wanted to talk to me alone—perhaps she felt it was important to inform me of a certain matter. However, I

couldn't forget a vital detail: she knew why I was here and that I had been reincarnated.

On second thought—if a house and a blacksmith suddenly appeared in the middle of a domain that I was in charge of, wouldn't it be odd if I didn't know a thing or two about it? Maybe she wants to talk about something related to that. Since she'd already given me her permission to stay here, I didn't think that she would backtrack on her word and suddenly tell me to leave. However, there were no guarantees that I wouldn't someday be pushed out. I was gradually growing more and more anxious.

"Well, whatever happens, happens."

I stirred a pot, steam rising, and mumbled to myself. I had graciously received another chance at my life, and I was determined to live it quietly and peacefully. But, however much I tried to ignore it, I was still a complete outsider in this world. So, if the forest's landlord told me to leave, I was prepared to obediently do so and find another way to live my second life. I'd just go somewhere else and create a normal routine again from scratch. *Who would tag along with me if that were to happen?*

Suddenly, I heard a loud *clack* and saw Samya peeking in from the door. The muffled sounds of the clapper came from the forge.

"Ah, there you are," Samya said. "We're done!"

"Gotcha," I replied. "I'm almost done here too, so could you carry these out?"

I chased away my dull and gloomy thoughts and tried to sound as bright as possible. Samya had the ability to sense these large shifts in emotions, so I had to be careful—I didn't want to worry her with my groundless fears.

"M'kay," she said, before turning to call the others. "Hey! Eizo said that food's ready!"

For a split second, Samya had worn a doubtful expression, but she still brought the others in. Everyone bustled into the kitchen and helped to carry the dishes out onto the terrace.

This might be my last party. With that thought in mind, I followed them, my arms laden with food.

Chapter 7: A Small Party

“A toast to our successful subjugation of the monster!” I called out. “Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

This was our way of doing things—the party to celebrate our success was a bright and lively affair. I felt like this was the best way to forget the fears I’d locked away in my heart.

We talked loudly and cheerfully while stuffing our mouths with food. Some of the seasoned dishes were no different from our normal menu, but amidst the joyous atmosphere, I felt like they tasted better. My gnawing hunger also improved my perception of the flavor.

I thought I’d made a ton of food, but everyone had a hearty appetite—the meal disappeared almost instantly. We would normally clean up immediately and end the party, but tonight, we decided to hang out on the terrace and talk a bit more.

“Oh yeah. Krul and Lucy didn’t make a fuss during our adventure,” I said. “I’m so proud of them.”

Rike had reported that their behavior at the cave had been perfect. They’d tagged along, but they could only stand around, so it must have been quite boring for them. In the worst case, they might’ve wandered around and gotten into trouble.

My mind had been so wrapped up in the battle that I’d only thought about them once all was said and done. *That’s...something I need to reflect upon.* For every future expedition, I would need to decide whether to leave them at home or bring them along.

Rike used her free hand to stroke Krul’s neck. “Yep. They both stayed still and waited quietly while staring at the entrance of the cave.”

I shrugged. “Maybe they understood our situation somehow.”

Diana and Helen nodded along.

“When I tell them to back away because something’s dangerous, they always obediently obey,” Helen said.

“And Lucy is always quietly observing everything,” Diana added.

I suppose this behavior is the norm for my two daughters.

Time passed, Helen started to sing, and Samya tapped the table in rhythm. Rike and Lidy danced around a bonfire we’d built in our yard; Diana and Anne showcased their aristocratic dance moves. This family time was a little different from usual, but it was still wonderfully fun.

At around midnight, I woke up and stepped outside of the cabin. I was already so used to my home that I was able to make my way through the darkness without stumbling. *What time is it now, if I were to use the numbered hours of my previous world?* The moon was at its apex and illuminated our garden below. The flora reflected a pale blue glow, and the sight was mesmerizing. There was someone waiting for me in the garden—a familiar figure.

“Lluisa.”

“Good evening, Eizo,” she replied with a smile. “Now then, let’s talk a little, shall we?” The moon was behind her, and I felt like she wielded a greater force than usual.

I gulped anxiously.

“You don’t have to be so on guard,” she said, smiling once more under the pale moonlight.

So she says. But whether I can believe her words so easily is another matter entirely.

“We don’t need to stand and talk, do we?” I asked, gesturing to the terrace that still should’ve had some chairs set out. “Please, let’s sit over there.”

“Ah, I’ll take you up on your kind offer.”

Lluisa walked in front of me. The terrace wasn’t hidden from view, so she apparently knew where we were headed. Dressed in a toga-like garment, she

boldly turned her back to me, seemingly letting her guard down. I wasn't sure if that gesture implied some level of trust toward me, or if she was confident that I couldn't lay a finger on her.

I had a knife hidden on me just in case. But even if I were to ever unsheathe it, I doubted it'd be aimed at Lluisa. I wasn't naive enough to believe that I had even a minuscule chance of besting the master of the forest in battle.



We headed to the terrace and sat across from each other. It sort of resembled a talk show that I'd seen on Earth.

Lluisa exhaled. "Let's get started, shall we?"

I nodded, curious to hear what she had to say.

"Since it's just the two of us here, I'm sure you have an inkling of the subject at hand," she said. "But it's about the circumstances surrounding your presence here."

"I guessed as much." No other topic had come to mind.

"First, as I've said before, the Dragon of the Land—including myself, the master of the forest—has approved of you staying here. Even if you aren't a person originally from this world."

"Thank you," I said, bowing my head.

As long as I had their assurance, I had nothing to fear. At this point, the margrave was a more troublesome existence.

I wasn't sure if Lluisa knew my thoughts, but she nonetheless continued.

"With that in mind..."

Here it is.

"Would you be able to teach Gizelle, or even the other fairies, some knowledge from your original world? Not often—just every once in a while. But I would like you to occasionally share your experience with them."

"My...original world?" I asked.

"That's right."

"But what are they going to do with that knowledge? This world contains magic, but the technology here is leagues behind that of my old world. The fairies likely won't be able to create most of the stuff I'm familiar with."

Precise machines that didn't require electricity—like the Myriad year clock—or even tools that required minimal electricity could possibly be created. But I doubted that anything beyond a difference engine could be made (especially not a computer). The main source of energy in this world came from steam

engines, and no one had yet invented the internal combustion engine. Even if people were able to use magic to create pressure within machines, it would be impossible to create precision parts.

In the future, this world might find a way to do those things, but I didn't understand the necessity of this knowledge in the present time. *This might be a clumsy and rude analogy, but if I explained the concept of a smartphone to a person from the Edo period, I doubt it would be of much use.*

And...

"Personally, I don't want my knowledge to make too great of an impact on this world."

Hence my initial trepidation about developing a leaf spring suspension system. I'd also given up on building a hand crank pump for the well. According to the explanation I received from the Watchdog, I wouldn't have much of an effect on this world, even if I ran wild. Regardless, there was no need for me to go out of my way and turn the hands of time forward.

"I see. You're very sincere, aren't you, Eizo?" Lluisa said with a graceful chuckle. "I expected that response from you. Which is why I specifically requested you to tell only the fairies."

Eyes wide in shock, I was unable to process her words for a moment. I thought for a few seconds before I came up with an answer.

"Because there aren't any humans who would believe the words of the fairies."

"Precisely." Lluisa silently put her hands together. "There aren't many humans who are aware of the fairies' existence to begin with. And the humans who do know don't hold a fairy's word in high regard. Should the fairies babble about knowledge that's unheard of in this world, it would most likely be brushed off as nothing but nonsense."

I nodded. "From a technological standpoint, many inventions from my old world can't be produced in this world yet. However, *some* items might be possible."

"We'll make sure the fairies won't leak that information. But, on the off

chance that one does, everyone will simply think that a human inventor received a hint of inspiration from the fairies. Either way, it's nothing for you to worry about, Eizo."

"Hm. Oh, speaking of, I almost forgot to ask about something important."

"And what might that be?" Lluisa's smile never faltered. If a person sensed that she had some ulterior motive, they would've undoubtedly put their guard up at this point.

"Why are you making this request of me in the first place?" I asked. "I mean, if you simply want information without worrying about it leaking elsewhere... Well, I can't be your only option."

"Ah. I can't fault you for wondering that," Lluisa replied, putting a hand on her cheek and sighing. "To be precise, this request comes from the main body. Unfortunately, this also means that I'm not privy to the details."

"The Dragon of the Land wants this?"

"Correct. And I'm but a small part of the dragon. It's impossible for me to know everything about the main body. I'm sorry, Eizo, but that's all I can tell you."

"No need to be sorry. It's not your fault."

Still, this meant that I would need to divulge information about Earth to the fairies, all without knowing *why* I was doing it. I had kept my mouth shut about my old world this entire time, and I wasn't sure if I could just casually change my way of thinking.

As I was lost in these thoughts, Lluisa offered a faint smile. "You don't have to give me an answer now. I said I'd tell you the location of a hot spring vein, didn't I? Gizelle will pop by sometime soon with that piece of information—if you've got any intention of sharing your knowledge, you can tell her then."

"I...understand."

"Then I'll see you later." Lluisa waved before suddenly vanishing.

With a *very* deep sigh, I sank into my chair. My thoughts seemed bottomless as I stared up at the glow of the moon. *Why does the Dragon of the Land want*

my knowledge? If this world were to repeat the historical events of my previous world, I would essentially become a man from the future (though, with magic and different geographical locations, it wouldn't be a perfect one-for-one redux).

Did the dragon truly want to know about future events and technology?

"It's probably not just because of curiosity," I said, shaking my head.

If curiosity was the goal, then why were the fairies acting as an intermediary? Why couldn't the Dragon of the Land come to me directly and ask? *Maybe it's not possible—perhaps there's something preventing it from reaching out, some hidden reason I'm unaware of. That reason might even be confidential information that only the Dragon of the Land can know. Or...maybe the dragon actually wants the fairies to whimsically tell others their knowledge.* At this point, that seemed to be the most likely conclusion. As Lluisa had said, knowledge of Earth's technology would be a revelation to the people of this world, and anything that sounded impossible would be brushed away as nonsense gibberish.

Take, for example, the simple leaf spring suspension system I'd made and divulged to Camilo—someone could've received a huge bolt of inspiration and invented something absurd like that. And if that sort of thing happened with my other knowledge, I honestly wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

While I can't explain anything complicated like nuclear fission (it's not like I'm very knowledgeable on that topic anyway), I think it'll be fine to explain other concepts. I didn't want to replicate King Midas's folly and earn my own pair of ass's ears. But, having fewer secrets could be better for my mental health and overall well-being.

"Okay," I said, my voice full of new resolve. "I think I'll be fine if the fairies come tomorrow."

So, I did some stretches and then decided to try and rest before dawn. *I probably still have enough time to catch some z's.* I returned to my room and slowly got back into bed.

Tomorrow, I will return to my normal lifestyle.

####

The next morning, everyone woke up like usual—it was as if yesterday’s events had never transpired. The only real deviation was the summer heat, but everyone still acted like their usual selves. Krul and Lucy happily tagged along with my morning routine; the family ate breakfast and prayed in front of the *kamidana*, just as we always did; and when we split up the tasks in the forge, we all cheerfully worked and fell silent during times that required concentration.

But of course, yesterday *had* happened, and the fight was a popular topic during lunch and dinner. Even now, Helen was voraciously eating some deer meat and passionately discussing the battle.

“If you ask me, the troll’s shrieks were the real problem,” she said. “If we coulda suppressed them somehow, we would’ve had an easier time beating it.”

“They did make us falter for a moment and miss our timing,” I admitted.

“Yep. Luckily, the thing didn’t have a foul stench—the troll’s screaming was the only factor that really tripped us up.”

Agreed. Though, obviously, the troll had no intention of going down quietly without a fight.

Diana slowly gulped her soup and then added, “We were in a cave this time around, so we had no choice but to fight up close. Maybe it’s better to have a few weapons for battles where we need to maintain our distance.”

“That’s something to think about,” I replied. “Longer weapons are better for a fight in the forest, no matter who or what our opponent may be.” The short spear we had was about my height or a little taller. That might’ve been enough, but I still felt it was important to have a stock of weapons that could cover an even longer range.

“If we plan to stay here long-term, it might be good to install a catapult or ballista somewhere,” Helen said, munching on some meat.

I raised an eyebrow. “In a blacksmith’s forge?”

“In a blacksmith’s forge.” She grinned, though her eyes indicated that she was

quite serious.

Well, it's not like I don't romanticize those weapons. I would be excited to reveal that I had hidden armaments in the cabin. Though I was mentally forty, I was still a boy at heart.

Usually, nothing dangerous ever ventured too close to our home. But if Helen, Diana, and I were out, and something like a bear appeared, it would be quite troublesome for the rest of the family. That much was as clear as the flames in the firebed. During such occasions, having a siege weapon would be incredibly useful. *It's certainly not a ridiculous suggestion.*

"I'll think about it," I said.

Helen (and even Rike) stared at me with sparkling eyes. I gave a strained chuckle. Setting aside the plans of turning our cabin into a fortress, I had a few other things that I wanted to build.

"So, Eizo, let me get this straight—you want to construct a new covered walkway that connects Krul and Lucy's hut, our storage shed, and the cabin?" Samya pondered this with a spoon in her mouth. "Hmmm."

Usually, Rike would scold Samya for her bad manners, but the dwarf was currently chewing on some meat and gulping down her fourth mug of alcohol for the day. She had her hands full.

"Right." I nodded. "And if we have a hot spring nearby, we'll want to create a bathhouse for it, right? I'd like to add that as a stop along the walkway as well."

"A bathhouse?" Samya asked, tilting her head to one side, the spoon still in her mouth.

I paused for a moment. "People don't usually wander around the Black Forest, but you wouldn't want to take a bath for the world to see, would you? I want to build a structure that'll give us a little privacy."

"Huh."

"And wouldn't it be convenient if you could change your clothes or get dressed there? Even with all of us living here, you wouldn't have to worry about anyone seeing you."

Everyone always cleaned themselves in their own rooms (usually with a damp cloth). Unless I forcibly entered a room without permission, there was little chance of me ever stumbling upon someone's naked body. I also made sure to stay within my room for prolonged periods of time while the women were washing. However, if I rushed out of my room with an urgent matter to attend to (most likely a physiological response), I could potentially glimpse something I shouldn't.

If we had a separate building for washing, I wouldn't have to worry about any of these situations—I could wander around our cabin freely.

"So that's how it is, huh?" Samya asked, scrunching her nose.

Was she worried about our first meeting, when I'd seen her in a compromised state of dress? Or was she just being carefree toward her family? I was a bit happy, but also a bit curious. The feeling was somewhat complicated.

"Yep, that's how it is," I replied. "Once we find the location of the hot spring, we can figure out what resources we need and plan out a whole project. At least for now, though, we can begin on the walkway. Oh, but there's no way we can complete it in one day. It'll be a larger undertaking than that."

We'd defeated such a powerful monster, and it was unlikely that any other beasts would emerge in the near future. So, the only thing on our docket currently was the standing order for Camilo. *Better to start soon and complete this project while we have the time—if we get any more special requests in the future, our home renovations will need to be delayed. Though with that mindset, I'll just keep making myself busy.*

"I understand the benefits of building all of this, but if we add another connecting walkway to the cabin, won't we create an odd shape?" Lidy asked quietly. "I think it's best to have a cleaner and more organized floor plan from the beginning."

This was true—I couldn't deny that adding a hallway like that might cause some inconvenience. "Hmm. As long as we don't try to build something in the center of the garden, I figured we had some leeway and flexibility," I said. "Is my thinking a bit too naive?"

Lidy placed her hand on her small chin. "The garden here *is* large."

“If the hot spring ends up being far away from the cabin, we could decide against extending the walkway all the way out to it. But it seems like a waste to not work on anything in our free time. And if the spring *is* nearby, maybe we can quickly build a little something to connect it. I’m just spitballing here, though.”

For some reason, I felt like a husband begging his wife to buy him that expensive camera he’d always wanted. *My state of mind is probably not so different from that hypothetical husband.*

After thinking for a while, Lidy finally relented. “It seems like we’ll need something either way. It might be better to be prepared than to panic later because we haven’t built anything.”

“Right?!” I asked excitedly.

She giggled, and it was like she was lightheartedly communicating that I was a somewhat troublesome person.

“Is that okay with all of you?” I asked.

“Fine by me,” Samya said.

Rike seemed enthusiastic. “Whatever you say, Boss.”

Diana nodded. “There’s nothing else going on at the moment, so let’s build it.”

“I’m good here,” Helen said.

And finally, Anne also agreed. “If it improves our quality of life, then I’m all for it.”

I wasn’t sure if everyone was gung ho about this project, but they’d all given me their assent. With a new walkway, we’d be able to take things out of the storage shed without worrying about the weather, and we could easily visit Krul and Lucy’s hut on stormy days. *Rain or shine, our normal routine could proceed uninterrupted. That would be nice.* It would be a minor quality-of-life change, but my mind was filled with plans of how to build and ideas about what the completed project might look like.

####

A few days later, we were back to forging weapons for Camilo's order. The summer heat was sweltering, but we all managed—no one fainted. Everyone was somewhat used to hot temperatures (this was a smithy, after all), but I was glad that we didn't have any accidents.

I was grateful that we'd built the well before the incident with the troll. The cool water was refreshing on these hot days, and it allowed me to wash myself more thoroughly. Most of the time, the water I brought from the lake every morning was enough for us; however, we utilized the well on days when it looked like our lake water might run dry. As summer progressed, we would need more water than ever—building the well when we'd had the chance had been an excellent idea.

On the day of our delivery to Camilo, we packed our cargo as usual and had Krul take us through the forest. As was typical of summer days, the sun's rays were beating down on us; though we were amongst the trees, the heat was getting to me.

"We've got this much shade in the forest, but it's still so hot," I griped.

"Is it because you're from the Nordic region, Boss? You don't handle the heat well?"

"Er, well, I guess so."

To be precise, I was just too used to having an air conditioner with me at all times. On Earth, I would usually commute to my workplace by train, so I'd had constant access to an AC. Lluisa was the only one who would understand that, though. I kept quiet.

According to my installed knowledge, it seemed like summer here was similar to Japan: hot and incredibly humid. It was indeed quite warm here, but being under direct sunlight was a different kind of heat than I'd ever experienced—maybe my body just wasn't used to it.

"I wonder if the roads are much hotter." Diana petted a limp Lucy, who was sprawled across her lap. Thankfully, Lucy wasn't suffering from heatstroke or anything; she was simply relaxing.

"The grass on the plains is tall, but not tall enough to provide shade like in the

forest,” I reasoned. “I bet it’ll get pretty hot. Maybe we can create a cover or something for Lucy using a piece of cloth.”

Helen rummaged around in our cargo and took out a piece of cloth. We were still rolling through the forest, so there was no need to use it just yet. Lucy happily wagged her tail, and the Lightning Strike smiled.

I ran my hand across the side of the cart. “Maybe we should improve upon this in the future. Add a hood or something. That way, we can protect ourselves from the sunlight, and we won’t have to worry about our belongings getting too wet on rainy days.”

“But we’re passing through the forest, aren’t we?” Anne countered, looking around.

“Any kind of covering might snag on branches or other foliage,” Samya added.

It was true—we were in a dense forest. The tree branches grew freely and broadly, uninhibited by anything. Luckily, none of us needed to duck under branches while seated, but a few hung low enough that if Anne stood up, she’d need to watch her head. If we were to build a hood, I wanted it to be high enough that we could stand inside the cart, but anything that tall would get caught in the foliage.

“I’ll think of something,” I said, turning back to the front.

The gap in the treeline that opened to the road was right in front of us, and I could already tell that the sunlight beat down harshly outside the shelter of the canopy. The grass of the plains greeted us, swaying in the gentle breeze. It grew freely—here and there, blades sprouted up high, as tall as the average human. Perhaps they were looking for more sunlight. When the wind brushed past, they fluttered slightly.

Lidy stared at the scenery, and with her voice full of admiration, she said, “This is beautiful in its own right.”

Barring the heat, I agreed that it was beautiful. “But now that we’re under direct sunlight, it feels even hotter.”

I wasn’t sure if “piercing” was the accurate descriptor here, but the sharp, relentless rays were burning my head and back. Lucy was under the cloth that

Helen had taken out earlier; it was pinned between pieces of cargo, creating a small roof of shade. The occasional breeze would pass through, and Lucy, tail wagging, seemed quite comfortable.

Lucy seemed to be doing fine, but I was worried about someone else too. “Is Krul okay?” I asked Rike.

Before Rike could reply, I received an answer from Krul herself. “*Kulululu!*” Her chirrup conveyed joy, so it seemed like she was fine.

“If you’re ever tired or if things get tough, make sure to stop, okay?” I told her.

“*Kulu.*” Krul gently nodded her head as though to say, “I know, I know.”

She’s in such a great mood, so maybe my comments were just unnecessary. I wasn’t sure if drakes had a rebellious phase, but if Krul ever went through one, I’d likely be devastated. I glanced over at Diana, who also wore an awkward grimace. *She must be thinking about the same thing as me...probably.*

I pondered these baseless fears about the future that weighed down my heart, and Krul pulled our wagon straight to the city beneath the scorching heat. The sun continued to beat down, and while a hood may not have been necessary, I would’ve gladly accepted a roof of some sort. Even a makeshift solution—sticks on the four corners of the cart that held up a cloth—would be preferable to no shade at all. Something like that would be easily retractable within the forest too, or when we had to unload our wares. The biggest issue with this solution was its lack of style, but there was no need to prioritize that factor over convenience. We weren’t exactly going to tour different nations on this cart. I wasn’t even an aristocrat, though I did have two noblewomen with me.

Overall, the heat wasn’t as bad as I’d experienced on Earth. We weren’t as cool as we’d been in the forest, but with the help of the breeze, it was still nice and comfortable. *If it gets any hotter, I’ll think about solutions. The makeshift cart canopy would be easy to build anyway.*

We didn’t run into any bandits—in this weather, robbers would have to risk heatstroke or even their lives to wait for potential victims. When we rolled up to the gate, I called out to the usual guard. “Hello there. Hot today, isn’t it?”

He gave a gentle wave of his hand. “Ah, you guys again. Yep. Summer’s here.”

He grabbed the bottle of water around his waist and took a sip. *Of course he’s thirsty—he’s standing here in metal armor.* The guard likely knew about the importance of hydration, not from a scientific standpoint, but from personal experience. He sighed, glanced at us, then turned toward the road once more. As usual, we were allowed to pass. Even though we knew each other, he still made sure to check the bare minimum for safety. *Seriously, though, it’s the absolute bare minimum.*

I prayed in my heart that nothing would happen to him as I bowed my head and we passed through. As usual, the city streets were bustling with life. There may have been a slightly smaller crowd, and the citizens were wearing summer clothing, but those were the only notable differences.

On the other hand, people I clocked as outsiders wore a bit more. Long pants and sleeves weren’t just for protection from the cold—they also shielded one’s skin from the sun. It wasn’t so hot that they couldn’t endure being more covered, and if it got to that point, they could always take something off.

Apparently, *I* was the only one who felt like this weather was too much.

The familiar scary-faced man sat in front of his stall with a glare, wearing slightly less clothing than usual. He gave a quick wave to Lucy and seemed a little excited the moment he saw Krul. When I realized that he looked forward to seeing my daughters, I felt a little happy, like a parent watching their children being praised.

Lucy noticed him and gave an energetic “*Arf! Arf!*” as she wagged her tail with gusto. The man smiled slightly. I wasn’t sure who he was, but one day, I wanted to let him pet Krul and Lucy.

Once we reached Camilo’s, we stored our cart in the warehouse, and I unhitched Krul from the wagon. I walked her and Lucy to the back, and the usual apprentice came out, wearing a short-sleeved shirt and shorts. The clothes suited him well—he seemed like the textbook example of a young boy.

“Hey,” I said. “Hot today, isn’t it?”

“Sure is,” the apprentice replied before he turned to my daughters. “Ah, Krul,

Lucy, let's go over there."

He pointed toward a long wooden board that was propped against a wall. It was a pretty wide space, and Krul had ample room to sit down beneath it and relax.

"There's plenty of shade over there," the apprentice explained.

"Ah, that so? Sorry about the inconvenience, and thank you."

I ruffled the apprentice's hair gratefully. Looking a little rumpled, he went ahead with Lucy and Krul. Lucy rubbed her body against his feet, seeming like she was playfully trying to trip him.

"If they do something naughty, you've got my permission to scold them," I said.

"Oh no, I'll be fine!"

The apprentice awkwardly made his way to the shade, and we all gazed at the wholesome scene for a moment before going inside. My shoulders' HP was steadily decreasing.

"Sorry to have you come here in this heat," Camilo said as he entered the meeting room.

The head clerk was nowhere to be found. *He must be checking our goods.*

"This is my work," I replied. "If I lost you as my client, I wouldn't be able to put food on the table."

I forced a smile, but quite frankly, that was a lie. Even including the costs of raising Krul and Lucy, I had enough money—the family could make do for a while. In terms of food and fuel, we were somewhat self-sufficient. Even if my contract were cut right this instant, we could probably last a year or two with no problems. And if I truly couldn't take care of everyone, I would unfortunately have them return to their households, but that would be in the far, far future.

"I see," Camilo replied. "Unlike during the rainy season, it's not like it's pouring here every day. I'm grateful you could make it."

"Business good?"

“Yep.”

He grinned. *Looks like he’s got something.* Helen, who sat near me, let out just a sliver of her murderous intent, but she was probably just annoyed by his reaction.

“Remember what I got from you?” Camilo asked. “Or more precisely, what you taught me.”

“Taught you? Oh, the suspension system?”

He nodded. “Yep. We’ve started to mass-produce them. I first attached one to my carriage to test it out, and...that’s some good stuff.”

“Ah, that’s great!”

Camilo had mentioned mass-producing the leaf spring suspension system a while ago, and now he’d finally done it. Having them installed should make the physical distribution of goods easier for him. And if logistics improved, transporting goods to the army would also go more smoothly.

So what was the impact of this upgrade on the world? Only God—I mean, the Dragon of the Land—would know. I didn’t have a clue. I would be happy if the world remained peaceful, but all I could do was pray for that. *Maybe Lluisa had contacted us with that in mind too.*

“And now that I can transport goods a little farther, your wares have been delivered a little farther too,” Camilo explained. “Your stuff is selling nicely.”

“Oooh,” Samya and Rike murmured. They always helped to forge the goods we brought to Camilo, so those two must’ve been genuinely happy to hear that the items they’d made were selling well. I shared their elation.

“I see. So did you want me to increase—”

Camilo shook his head before I could finish. “I’ll sell whatever you bring me. I’m sure you know that. But there’s no need for you to go out of your way to increase your output.”

Someone in our family breathed a sigh of relief. I wasn’t sure who.

“And well, combined with that suspension,” Camilo continued, “I felt like this was a fair price this time around.”

On cue, the head clerk entered the room. He was carrying a leather bag, which he placed on the table. The sound had already given away the contents, but when I checked inside, I saw that the bag was stuffed with gold coins.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“You know what,” Camilo said. “It’s money.”

“Yeah, uh, I can see that, but...”

I smiled awkwardly; Camilo feigned innocence. *He knows what I’m asking and is just avoiding having to answer.*

“It’s for the suspension,” explained Camilo.

“I thought I said I didn’t need compensation.”

He sighed loudly. “You say that, Eizo, but I’m gonna make a lot of dough with this suspension system. Well, I haven’t sold it to others yet, so I’m just guessing.”

I nodded. Using knowledge from my previous world, I was almost certain that this mechanism would sell extremely well. I doubted that one could claim a copyright or any such thing on the leaf springs, so others would probably duplicate the design over and over. At that point, demand would reach its peak and then die out, but until then, Camilo would practically monopolize the market. Knowing him, he likely had plans to delay his design spreading, or at least prolong that inevitability as much as possible. Otherwise, he never would’ve decided to sell this system to others.

“If I start rolling in money for free, I’ll have a guilty conscience that’ll get worse for every item I sell.”

I snorted. “Pft, you aren’t that kinda guy.”

“Ouch! That’s rude. I’m a pretty sensitive man, you know.” He acted offended for a moment before a grin spread across his face. “In any case, it’s probably wise for you to learn a bit more about how to make money.”

Rike, Diana, and Anne nodded firmly. *I’ve been told this time and time again, but I just can’t seem to understand it.* All my products were made due to my cheat abilities, meaning that I forged items by borrowing power from

elsewhere. As such, I was a bit hesitant to make tons of money with my cheats. *I feel a little bad about it.* Of course, I couldn't tell Camilo this, so I just folded my arms in front of me, thinking long and hard.

"Hrmm," I groaned. "So that's how this goes, huh?"

"Yep," Camilo replied with a throaty chuckle. "With fair work, you should get fair payment. And it really does make me feel less guilty and hesitant."

I glanced over at the head clerk and met his gaze. He smiled and nodded.

"All right, then," I relented. "I'll gratefully accept this payment."

I grabbed the bag of money, and just before I was about to tie it closed, I took out about ten gold coins and placed them on the table. Camilo raised an eyebrow.

"Ah," someone gasped. I guessed it came from the direction of Anne.

There was a beat of silence.

"What's this?" Camilo asked.

"Payment in advance," I said. "I'd like for you to obtain an item called rice from the Nordic region. We've got no plans of growing it—we just want it for food."

People from my previous world may have imagined rice fields with paddies growing, but the climate here was unsuitable for the crop, and those types of fields required a lot of work to maintain. *Upland rice—though it doesn't taste as good as regular rice and doesn't yield as much grain—may have a chance of growing here. For now, even if this world's rice doesn't taste as good as Earth's, I have to give it a shot. As a person raised in Japanese culture, I feel it's my obligation to try it.*

"And..." I continued.

"There's more?" Camilo said in an exaggerated manner.

I nodded. "If you can get your hands on unusual metals, could you, please? I don't have anything particular in mind, so the type of metal doesn't matter. You can take the money from here, and if it's not enough, I'll bring more."

He sighed loudly again. “You’ve got a certain...*style*, I’ll give you that.”

“Guess so.”

We all laughed. I glanced over and saw Rike, eyes sparkling as her excitement grew. Diana sighed loudly. Lidy put a hand on Anne’s shoulder and offered her puzzling words of consolation: “That’s the kind of man he is.” Samya and Helen didn’t seem to care—they yawned in sync like sisters.

Camilo grinned mischievously. “You sure you wanna give me this advanced payment without consulting the rest of your family?”

“Er, I think I’ll be fine. Hopefully.” Cold sweat ran down my back.

Ten gold coins was a pretty decent sum of money, but I had plenty of savings (which was frankly unfitting for a blacksmith like me), and I still had a greater amount left in the bag I’d just received.

Diana sighed again. “It’s money you earned from your wares, so it’s fine.”

Her comment sounded slightly thorny, but she gave a strained laugh, as though to say, “There’s no helping this man.” Everyone else nodded along. I’d received approval *after* handing over the money, but the family seemed to agree with my spending.

“W-Well, now that I’m done with everything I need to do, I think I’ll be taking my leave.” I hastily stood up. “I’ll come again in two weeks.”

Camilo roared with laughter as I left in a hurry. “Sure! Later!”

Our usual business meeting had come to a close. As I stepped outside the room, I felt like it’d become slightly hotter. *Sunlight peeks into this hallway, after all.* I had walked down the stairs and was headed to the back when Anne turned to me.

“Are we not doing anything with the jewels?” she asked.

“Hm?” I replied. “Ah, yeah.” *She must be referring to the reward we received from Lluisa when we killed the troll.* “It’s not like we need to convert them into money right now, so I thought it was better to leave them be. They don’t take up much space either, not much more than gold coins.”

“You’re right,” Anne said. “Though, some of those gems were pretty

valuable.”

“From a blacksmith’s perspective, none of them were terribly interesting.”

I’d glanced at them with my cheats but had detected no valuable metals in the mix. They were just plain old jewels. *Which might be a rude way to describe priceless gems.* Regardless, it didn’t seem necessary to know their value for now, so I just decided to store them away as assets.

“But it might be time to think of a place to store money and jewels,” I said.

Because I made this trip once every two weeks, it was easy for me to forget, but our cabin was located in the depths of the Black Forest—basically no one could reach our home, much less in a casual manner. A careless person would easily get lost amongst the dense foliage, and the wolves acted as nature’s guards to protect the forest. On rare occasions, one could run into bears, boars, and deer, which were dangerous in their own rights. It would be difficult for a normal person to come out of a battle with these beasts unscathed.

Even if someone *was* able to get close to the forge, our cabin was surrounded by a magic spell that repelled humans. Without overcoming these obstacles, a person couldn’t visit our home. It was like living in a securely guarded base. This also meant that those who *could* still reach the forge (like Helen and Anne) had quite a bit of skill and luck. It felt meaningless to add flimsy security measures against such people.

Can you blame me for not thinking too much about security? Still, this doesn’t mean that we should remain defenseless in the future.

“A hidden safe might be a bit much, but it would be beneficial to have something that makes our valuables difficult to steal,” Anne said.

“If I go all out, I can probably make a safe that even a famed sword can’t slice through,” I replied. “It might be a good idea to forge one and just leave it in our storage shed.”

No one would lug a safe out of our cabin and immediately check its contents. We were in the Black Forest, constantly surrounded by danger—no burglar could take their sweet time. Besides, who would go through the hassle of carrying a heavy safe through the forest? I didn’t expect that anyone would take

that risk.

“In the storage shed?” Anne asked. “But it’d be outside of our supervision.”

“I’d rather a burglar take the safe without our notice than put the household in danger.”

“And what about Krul and Lucy?”

“They’re smart and really astute. If they think things look bad, I’m sure they’ll run. And if they don’t run, they’ll probably still warn us of an intruder, wherever the safe may be...I think. We don’t keep them on leads or anything.”

If a large group of highly skilled combatants tried to get us, we’d have to surrender, flee quickly, and possibly abandon the cabin and forge.

Anne sighed. “I’m sure you’re well aware of this, Eizo, but we’ve got valuables that are far beyond what a ‘simple blacksmith in the Black Forest’ would usually have. You’d better keep that in mind. I’m certain that Camilo will try to get rid of whatever comes in your way—so will the count and the margrave. But there are always exceptions and times when you can’t fight off your opponent.”

“You’re right.”

I had ties to one of the most highly ranked aristocrats in the kingdom, but that didn’t mean that my safety was guaranteed. If the emperor, for example, personally tried to land a blow on me... Well, it would be extremely difficult to handle the imperial family, but it wouldn’t be impossible.

From the perspective of an outsider looking in, I was just a simple old blacksmith. *Though, there’s nothing false about that statement—a simple old blacksmith is exactly what I am.*

What kept nagging at me was the confusion during the incident with Marius and the Eimoors. Who had assisted Karel (the second Eimoor son, now deceased, though that was kept under wraps)? Both Marius and Diana had declared that Karel couldn’t have acted on his own, and it was safe to assume that a high-ranking person had lent their aid. This view was shared by everyone who had been involved.

“Hm, I guess we need to strengthen our defenses and maybe build another

cabin for times of emergency.”

Words of happiness and complaint echoed in equal measure across the rear entrance to Camilo’s shop. Before me, there stood a tall structure surrounded by wooden planks. *It almost resembles a fortress. Nah, maybe I’m exaggerating.* My two daughters weren’t asleep in the shade that the apprentice had created, but they were lying down happily.

Camilo’s shop apprentice was sitting down near my daughters—he stood up when he noticed us approaching.

“Oh, hello,” he said.

“Thanks as always,” I replied. “Wasn’t this shelter tough to build?”

“Not at all. Everyone in the store helped out.”

“That so?”

I always felt bad for stealing the apprentice’s time and making him look after my daughters. Though perhaps the rest of the store also found it wholesome to see him frolicking with Krul and Lucy.

As usual, I handed him his tip, but today I included a significant bonus. *He should get paid in proportion to his effort. Though, I always push back when someone tries to offer me more, so that argument might not be so convincing coming from my mouth.*

“Could you share some with the other store employees who helped you out?” I asked.

“Of course. As always, thank you.”

“Oh no, that should be my line.”

The apprentice bowed, and I tousled his hair. I noticed Krul and Lucy getting up—Lucy bounded over and began happily skipping around Diana.

“Now, now, that’s dangerous,” Diana warned. But she couldn’t hide her doting smile. Since I wasn’t within her arms’ reach, my shoulder was safe from a relentless barrage.

Krul followed Rike and Lidy, who were headed toward the warehouse. Our

drake seemed to completely understand her role, but perhaps I also doted on her a bit too much and overestimated her capabilities. *She is my pride and joy. I can't help it if I'm a bit biased.*

Once Krul was tied to the cart, we immediately climbed aboard and left the city. If there were no surprise incidents, our next visit would be in two weeks. As we headed home, I gazed at the people we passed. *Will the view of the city change a little by our next visit? Or will it stay the same?*

Nothing of note occurred on our ride home, and we made it back safely. We almost always arrived at our cabin without incident, so it was easy for me to assume that this world was safe; I knew, though, that it was anything but. The roads were secure, thanks in large part to the guards frequently patrolling the area—Samya also helped us avoid any troublesome encounters in the forest. But without their aid, I was positive that we would've run into sticky situations. Frankly, if I was embroiled in some matter, it was usually an extremely important task or something difficult to complete. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but it did mean that my family had been exposed to danger because of my circumstances.

That has nothing to do with the guards or Samya, though.

Now that we were home, we unloaded our cargo. Rike, who'd gone inside first, suddenly called for me. When I went to meet her, she was carrying a small piece of wood.

"This was in front of our door," Rike explained, handing it to me.

Upon closer inspection, I spied small letters carved into the surface.

Dear Eizo,

I visited your place today, but it seems that you're out, so I'll come again soon.

Gizelle

The engraved words were neat and easy to read. *She must've used the knife I'd given her.*

“Gizelle stopped by,” I said.

Rike nodded. “Seems like it.”

She probably wanted to tell us the location of the hot spring vein. If one of her kind had fallen ill, she would’ve waited for me to return instead of leaving. Though I wanted to learn the location of my potential hot spring, that information wasn’t dire—I could wait. *I’ll show her my hospitality when she visits next.*

“Maybe I should make something. Some kind of placeholder we could put out when we’re gone. People could use it to tell us they came by.”

I hardly ever got any guests, and if someone had a request for a custom model or anything else, they would probably wait for me. Still, it wasn’t a bad idea—it would be a nice convenience for the folks who visited our cabin every now and then.

“That’s a great idea!” Rike exclaimed joyfully, seeming excited to make something new.

She went inside the cabin, and I headed to our cart to unload the rest of our cargo.

Chapter 8: The “Usual” Summer

“Now then, I’d like to start building a connecting walkway,” I said.

It had been a week since we’d last visited Camilo. We had just finished forging knives, swords (both long and short), and spears for our next order, and now we were eating dinner.

“Oooh!” Everyone applauded.

“But I still haven’t decided on many of the details,” I said.

“What do you mean?” Samya asked, cocking her head to one side. “Are there types of walkways?”

I nodded. “For example, we can decide how high off the ground we want it to be. Stuff like that.”

“If it’s too tall, it’ll be difficult to walk across,” Lidy pointed out.

Aside from Krul and Lucy, Lidy wandered around in our garden the most. Rike hardly went to the garden; the other four trained in our front yard every day, but they rarely went to the farming plots, Krul and Lucy’s hut, or the storage shed located in our backyard. They didn’t really have a reason to go back there.

I nodded again. “Krul and Lucy are wandering free, so if it’s too tall, they won’t be able to walk around. I think we should make it low to the ground.”

“Let’s see,” Diana replied, putting her hand on her chin and thinking hard. It was wise to listen to the opinion of my daughters’ “mother” for this project. “The walkway needs to be convenient for daily use while not obstructing Krul and Lucy—if something dangerous happens, we don’t want them to be trapped.”

“Yeah.” For example, if there was a fire, it would be terrible to block their path of escape. Of course, in such an event, I was prepared to tear my entire house down to protect Krul and Lucy. Circumstances might not allow for that, though. If something happened to them because of my architectural choice, I

would feel regret for the rest of my life. As such, I was prepared to cast aside daily comfort, convenience, and the walkway's design if it meant my daughters would be safe.

Lidy quietly raised her hand. "So we want to build something that lets us visit Krul and Lucy's hut and the storage shed, even during the rain. Eventually, we'll want to extend it to the bathhouse. Why can't we just lay some planks on the ground? A walkway like that would be easier to manage if our plans change."

"I guess." I pondered for a moment. "If we put a roof over it, that *would* get the job done."

Lidy nodded. There were no guarantees that the bathhouse (or hot spring) would be the last amenity we might build. So, if we did add more buildings, it would be better if the walkway was easier to replace or reform. If we built right on top of the soil, the planks would rot eventually. But I could make repairs when needed.

Back on Earth, I'd seen something similar on a mountain trail (though that walkway had been uncovered), so this wasn't a ridiculous suggestion. *Probably*. We *were* in the middle of the forest, so this was similar terrain.

"All right. We'll erect some pillars and put a roof over the walkway," I decided. "And the floor won't just be planks. Maybe we can add some bracing beneath the planks to elevate the whole thing off the ground slightly. Let's start tomorrow."

Everyone agreed. For whatever reason, we felt like making a toast, so we clinked our cups together.

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The next day, after breakfast and my normal water fetching routine, all of us gathered in the yard (including Krul and Lucy).

"Okay, so let's all decide what jobs we want," I started. "Any preferences? If you'd rather do a particular type of work, that's fine with me."

If we'd been building another room, Helen and Anne would've been required for certain tasks—they were both big and strong, plus their speed was unmatched. But this time around, we wouldn't be doing anything too crazy. We

needed pillars that were fairly sturdy so that they wouldn't easily fall, but other than that, there was nothing much to be worried about. *We'll be using this walkway daily, so I'll be able to spot any dangerous or rickety places and repair them right away. It won't be too much of an issue, I think.*

Above all, I didn't mind if this project took some time. Unlike the stuff that we'd built so far, this walkway was more of a convenience feature than an actual need, and it wouldn't be a huge problem if we didn't have access to it right away. As such, I wanted to have fun building it. If my family members had other tasks to tend to, then they were free to prioritize those. Though, no one seemed to have other pressing matters. *Unlike the busy docket we had before Marius's wedding, our calendar right now is pretty empty.*

One downside to living in a forest was the lack of entertainment, but any potential boredom was mitigated by all the stuff I had around me that needed fixing and repairing. I was able to stay busy every day with these chores, so I hardly missed other types of entertainment.

"All right! Let's begin," I said. "I'll mark out the path for the walkway, so let's erect the pillars on either side of it."

Everyone cheered happily. To the vast forest, our excitement over a small construction project must've sounded like the tiny, tiny cry of a newborn baby.

To start, I planted a stick in the ground on the side of the terrace and tied a rope around it. I pulled until the rope grew taut and stretched it out as far as it would go. If I drew a line along this rope, our walkway would be straight. Though, if it did get a little crooked, that would just be a cute little quirk that added to the walkway's charm.

Because the soil was firm, we used the steel ferrule on the butt end of the spear to draw a line in the soil. (This was, of course, a spear we had for personal defense that was not for sale.) This line, following the rope, extended farther from the terrace than I'd anticipated, and though this was only our first step in the process, I was able to map out a good distance of the walkway.

After that, I brought out a straight wooden plank that was around a meter long. This plank could be used to lengthen the line and keep it straight, like tracing a line against a ruler on paper. I repeatedly repositioned the plank to

extend the walkway's length. Once at Krul and Lucy's hut, I kept extending the guideline toward the storage shed.

Ultimately, I designed the walkway to be wide enough for two people to walk alongside each other, and that seemed enough for me. Though I'd only mapped out the skeleton outline of the walkway in the dirt, I was pleased to see that the dimensions were generous enough that even Krul could walk along it.

Now that I've finished the line-drawing process, it's time to think about the roof. It needed to have some height so the tallest among us would be able to walk comfortably—without any walls on the sides of the walkway, I wasn't sure if a tall roof would actually offer much protection from the elements. Regardless, I wanted to try, and besides the pillars and roof, all we had to do for this project was lay planks on the ground for the walkway.

Unfortunately, these steps were all easier said than done—we had quite a bit of work ahead of us.

“Okay, why don't we divide into groups?” I suggested.

Everyone agreed; even Krul and Lucy cried out.

The roof came first. Thankfully, we were used to constructing pillars and roofs since we'd added additional rooms to the cabin. We dug some holes equidistant from each other, fortified the bottoms of the holes by tamping down the ground, and inserted our pillars. Our strongest family members (Rike, Helen, Anne, and Krul) were in charge of this.

While they worked, it wasn't like everyone else was just lazing around. Samya and Lidy were cutting planks for the roof, and Diana and I were figuring out how to elevate the walkway off the ground. Ultimately, I decided to go with a construction that was similar to railroad tracks.

Diana held up a length of wood in her hand and asked, “Is this shape okay?” This piece of lumber was ten centimeters by five centimeters, and it had a length of one meter (the width of the walkway). We were cutting from a thick log, so we could get quite a few pieces of this size.

“Yeah.” I nodded. “You can just roughly estimate the size. It doesn't have to be exact.”

These pieces would be placed horizontally and buried halfway, like the “railroad ties” of our walkway. From here, we could layer planks vertically atop the ties, giving our walkway a few centimeters of height off the ground. I figured this was enough—barring extreme situations, I was pretty sure that no water would flood that high. And if I found out later that water did accumulate that much, I could always dig a drainage ditch.

The sounds of our construction echoed through the quiet clearing. This area in particular was dense with magical energy, even by the standards of the Black Forest, which was why animals wouldn’t come near our cabin. *But considering how loud we are, most animals will probably grow even warier of this place and avoid us. Maybe even the wolves and the bears have started to learn that they shouldn’t come close to our home.* I didn’t really want to scare off deer or boars since they were our precious food sources, but I’d be glad if dangerous predators like wolves and bears stayed away.

“Arf! Arf!”

Meanwhile, Lucy was running around everyone and cheering us on. She dug some holes, carried some small pieces of wood, and overall looked very busy—she must’ve thought she was helping us. In terms of actual helpfulness, she really didn’t do much...but it was the thought that counted.

“Will she be able to assist us one day?” I wondered aloud.

“Maybe,” Diana replied.

I was gazing at Lucy—proudly carrying a tree branch in her mouth—as she trotted toward Samya and Lidy. Diana looked at her with a smile, and I likely wore the same expression. *Watching my little daughter work hard is adorable. Any parent would think so. Even if she grows into a large beast over two meters tall, I’ll still think she’s precious.*

Lucy padded across the walkway, which was currently only a set of lines in the dirt, and for a split second, I thought I saw an elegant wolf walking across a splendid wooden path.

An entire day passed. Team Pillar had practically finished their job, while Teams Floor and Roof had finished cutting lumber. Tomorrow, we would be

ready to assemble everything.

“It’s not bad to do this kind of construction project every now and then,” I mumbled.

With our work done for the day, we finished cleaning up. Samya, Diana, Helen, and Anne quickly tidied up their area, popped into the house to grab their wooden swords, and then proceeded to the front yard for some training. Helen, who was the strongest soldier in these parts, had been teaching the other three ladies every day. Apparently, they were getting stronger in leaps and bounds.

I thought back to something Helen had said recently: “If they train for another month or two, they’ll probably be better than that knight captain in the capital. Uh...I forgot their name.”

I see. No wonder Lluisa said that we were the strongest in the Black Forest. Samya would likely be staying in the forest for good, but Diana and Anne would probably move on someday. Was it all right for Anne to return to her family as the strongest sword fighter in the empire? *Honestly, I think that the emperor would be ecstatic about that.*

Helen was talking to the other women with a huge smile on her face, and I could only muster a half-hearted “Don’t push yourselves.” As usual, the four would be training under Krul’s and Lucy’s eager gazes.

I watched them leave and then picked up the tools I’d been using. When I turned, I noticed Rike staring—her eyes wandered all around the area, and she seemed overcome with deep emotions. I followed her lead and gave our homestead a sweeping glance.

At first, our cabin and forge had been much smaller, but we now had many rooms and even a terrace. Our backyard had become a courtyard, and thanks to Lidy, it had been transformed into a magnificent garden. Our front yard featured some targets set up for archery practice and other equipment like that—it looked like a training area. Krul and Lucy also had their own hut, and we had two separate storage areas: one stand-alone shed and a room attached to the cabin. We were currently building a walkway to connect the hut, storage shed, and cabin. Though I walked to the lake every day, we had a well now, and

it was unlikely that we'd ever have a water shortage. On top of all of this, we even had plans to build a hot spring.

We had an empty room in the cabin for now, but in the unlikely chance that it became occupied, there was space next to it to build another room. We could just keep elongating the cabin. *Or maybe it's better to build an annex in a different spot?*

Rike seemed to sense my thoughts. "Maybe this place will become a small village one day."

"H-Hmmm."

If I built an annex and more living spaces, we could house even more people. Each group would have space to decide their own roles and lifestyles. *It made no difference that everyone is part of my family, but if we eventually have a group large enough to call a community...then yes, this area might become a village. We have food and water sources, so even if we welcome a few more people, it shouldn't be a problem.*

"Except for Samya, who lived in this forest, and you, who became my apprentice, I don't think we'll need to shelter many people long-term," I replied.

Every member of my family was powerful in their own right. Besides Rike's and Samya's obvious skills, we had Diana, who was the daughter of the kingdom's count; Anne, who was the seventh imperial princess; and Lidy, an elf with valuable knowledge. Helen was a mercenary, but her strength could tip the balance of power quite easily.

Helen, Diana, and Anne would likely move out someday (and probably Lidy when she found other magical accommodations), so it was unlikely that our mini battalion would remain this strong forever. However, if any more powerful people joined us, we could start attracting the attention of the city, the capital, or government officials.

Would they be shocked that a mere blacksmith like me could organize such a formidable village? And what's with all of these powerful women around me anyway?! Does the Dragon of the Land have something to do with it? Maybe I should send Lluisa back to the main body with a word of vehement protest.

Regardless, I needed to remember that Diana, Lidy, Anne, and Helen would someday leave this place. This may have been a rude analogy to make about the four ladies, but I honestly felt like a mother adopting stray kittens.

When I told Rike all of this, she looked at me skeptically.

“Try not to attract *too* much attention, Boss. We’ve got the republic nearby, and you seem to easily get wrapped up in troublesome affairs.”

I shrank down a bit at her words. “Ugh, you’re right. I’ll be careful.”

During dinner, we ended up talking about what stance Forge Eizo might take in an international crisis. The Black Forest was technically located in the kingdom, but we had family members from both the kingdom and the empire. Ultimately, we concluded that we were politically neutral, at least from an outsider’s perspective. However, Anne suggested that we should know how to respond or position ourselves should we get caught in a difficult scenario.

“As I’ve stated before, the empire really doesn’t have any complaints about you, Eizo...just as long as you don’t support other nations,” Anne explained.

“The kingdom likely feels the same way,” Diana added. “I know my brother does.”

I nodded. “I’ve mentioned this before, but quite frankly, I haven’t consciously tried to side with a specific nation.”

I just happened to live—or rather, I’d been provided a home—in the Black Forest. If I’d been given a cabin in the mountains of the empire, I would’ve resided there. Judging by Lluisa’s attitude, there seemed to be some divine reason I was sent here, but I wasn’t privy to those details. *I can’t exactly mention that to the other members of my family anyway.*

“The circumstances of my residence, along with some strange twists of fate, have allowed me to become friends with higher-ranking people in the kingdom,” I said. “However, if war were to break out between the kingdom and the empire, I wouldn’t just leap to the kingdom’s defense. Though, on a personal level, I’ve got no qualms with helping out Marius.”

On the other hand, I’d never seen the king, but I *had* met with the emperor.

That alone made me feel closer to the empire. Though, I wasn't willing to just side with them. When it came to relations between the kingdom and the empire, I truly wanted to remain neutral. *That being said, I don't want to abandon Marius.*

Anne sighed. "Wouldn't your personal feelings result in you siding a bit more with the kingdom? If the count requests something of you, you would come to his aid, right?"

"Hm. I guess so."

What if Marius suddenly shows up and asks, "Sorry, but can you prepare ten swords for me?" I would probably accept his request. Though, I might not give him the best quality stuff I could possibly make.

"Yeah, I doubt I would turn him down," I said. "But couldn't the empire try to commission something from me too?"

"That's possible, yeah," Anne replied.

"I probably wouldn't decline that request either."

In terms of distance and relationships, it was just easier for Marius (or the kingdom's representative) to come talk to me. But, now that Camilo was trading in the empire, I had a route to communicate with imperial officials—they might have a harder time reaching me, but it certainly wasn't impossible. In that sense, Camilo, Marius, and I were definitely connected. *Ah, no wonder my family calls us the Three Rowdy Rascals.*

"The items that I—we—make might enable others to cause harm or even kill. That's simply a fact that I must accept, I think. I don't plan on forgetting it, though."

I had uttered these thoughts before, back when I'd just arrived in this world. At the time, only Samya, Rike, and Diana had been around to hear them. I had agonized over a decision back then but had ultimately decided that I wouldn't waver anymore.

"So you're planning on accepting requests from both sides," Anne said.

"Yes."

My position would remain neutral. I'd support both sides, even if they were bitter enemies. For example, if a Demon Lord and a hero (I didn't know if those existed in this world) both came to me for a sword, I would likely forge two swords.

Anne and Diana were noblewomen, so they would be the ones most affected by international conflicts. Even so, they seemed to have no complaints about my stance. As for the other four ladies living here...

"I'm not really interested in stuff like the kingdom versus the empire," said Samya.

Helen nodded. "Ditto."

"Same here, really," Lidy said.

Samya, who'd grown up in the Black Forest, wasn't very familiar with concepts like royalty. Had the beastfolk lived in the city, her stance might've been different. Lidy was an elf, and her race was isolated from human affairs. Helen was a mercenary—as long as she was paid for her services, she likely didn't care what camp she was in. *She does seem to have some bad memories of the empire, so if the two nations come to her at the same time, she might choose the kingdom.* That was the extent of her bias, though.

"I'll follow whatever choice you make, Boss!" Rike said energetically.

Everyone looked at her, expressions conveying variations of "thought so" and "I knew it." And with that, we changed topics.

Chapter 9: A Midsummer Night's Lesson

The next day, we got back to building the walkway. Anne and Rike of Team Pillar transferred over to Team Roof, and Helen joined us on Team Floor. I didn't send the tall Helen over to Team Roof because Rike was more experienced at building them. In exchange, I sent Anne, the tallest of us all, to help with the roof.

Krul, who helped out a lot by acting as a crane for the roof, was now carrying items that we needed. Our cheerleader (cheerwolf?), Lucy, got back to her important duty of providing us with energy.

Team Roof quickly built the beams and joists to connect the pillars to the roof. I doubted we'd be finished by tomorrow, but we were moving so fast that I started to believe it could be a possibility. Meanwhile, Team Floor was positioning the "railroad ties." (Or something like that. We didn't have a train.) We used our shovels to dig little pits into the ground and partially buried the planks. I didn't expect us to be done with this by tomorrow either. While I wanted to quickly finish this walkway, it wasn't of utmost urgency. Since we'd finished making our wares for Camilo's order, we could take our time—as long as this project didn't affect our *next* order.

"I'll keep digging, so could you all place the wood planks?" I asked.

"Okay."

For whatever reason, my production cheats applied to this task, so I decided to do the digging while everyone else buried the planks. They weren't completely level in some places, but as long as the minor rises and dips didn't hinder our walking, I decided to let it slide. *Anything fragile enough to be threatened by me tripping over a bump on the walkway wouldn't go in the storage shed anyway. I'd carry it straight to the cabin.*

The plank-laying process went like this: I worked my arm muscles, which had been enhanced with magic and my cheats, and dug shallow U-shaped pits for the planks to rest in. Rocks would appear every now and then, but Helen

removed them all for me. To be precise, she threw any small rocks far away at an incredible speed. She kept chucking them in the same direction, so anything that tried to approach us would definitely avoid that spot. *Maybe she pegged an unlucky deer or something.* Since Samya and Lucy didn't react, Helen apparently didn't have any victims.

After removing rocks from the pits, I added some dirt to level things out and patted everything down firmly. We could then place the wood planks into these small cavities and add some more dirt if there were any gaps. Over and over, this process repeated.

All the while, Lucy would gleefully fetch the rocks that Helen had thrown and bring them back. *I'm not sure whether to praise her or scold her for that.* I ended up doing the former, and Lucy happily fetched more rocks for us. Even with this distraction, we were able to make decent progress.

Just as I was about to tell everyone to stop working for the day, I heard a familiar voice.

"Pardon me."

"Yes?" When I turned, I saw Gizelle, the chief of the fairies, in all her doll-like glory. I bowed my head. "Sorry about the other day."

"Oh, please don't worry about it. We're all living our own lives in the Black Forest. It'd be more unusual if our lifestyles *were* in sync." She giggled, her voice ringing like a bell.

I was often at home because I was a blacksmith, but there were probably more creatures in this forest that did just the opposite. There was no way to make an appointment either. *Fair enough. It's difficult for us to contact each other.*

"And since you're here, Gizelle, that means..."

"That's right," she replied with a broad smile. "I'm here to tell you the location of a hot spring vein."

I'd guessed as much, but I was still delighted to hear it. Diana would later look back on this moment and say, "Your happiness was frankly unparalleled. I don't think I'd be that joyful even if I gave birth to a child." Apparently, I'd looked

absolutely elated.

“Over here please,” I said to Gizelle eagerly.

Clearly, I was on cloud nine. I only cleaned up a little before leading Gizelle into the cabin. The rest of my family looked on wearily.

“I’m so sorry.” Gizelle offered me a bow. “It seems like I’ve demanded more from you.”

We were all eating dinner together—I served Gizelle the same meal as the rest of us.

I quickly waved my hands in front of my face. “Not at all. You aren’t an extra burden. Not one bit.”

Gizelle and the fairies barely ate anything. This was because they mostly subsisted on a diet of magical energy, just like Krul. And the fairies apparently didn’t like meat. I’d prepared her a bowl of soup that was only a bit more than a spoonful—this small quantity obviously wasn’t any extra effort on my part. I served her the soup in the smallest cup we had, though to Gizelle, it probably seemed more like a bucket.

“I should probably prepare some cutlery and dishes of different sizes,” I noted.

We didn’t have any tableware meant for giants or fairies—just things meant for people of human proportions. *Since I knew Gizelle was coming to tell me about the hot spring, I probably should’ve made tableware for her before beginning the walkway project.*

The only person who might use large tableware for giants was Anne’s mother (in other words, the empress), so that wasn’t urgent. *At least, I don’t think it is. I don’t exactly want the empress to drop by so casually.* But as things were, I wouldn’t be able to accommodate any giant guests at all, so I figured I should make something. *I can put both large and small tableware on my list of projects. Maybe I can tackle that after building the walkway and before digging out the hot spring.*

Gizelle’s eyes widened. Her doll-like face was adorable—Diana and Anne

smiled with delight and satisfaction.

“Oh no, there’s no need!” the fairy hastily replied.

“It’s actually a perfect opportunity for us to practice our handiwork,” I replied. “And there might be times when fairies need to stay here.”

My family likely assumed that fairies would only stay here when they needed medical treatment. However, they didn’t know that I would also be entertaining fairies to offer them information about my previous world (as per the request of the Dragon of the Land). If fairies stayed for prolonged periods of time, my family might become suspicious, but if they repeatedly stayed for short bursts, that wouldn’t be too strange. We all lived in the forest, after all—I would use this chance to teach the fairies what I knew.

“Hm,” Gizelle said. “I could also bring you our tableware.”

“I’m a blacksmith. Cups can be made by simply carving wood, and spoons and forks are metal—we can handle that.”

“Judging by that splendid knife you gave me, I can see that smithing is your forte. All right, then could I ask you to please make some dinnerware?”

“Of course.”

Gizelle had given us an extravagant gift—she’d blessed my friend and his wife with safety. I wouldn’t be satisfied if I didn’t show the fairies my hospitality, so I was glad that I had received her permission.

“Huh.” Anne took a bite of her dinner. “You guys really are different from elves.”

She seemed interested in the differences between the two species. Since Lidy had stated that she wasn’t keeping her biology secret, Anne had been told that elves required magical energy to sustain their bodies. This was why elves rarely lived in cities. “I see,” Anne had said. “No wonder father couldn’t take one for his bride.”

“We fairies are a species largely composed of magical energy,” Gizelle explained. “We just resemble humans.”

“Using your words, elves are also composed of magical energy,” Lidy said,

“though our bodies are more tangible. We resemble humans a bit more.”

Though they were completely different sizes, Lidy and Gizelle smiled at each other like sisters. I felt that even their smiles were similar. *I can see where Anne’s curiosity comes from.*

“More tangible, huh?” Anne nodded. “That might be why you both require differing amounts of magical energy.”

“I think so,” Gizelle and Lidy said.

They really do seem like sisters. I took a sip of my soup.

Once dinner was done, Gizelle declared, “Now then, the moment you’ve all been waiting for! Especially you, Eizo.” She smiled at me. “I will reveal the location of the hot spring!”

We all clapped and Gizelle looked on with pride.

“I’m sorry to keep stalling, but could I borrow something to write on?” Gizelle asked apologetically.

Lidy went to the corner of the living room and took out some ink, a pen, and paper from the cabinet. Though we had writing utensils, none were fairy-sized. *Is she planning on diligently scribbling with a pen of her size? I’d love to see that.* Diana and Helen apparently had the same thought, because they looked on with sparkling eyes.

“I could simply guide you to it, but to offer my gratitude, I thought I’d show you a little something,” Gizelle said. She used her strength to remove the lid from our small ceramic inkwell (we didn’t have a glass pot for it). *If I’d been seated next to Diana, I’m sure that my shoulders would’ve received a fatal blow.*

Gizelle slowly put her hands together in front of the inkwell and closed her eyes. It looked like she was communing with the gods. Slowly, a pale pink glow enveloped her body.

“So pretty,” someone whispered.

Gizelle, who normally looked like a doll, was praying while surrounded by this pale glow—it made her seem more divine and godlike than adorable. Light engulfed the pot of ink as well, which was a bit surreal. Suddenly, a thin thread

emerged from the inkwell.

Ink... The “thread” is ink!

It gently curved around, as though it was a living being, and stretched its body. Then, it dove headfirst onto the paper. When it landed, the ink slowly spread across the page. It wasn't like a splotch that bled and slowly seeped outward—the thread was clearly scribbling something. Like invisible ink that reacted to heat, forms gradually appeared on the paper.

Before me, an image of a building came into focus, one I was intimately familiar with.

“This is...our cabin,” I said.

“Seems like it,” Diana agreed as she peered at the paper.

The drawing had a chimney, walls made from brick and wood, and the rooms we had added on. There was a garden in the courtyard, Krul and Lucy's hut, the storage shed, and a well. It wasn't a realistic sketch, but it captured the characteristics of our residence very well.

Familiar terrain around our house was also being drawn. Once the art extended to the lake where my daughters and I went to fetch water every day, the thread stopped. The scribbled symbols looked quite cute, like a doodle, but the elaborate map was indeed precise. *We're in the Black Forest, so a majority of this clearing is surrounded by trees.* Even so, small hills and the like had been properly illustrated.

As the map appeared before us, we all applauded.

Gizelle looked a little embarrassed as she said, “I don't do stuff like this often, but I guess this is a special case.”

Wow, we got to see something amazing!

“Is that magic?” Anne whispered.

“I don't think I've ever heard of magic like that,” Lidy whispered back.

“If elves don't know about it, there's no way normal people would either.”

Magic that can accurately illustrate a precise map... That's something

everyone would want. Or maybe not—some might feel uncomfortable about having a specific place mapped without their permission.

While Anne and Lidy continued their conversation, I tuned in to another set of whispers. These voices were discussing something a bit more dangerous.

“This is nice,” Helen murmured.

“Why’s that?” Samya asked.

“We can make plans in case we need to defend this place.”

“Ah, that’s true.”

I’ll leave defense strategies to the pros. I peered at the map once more and noticed one unfamiliar spot—it was in the shape of a lake, but I’d never seen anything like it around here. I didn’t have to possess Samya’s keen observation skills to notice this difference.

It must be...

Rike pointed to the symbol. “Is this where the hot spring is?”

“Indeed!” Gizelle turned to me, looking slightly worried. “Eizo, can you tell where it is on your land?”

“Yep,” I replied. “In fact, I could head there right now.”

The hot spring was located directly west of Krul and Lucy’s hut. Since we were going to build the walkway right in front of the hut, it would be easy to extend it to the hot spring without changing our current building plans. I’d been prepared to redesign and reconstruct the walkway if needed, but luckily, that wasn’t necessary. I internally sighed in relief, and I knew I wasn’t the only one.

Gizelle smiled. “I’m glad. I would’ve happily led you to the location myself, but you don’t seem to need that.”

“Not at all,” I said. “I’m very grateful for the information you’ve given us.”

This map of our homestead was a spectacular gift, and I would’ve been happy to receive it even if she hadn’t disclosed the location of the hot spring. In this world, I couldn’t just go to a bookstore and buy a map drawn by the Geological Survey. *And if someone told me to draw one, I’m not sure I have the skills to do*

that. I would definitely reference our map the next time we decided to build another structure around the cabin.

With the map in front of us, we had a spirited discussion with Gizelle about the topography around the cabin. For example, the land in the forest actually had a lot of dips and rises, but we hadn't noticed them while walking around.

The night wore on, and eventually, Gizelle had to leave.

"You could just stay over," I offered.

Gizelle quietly shook her head. "Thank you so much for your hospitality, but I need to get back—I've got much to do."

"I guess that can't be helped."

"Eizo, I sincerely appreciate the gesture."

We exchanged smiles, and she floated away, waving her hands. *I guess appearing and disappearing suddenly like Lluisa was a bit too immodest for the chief of the fairies.*

"Why don't we clean up and prepare for tomorrow?" I suggested.

"Roger that!" everyone chorused.

And so, we all headed inside. Lucy ran off to her big sis, and I closed the door behind me.

Pale light leaked in through the window, and I saw the garden illuminated by the glow of the moon. It looked magical. I was up at this late hour, but not because anything had woken me from slumber—I actually hadn't slept at all. Slowly, I tiptoed out of bed, careful not to make a peep, and cracked open the door of my room. I wasn't wearing my usual vest, and my footwear was soft, so I didn't make a sound as I gingerly slunk out of the house. *I think I'm being quiet, but it's probably loud to Samya.* I felt like a guy having a secret rendezvous with a woman. *And this is, no doubt, a secret.*

I gently shut the door to the cabin. It was during times like this when I cursed the door for having a clapper—luckily, it didn't make a loud sound.

Made it outside—my first mission is complete. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Suddenly, I heard a small voice. It sounded like the jingle of bells.

“Good evening,” the voice said.

“Good evening,” I replied. “I know we only parted ways a few hours ago.”

In front of me was Gizelle, who had supposedly left us a while ago. I’d expected her to be there, so I was calm and didn’t let out a large yelp of surprise.

“Gizelle, you could’ve communicated the information about the hot spring in another way,” I said. “For example, you could’ve sent the map with other fairies like Reeja or Deepika—they would be more than capable of guiding us to it. *You*, the chief of the fairies, didn’t have to deliver that information personally. And yet you did, so I assume you have something else to tell me. Guess we’re on the same page.”

“I’m glad you’re quick to pick up on things, Eizo.”

“What would you have done if I hadn’t shown up?”

“Oh, I would’ve just left and gone home. Sleep isn’t really an issue for us.”

“I see.”

Most of Gizelle’s body was composed of magical energy, implying that she practically didn’t need sleep. I felt kinda bad about keeping her waiting, but I was simply here to fulfill the request from the Dragon of the Land. *This is all part of my work, so I won’t let the small details bother me too much.*

“Now then, what shall I start with?” I asked. “Anything in particular you want to know?”

“You’ll be providing me with information that’s new to this world, so I’m not sure.”

“Right, that’s true. Well then...”

I chose to tell her a bit about steam engines. Steam rose when water was boiled, and high-pressure steam could be used to move things. Roughly classified, there were two methods of utilizing steam: you could channel steam at a turbine and cause it to rotate, which generated energy, and you could also use pressurized steam to move a piston inside a cylinder, which provided

locomotion. The former was used to generate power for items big and small, while the latter (as one could tell by the name) was used for steam locomotives.

I decided not to discuss the complex mechanisms of the steam locomotive today (if I chose to tell her everything, we'd be here until daybreak). Instead, I opted to explain turbines that utilized the pressure of steam for energy generation.

"Imagine it like a windmill," I said. "But instead of wind moving the blades, you use steam from boiling water. The process works pretty much exactly like that. And as I explained earlier, it generates energy."

"I had no idea something like that existed in your previous world," said Gizelle.

I nodded. "And there's something even more complex called an internal combustion engine. Maybe we should save that for another day, though."

"I agree. My stomach feels full from processing all that information."

She gently patted her stomach and I almost burst into hearty laughter before quickly catching myself. We both chuckled.

"Thank you, Eizo. I think I'll take my leave for today."

I nodded, and soon after, she disappeared into the trees.

With that, our first midnight lesson was over. I quietly opened the door to my cabin, intending to return to my bedroom. Silence greeted me, and it was reminiscent of the first time I entered this cabin. I hadn't been in this world for very long, but the cabin had grown lively and cheery in that time—it felt as if my home had always been like this. *How will I feel if everyone leaves and goes their separate ways?*

I bolted the door behind me. When I turned around, someone was right *there*—right in front of me. I almost screamed in terror, but I managed to muffle my voice, albeit a bit desperately.

"Oh," I sighed. "It's you, Lidy."

The elf was standing in front of me now, but I didn't remember seeing her on my way to Gizelle (unless I'd completely missed her). She must've just come out

of her room.

“Were you outside?” she asked.



“Hm? Y-Yeah. The moon’s beautiful tonight, so I thought I’d gaze at it for a bit.” I was glad that she wasn’t Samya—a beastfolk would’ve instantly sniffed out my lie.

“I see,” Lidy replied with a quiet smile.

For some reason, she seemed to emanate an overwhelming aura—I felt like she could overpower even Helen in this state. She was an elf, not too tall, and had a slender build. Personality-wise she was dignified, but at times she seemed a little meek or timid. *Not always, though; I remember when Nilda was here. Every now and then, Lidy can exude a terrifying presence.*

“I’m not doing anything weird, so there’s nothing for you to worry about,” I insisted.

“I’m glad to hear it.” At that, she turned on her heel and returned to her room without a sound.

“I should hurry up and sleep too.”

A lack of rest would certainly impact me tomorrow (I judged that it was now after midnight, at least based on Earth’s clock). I went back to my room and laid down on my bed, but my heart was still thumping with nerves. Though I couldn’t fall asleep immediately, it didn’t take as long as expected, and soon, I lost consciousness.

It was cloudy the next morning—the summer temperature and the atmosphere of the forest made the day seem a little gloomy. It was still warm, but we were no longer under direct sunlight, so the temperature was a little more comfortable. That was probably the only positive, though.

“Will it rain?” I wondered aloud, peering at the gray skies.

Samya looked up, twitching her nose. “Nah. We should be fine.”

“If you say so, then I believe it.”

She smiled. “I’m wrong occasionally. Maybe...once every ten times.”

I thought back to a game from my previous world where robots appeared on-screen. *Ninety percent hit accuracy is pretty good.* Now I just needed to pray

that this day wouldn't fall under that ten percent.

I grinned and ruffled Samya's hair before picking up a hoe and returning to work.

"We've gotten a lot done already," Helen said as she gazed at the walkway.

The family was out on the terrace enjoying lunch. Rain hadn't fallen yet, so we'd all been working safe and sound. Team Roof had apparently gotten used to their task—they'd constructed the roof faster than expected. And Team Floor, which included myself, only had a bit left to do. I didn't think we'd finish by today, but it seemed like we'd be *mostly* done. *We've made pretty good time.*

"When I see the walkway as a whole..." Anne paused for a moment. "It makes the homestead feel connected."

Everyone nodded. Buildings separate from the cabin had previously seemed isolated. But a walkway, even an open-air one like this, connected everything to the main cabin. Now our whole property felt like one big structure.

In a proud, exaggerated tone, I asked, "Aren't you all glad we decided to build the walkway?"

They all forced a laugh but nonetheless seemed to be in agreement.

"Seeing the results, I *am* actually happy we did this," Diana relented. "Krul and Lucy are no longer left out."

Rike nodded. "I agree."

Their reassurance bolstered my determination. Soon, we finished our lunch and began the afternoon's work.

The sun had started to set by the time we'd finished laying the floor planks. We still had to add some filler dirt around the "railroad ties" beneath the planks and firmly tamp the ground, but the rough shape of our floor was complete—it spanned from the cabin, to Krul and Lucy's hut, to the storage shed. We now knew the location of the hot spring vein, but we'd yet to dig for it, so there was

no reason to extend the walkway to that spot. *That'll be a project for later.* The walkway's roof also wasn't quite finished, but seeing everything connected, I felt a surge of accomplishment.

I was also relieved, but that wasn't due to us finishing so early. No, it was because I'd made a certain design choice.

"I'm so glad I didn't add an extra step and make stone tiles."

Had the flooring been made of stone, it would've resembled a road, and this place would have truly started to feel like a city. I was glad I had opted to use wood instead. *I know it's not easy to replace planks, but it's not too difficult either. Thank god I chose wooden floors.*

####

The next day, Helen moved to Team Roof while Diana and I added the finishing touches to the floor. More than half of the roof was done, so we were shaded from the sun's rays shining down on the forest. *It should also be able to protect us from the rain, but there aren't many storms in this area during summer. We might just have to wait until the rainy season next year to test it.*

The soil we had dug up for the railroad ties was now being packed back in to stabilize them—I used a log to compress the dirt around each tie, making our foundation firmer and more compact. *I think there's a machine back on Earth that does this. What's it called again? A...rammer?* We didn't need to be nearly as fast, strong, or precise as that machine, though, and I didn't expect us to be.

Diana scooped dirt with the shovel and placed it around the ties while I pounded the soil flat with the log. When I did so, it compacted the ground, creating more space for Diana to add dirt. We just had to repeat this process over and over.

I thought it would be just Diana and me on this task for the whole day, but then one more helper joined the mix: Lucy. I'd spied my daughter staring at our work from a distance, but once we finished one section of ties and moved on to the next, Lucy approached us. She raised her front paws, standing up on her hind legs, and let all her weight fall onto our finished floor. *Thud!* She repeated this process several times before she moved to another location and did the same thing.

I stopped tamping down dirt for a moment to look at Diana. “Do you think she’s copying what her parents are doing?”

Diana was watching over Lucy and, as usual, doting on her. “Yeah.” She placed her hands together like she was praying. “Lucy can observe us working and figure out what needs to be done. She’s a genius.”

I nodded firmly at Diana’s assertion. Black Forest wolves were known to be cunning and clever. Lucy was a magical beast on top of that, and the magic may have further augmented her intelligence.

She keenly understands what we’re doing and is trying to help out. I knew it. My daughter’s amazing. Speaking of daughters...

I glanced over at Krul. She skillfully picked up a piece of wood with her mouth and handed it to Rike, who was working on top of the roof. I’d gotten used to that sight, but obviously, Krul wouldn’t be laboring alongside us if she didn’t understand her role.

Is she smart because she’s a drake? I’m excited about her future...and a little anxious.

My ears were drawn to the sound of someone hammering nails on the roof. Diana and I had stopped our hands, but until moments ago, the sounds of her shoveling and me compacting dirt had been additional layers of noise. Like a small orchestra, we played our workers’ symphony, and the music reverberated within the Black Forest. *It’s kind of a shame that I can’t appreciate the show objectively from an outsider’s perspective.*

The walkway was a collaborative venture where everyone contributed a small part. *Connected parts of a walkway, connected effort, and a connected family—I hope stuff like this also becomes “normal” for everyone.*

I kept these thoughts in mind as I petted Lucy, who was wagging her tail vigorously and expecting praise. Thanks to Lucy’s assistance (in terms of psychological assistance, her actions were super effective), we finished the flooring by dusk, and the roof was also practically complete. *We can probably finish the whole walkway by tomorrow afternoon.*

I turned to Diana. “If we help out Team Roof tomorrow, we’ll be done in a

flash.”

“Yeah.” Diana smiled. “We’ve gotten used to this whole process, so I think if we lend a hand, it’ll speed everything up.”

“Arf! Arf!”

It seemed like Lucy was willing to help us out tomorrow too. For the umpteenth time today, I petted her, and our workday drew to a close.

####

We finished the roof before lunch the next day. I could almost imagine calm background music and a narrator saying, “Oh my goodness.” *Is that home makeover TV show still airing on Earth, I wonder?*

Anne raised her hammer, ready to pound in the final nail, but then she stopped. “Are you sure I can do the last bit?” she asked tentatively.

Our family collectively nodded and answered in variations of “It’s nice to experience it at least once.”

So Anne’s hammer came down, and echoing applause erupted in the forest. With that, the blacksmith’s cabin was now connected to the storage shed and our daughters’ hut.

Time for an opening ceremony.

“Excuse me,” I said, standing in front of the storage shed.

I used the walkway, strolling over to Krul and Lucy’s hut and then to our main cabin. My two daughters must’ve thought this looked like fun, as they followed after me joyfully. I wasn’t sure if I could call this a “maiden voyage” down the walkway, but it was something like that.

Yes, I’d been the first to officially use the walkway. For the record, though, I’d gently protested that, just as Anne had balked at hammering in the last nail.

“It doesn’t really matter who uses it first,” I’d argued.

“If the head of the house goes first, then the rest of us can use it without hesitation.” My family had unanimously agreed on this point.

I was just strolling along a walkway, but I felt myself become a little tense.

Maybe I should purchase some proper attire from the Nordic region.

Once I walked all the way to the main cabin, my family let loose another round of applause. Krul and Lucy probably didn't understand what the clapping was for, but they enjoyed the happy atmosphere anyway and started running around the yard.

"Stuff like this makes me feel kinda embarrassed!" I confessed.

"Right?!" Anne huffed loudly. "Now you know how I felt earlier with that nail!"

"Yeah, yeah. I get it."

It was indeed a little embarrassing to do stuff like this every time we completed a project, but I thought it was important to finish things off with a bang. This was an event that connected our family—I didn't think a deity from above would punish me if I celebrated this joyous occasion lavishly. So, I decided to kick off our festivities with a luxurious lunch. I grilled plenty of meat, used all the spices and seasonings we had in the cabin, and prepared dishes with all sorts of flavors. Wine and hard liquor were also on the menu.

Upon hearing the good news, Rike immediately used the walkway to take a cask of liquor out of the storage shed; she brought it to the terrace. It was dangerous to be near the forge's fire while drunk (even if we were only a little buzzed), so I couldn't permit anyone to do any smithing in our free time this afternoon. *I planned for us all to take it easy and rest for today, so I don't think it'll be too much of an issue.*

"A toast to completing our new walkway and connecting our household!" I exclaimed. "Cheers!"

"Cheers!"

To an outsider, my family would've probably looked completely out of place. Yet, under the afternoon sun of the Black Forest, a humble little party had just begun.

Chapter 10: The Residents of the Black Forest

We had a few calm days after finishing the walkway because the order for Camilo wasn't due just yet. Our forge's busy season came in spikes, and things generally only got hectic when someone came to me with an issue or request.

A quiet forge isolated from society—that was what we were. When we finished the weapons for Camilo's order, we could spend the rest of our time leisurely until the day of our delivery to the city. Of course, that came with a proviso: "Only if nothing else crops up."

Today was our day off, and we all decided to stay in the cabin and relax. Even so, we still had some stuff to do. Samya and Diana were sewing clothes; Lidy and Helen were out in the garden; and Rike, Anne, and I were repairing damaged furniture. If we were planning to live here for a while, all of these roles were essential for the maintenance of our household.

My thoughts drifted to work I wanted to do in the forge. *I still have to figure out how to process the hiiirokane and the adamantite. Also, I need to find a way to create a magical jewelstone that doesn't crumble easily.* I didn't have a clue about how to even *start* solving these problems, so I decided to put them aside for now.

The hot spring was also on hold. Since the master of the forest had personally boasted about the hot spring vein, I doubted we'd need to dig down a whole ten meters deep or anything like that. However, excavating it—combined with the construction of the bathhouse structure—would be a large project. There was no way the whole thing could be completed in just a few days.

Though, maybe we could dig out the hot spring itself without building a bathhouse. If we set up partitions for privacy, I doubt anyone would see us. This is the Black Forest, after all. Practically no one came near our cabin, so I was probably being overly careful. But, my house was filled with young ladies. It was better to be cautious and shield them. *At least, that's what I think.*

In any case, this morning, each member of the family decided to work on the

task that was in front of them. We sandwiched lunch in between our work, and once we'd taken a break and cleared away most of the dishes, we decided to start our afternoon work.

As we stood up, we heard a muffled knock at the door. The whole family was currently in the main cabin, so I guessed that the noise had come from the forge.

Rike, who was just about to head to the forge, glanced at me. I nodded. She pulled the door open, and Helen, true to her nickname, swiftly darted into the workshop.

We were in the depths of the Black Forest—dangerous beasts prowled nearby. While the heat might've made them a little sluggish, they were still formidable. A person who could overcome these beasts and reach our cabin possessed significant strength and power, but not everyone was guaranteed to be friendly. That's where Helen's vigilance really came in handy.

Several more knocks peppered the door. "I hear you," I called out. "I'll be with you in just a moment."

The knocks stopped. Helen and I stood at the front of the forge. We turned to each other and nodded. Should anything happen, she would push me aside and slash at our potentially evil visitor—the neck wasn't off-limits either.

But when I finally opened the door, it seemed that our worries were all for naught. We were greeted by a short girl in light armor—her long flaxen hair was tied to one side.

Oh, it's Flore. She was with us when we defeated the dragon.

"I'm here!" she exclaimed with a broad, carefree smile.

We were all a bit taken aback.

"What?" Helen asked, baffled. "You're—"

Flore stuck out her finger and stopped Helen. "I came here all by myself."

That is the condition I place on anyone who wants to make a request of me. Which means...

"Would you like to order a custom model?" I asked.

Flore's satisfied smile grew even wider, and she nodded firmly.

Samya, Rike, Helen, and I guided Flore to our meeting room.

"All right," I began. "For now, I'd like to hear what you want and why you need it."

"Oooh?" Flore asked with a mischievous grin. "Does that mean you might not forge me something if my reasoning isn't sound?"

I shook my head. "It doesn't matter whether someone is an emperor or a Demon Lord—if you can come here by yourself, I'll make you something."

I hadn't made any promises to a Demon Lord, but I *had* crafted a blade for a demon once. I'd also promised the emperor that I would make him something if he ever came to see me personally. Since I'd given him my word, it didn't matter whether his weapon was used for only self-defense—I'd make it for him regardless. *However, I might have to tweak it slightly so that the entire world doesn't fall into chaos.*

"Whew, I'm glad." Flore sighed loudly. "It was pretty tough to get here! I would've been bummed out if I'd come to see you for nothing."

When the family had bumped into her last time, she'd been deep inside the forest, not lingering around the road. In other words, she'd always been more than capable of reaching our cabin. I had no doubts about that.

"Ah, so..." Flore started.

She quickly divulged her need for a new weapon. In short, she had received a request from a good friend—in the near future, she would be setting out on a job as a "pathfinder."

A labyrinth had been erected around the time of the Great War six hundred years ago. Flore, as a pathfinder, was to assist a group in finding hidden treasure deep within that labyrinth. *So, will she be helping adventurers? Like the ones in fantasy novels and games from my previous world?*

For this expedition, she wanted to request a custom model knife.

I listened attentively to Flore's story. *Her request for a knife doesn't seem dangerous, even if she's lying about its purpose.* I felt a little guilty about

doubting an acquaintance's story, but I glanced over at Samya just to be sure. She gave a slight shake of her head, implying that Flore was telling the truth.

I folded my arms in front of me and tilted my head. "A knife, huh?"

"Wait, did I say something bad?" Flore asked, panicking slightly.

A knife wasn't an issue in and of itself. I had made plenty of elite model knives that were out on the market right now, so forging a custom model wasn't really a problem.

Except...

I had a bit of a personal reason for not wanting to fulfill Flore's request. Only my family members had received custom model knives—they were proof that a person was part of the Forge Eizo family. I was extremely hesitant to make knives like that and just hand them out to other people. However, I was also aware of how useful knives were as a tool—it made sense that someone would want a knife of the highest quality, even if that meant spending a pretty penny. In extreme cases, it was an item that could save a person's life, even more so than normal weapons or armor.

"Hm, well, I've got my personal reasons," I said. "I would like to avoid making knives."

"Really? Ugh, but I really want a knife," Flore grumbled with a pout.

Someone gently tugged on my sleeve. I turned around—Helen was the culprit. As a mercenary, Flore was Helen's junior, and the former looked up to the latter. Helen probably wanted to help out her adorable young protégé.

"I ask that you make it for her," Helen said.

Huh. Well, because a family member is requesting it, I guess I should reconsider.

"Okay, okay," I relented. "But, Flore, why do you want a knife so badly instead of a sword?" Flore used a sword and shield. There must've been a reason she was so fixated on a knife.

"I'm sure the swords you make are strong, but the one I've got does its job, so I'm good," she replied.

Indeed, Flore possessed a fine blade of her own. She wasn't wrong in thinking that it was good enough.

"Anyway, as a pathfinder in a labyrinth, I'm gonna need a lot of tools. My knife's a little damaged, though. I'd like something durable that'll last a while."

"Why didn't you ask for a different tool?" I asked.

"Because I use my knife the most."

"But you'll be using other tools, won't you?"

"Yeah, of course."

"Hm."

I folded my arms in front of me and thought hard. Flore didn't want a weapon, but a blade that could be used as a tool. *So maybe I could forge something that can be used purely as a tool? Something that lacks lethal potential.* I thought back to my previous life for a moment.

Bingo! Something similar to what I'm thinking of does exist. Now, would it be an issue if I introduced that invention to this world?

Back on Earth, this tool had been popularized around the 1900s, but something similar had existed as early as the year 200. In other words, the idea itself was extremely ancient, but it had to be rediscovered after being lost to history. Which meant...having it in this world wouldn't be an issue.

"What about a knife with a bunch of other tools attached?" I suggested. "A multiuse blade."

"A multiuse blade?" Flore repeated dubiously.

It wasn't just Flore—everyone else in the room looked at me with uncertainty. This concept definitely didn't exist in this world yet.

"Uh, like, it'll have a knife, a small saw, a pair of scissors, a file, a pick, and more tools in one collapsible gadget," I explained.

I took out a writing utensil and drew a picture of a Swiss Army knife. I didn't make a one-for-one copy of the invention from my previous world but tweaked it a little to match this world's technology.

“Huh,” Flore said. Samya and Helen also peered at my sketch, intrigued.

Rike’s eyes sparkled. “Whoa!”

“Wait, this still has a knife,” Flore said with knitted brows. “I thought that wasn’t acceptable.”

“If we’re being precise, this thing *does* have a knife, but it looks completely different from the ones I usually make,” I explained.

I wanted to avoid making just a knife because it was a symbol of our family. However, if I made a tool like this... I couldn’t see a problem with that. *Though I think I am being weird about the knife thing.*

“Hmmm.” Flore frowned for just a moment before her eyes began glittering. “Well, whatever. So you can make me this tool, right?”

I nodded. “I was the one who suggested it, so I won’t say no.”

“Then I’ve made my decision!” Flore declared, beaming with joy.



Flore extended her arm for a handshake, and I almost took it before Rike cleared her throat.

Hastily, I added, “As for the fee—after it’s done, you can pay what you think is appropriate.”

“Huh?” Flore looked shocked. “Wait, really?”

“That’s how we do things.”

“Are you guys okay? Are you turning a profit?”

“Fortunately, every customer who’s made the trek to our cabin hasn’t thought about cheating us.” I didn’t tell her that I mainly sold my wares to Camilo.

“Makes sense.” She nodded. “You have to work hard to come all the way here. Who would want to ruin that by being stingy?”

“Exactly. So, is that okay with you?”

“Of course!”

She gave a carefree smile, and this time, I shook her hand.

Business is settled.

Though I’d planned on repairing some furniture this afternoon, I decided to leave that for another time. Flore’s request was fresh on my mind, and I wanted to get started immediately. I’d told Flore she could leave for the day, but she chose to stay, just like all of our other past customers. *Helen can look after her.*

Flore was currently in the courtyard with Lidy and Helen—they were tending the garden. Rike and I went to the forge. The general steps for this project would be the same as usual: heat up metal plates, hammer them, and form a shape. However, a Swiss Army knife was more difficult because it had to be collapsible, and it had to move smoothly without being sticky or rickety. Luckily, I had my comrades’ reassurances, Rike’s skills, and my cheat abilities on my side.

Rike heated steel plates, cut them to roughly the correct size, and formed each tool’s basic shape. I then reheated the metal pieces and processed them

again. *Feels like I'm pushing Rike to do the actual work and then doing it over again.*

When I said as much, Rike replied, "This is part of my training. I also want you to show me how you finish it up, Boss."

Since she seemed okay with this arrangement, I didn't press the matter. *My status within this forge seems to be dropping lower and lower. Maybe I'm just imagining things. At least, I hope so.*

The work itself went smoothly. This custom tool would include a knife, a saw, a pair of scissors, a file, and a pick. Individually, these parts were quite simple to forge. But since we would need to combine them (and because all the tools had to fit within the palm of my hand), it took some time to make everything just right. The saw had a tiny, intricate zigzag blade, the scissors needed to open and shut smoothly, and the file's ridges were small and precise. *No doubt about it—this custom model will take some time to finish. There's no way I can complete it by the end of today.*

By dusk, I'd forged all the individual tools, like the knife and saw, but I hadn't been able to bind them all together yet. The small pieces would have to rest uselessly on my workbench until tomorrow.

We had Flore as a guest for dinner, so I decided to make our meal a bit more luxurious than usual. We always ate soup and unleavened bread, but I also seared some venison steak and slathered it with a berry sauce. *Hmm, will that be enough? I don't want to run out of food. Also, does she like these flavors?* I decided to cover all my bases and add a dish to the menu: fried boar meat sprinkled with salt.

Flore ended up enjoying both kinds of meat. "Delicious!" she exclaimed, smacking her lips. The extra dish had ultimately been unnecessary, but she'd wolfed down every bit of it anyway. *I'm glad I added it. She might not have eaten her fill otherwise.*

I retired to my room immediately after dinner with tomorrow's work on my mind. The other ladies apparently stayed up pretty late chatting. When casually asked about it later, they said they'd mostly talked about Flore's mercenary work with Helen. *Should've stayed and listened—I probably could have gotten a*

different perspective and gained some insight. I vowed to stay awake and join them the next time.

I rose first thing in the morning and swiftly started work. Lunch came and went, and by the time the sun was a little past its apex, I'd assembled all the parts—the Swiss Army knife was now in one piece. *I'm done!* The finished product was a bit simple, but that was probably better for a tool that would be used often.

Rike called out to Flore, who was working in our garden, and the mercenary practically flew into our forge.

"Is this it?" Flore asked.

"Yep, it's done," I replied.

At a glance, the Swiss Army knife looked like an ordinary block of wood.

"I'll explain how to use it. It's really simple, though."

"Okay."

I picked up the tool from the table, slotted a fingernail into the groove on the back of the knife, and flipped it out until the blade was straight. The thick wooden handle seemed comically large for a knife of this size, though that was because it needed to house the other tools. The handle also had a small cat symbol engraved on the base, indicating that it was a product of Forge Eizo.

"This is the knife," I said.

One by one, I flipped out a saw, a pair of scissors, a file, and a pick. I didn't completely straighten each tool like I had with the knife, just angled them outward so that they were all visible.

"This is the saw, and these are the scissors. You don't have to fully extend a tool to use it, but it's probably best for you to do so with the knife and the saw."

Flore nodded. "Got it. Can I touch it?"

"Of course."

She grabbed the Swiss Army knife and turned it this way and that, looking it

over from various angles. Then she whipped out each tool and collapsed them again.

“I see, I see,” she murmured.

“How is it?”

“This is great!”

She beamed brightly, and I breathed a sigh of relief. I was worried she’d ask, “How can I use this tiny thing?” or something like that, but she hadn’t done any such thing. Flore played with her new tool for a while, then suddenly turned to me.

“Kay. I’ll go home now.”

I jolted, a bit startled by the suddenness. “Huh? Already?”

She grinned. “Yeah. I should leave before I start wanting to stay here full-time.”

“Ah...all right.”

She’d only spent a night here, but her boisterous nature would be missed. However, if these were her true thoughts, I couldn’t stop her.

“I’ll go prepare!” she exclaimed before dashing into the guest room.

I watched her go, then immediately gathered everyone in our yard. We stood out front as Flore prepared to depart.

“Oh, and here you go.”

Flore handed me several gold coins. I thought it was a bit too much, but I was strictly prohibited from trying to give her a discount. *Even I’ve learned that by now.* Instead of arguing, I simply said, “Thank you for the payment.”

It seemed that Flore had gotten friendly with the rest of my family last night when they’d swapped stories about defeating the dragon. Everyone offered her friendly farewells.

“You should stay here a bit longer next time!”

“You can swing by even if you just want to hang out!”

Helen was last to say goodbye. “If you think it’s looking even a little dangerous on your way home, come back here immediately,” she insisted.

“Okay! See you all later!” Flore grinned one last time before darting into the Black Forest.

“Aaand she’s gone,” Helen said as we watched Flore’s back grow smaller and smaller.

“She might come and ask us to repair something,” I said. “Besides, she said, ‘later,’ didn’t she?”

“You’re right.” Helen gave me a gentle pat on my back. “Ah, also, can you make me one of those tools too?”

“Oh, I want one!” Samya exclaimed.

A flood of voices rose up—I couldn’t stop the crowd. Everyone seemed to want a Swiss Army knife.

“Next time!” I shouted over them with a forced laugh.

“Boooooo!!!”

In the future, the pathfinders who’d seen Flore’s Swiss Army knife decided to make one for themselves. The shape and variety of tools changed to suit each person’s needs, but the overall concept remained the same—it eventually became known as a “pathfinder’s companion.” But of course, I had no way of knowing this future. Not yet, anyway.

The following day was our scheduled trip to the city. As always, we piled cargo onto the cart and traveled through the forest. The rays of summer sun were still strong, but I felt like they had become slightly milder. In the circles of light that punctured the canopy, I noticed that the ground was warm.

I looked up at the sky. “It’s a bit cooler today. Maybe summer’s coming to an end.”

“Yeah,” Samya said. “Summer doesn’t last too long around here.” Sunlight streamed through the foliage and shone onto her face. She squinted her eyes against the light, then turned back to me with a grin. “But it’ll still be warm for a

while longer. Might be tough for you, huh, Eizo?”

My shoulders slumped. “I might be used to the heat of the forge, but I don’t want the outside to be this hot.”

“Agreed,” muttered Diana. She apparently didn’t do well in the heat either, though it wasn’t so unbearable that she wanted to stay holed up in a high-elevation mountain town or something like that.

Overall, our trip through the forest was peaceful. We chatted as we went, and our laughter echoed through the trees. *This, too, has become part of our normal lives.* The casual atmosphere continued on the road, and only the summer sun seemed to be working hard. I didn’t expect bandits to try anything in this weather.

I greeted the guard at the city gate, and we passed through, rolling along streets that seemed to have a slightly smaller crowd than usual. The scary-faced man who was always looking forward to Lucy’s arrival was here again—he stood in front of his shop, sweat pouring down his surly face, but he still gave a small wave to our pup.

We eventually arrived at Camilo’s store. As usual, we went around back and entered the warehouse. The apprentice quickly ran out. Sweat was dripping from his brow as well. *I bet he’s been working. The heat must be getting to him.*

“It’s still hot,” I noted.

The apprentice gave me a carefree smile. “It sure is.”

It was good that he seemed so energetic. I glanced over and saw that the shaded structure they’d built last time was still there—the apprentice and my daughters would likely spend some time beneath it again today.

“Well then, sorry to trouble you, but I leave them in your care.”

“Of course!” the apprentice exclaimed, pounding a fist against his chest.

Krul and Lucy rubbed their heads against him, and after getting them settled, the rest of us entered the meeting room and greeted Camilo. After our usual round of small talk, Camilo brought up something unusual.

“So, I wanted to ask you something...just in case,” he said.

“Hm? What’s up?”

“Just in case”? It was unusual for Camilo to bring up something that sounded so ominous—he balked at involving me in sticky situations, and he usually kept me in the dark about anything shady. That stuff hardly ever reached my ears. So what could this be about? Did someone want (or order) him to ask me something? Maybe he needs to at least act like he’s inquired.

“Someone’s wondering whether you’d like to live in the capital,” Camilo stated. “They are offering a deal: if you accept, any and all obstacles in your path will be destroyed. Nothing will get in your way.”

Everyone gulped at his phrasing, but I replied without missing a beat. “Can’t do that, I’m afraid.”

“Thought so.”

“The margrave?”

“Uh-huh. Don’t worry, though—I doubt he’ll do anything about you declining his offer.”

“And if he *does* do something, he’ll get what’s coming.”

“Yeah.” Camilo forced out a chuckle.

Both he and the margrave must’ve known what my answer would be. It was best for some of my family members to be sheltered in the Black Forest, which was why I stayed there. I wasn’t about to leave so easily. The margrave was surely aware of this.

However, even I could admit that it would be more convenient to live in the capital, despite any associated costs. If I were to think purely about profit, the capital was definitely the better option.

Still, moving there would never work for me. One of the main reasons I stayed in the forest was because of the abundance of magical energy—the capital didn’t have nearly enough, and I couldn’t forge the same caliber of items there. This factor was extremely important.

Above all else, though...

“I’m nothing without my family, and I would never move to a place that might

not be ideal for them. But...I've also taken quite a liking to living in the Black Forest."

Camilo laughed heartily. "So you're a Black Forest resident, through and through!"

"Yep. That's how I've felt from the start." I laughed along with him. No matter what state the world was in, I was a mere blacksmith. I wanted to remain a resident of the Black Forest, and I planned on doing so. My family also breathed sighs of relief.

In the corner of my mind, I thought I heard Lluisa's voice saying, "Oh my. Thank you."

Epilogue: Records of the Black Forest I

The Black Forest's infamously dangerous reputation was known across the world. This perception had softened a little over the years, but even now, people knew it wasn't a place where one could stop for a leisurely picnic. Hostile beasts prowled the area, and monsters could emerge at any moment.

Currently, I was walking in this dangerous forest. I wasn't here for a picnic, of course—I was searching for *his* tracks. Though I found it difficult to believe, my research indicated that the first records of the blacksmith's existence had come from this forest. I'd uncovered this fact only recently. He'd apparently claimed to be from the Nordic region, so I'd gone to investigate that area a while back. However, any traces of him there had been scrubbed and erased. In fact, they'd been more meticulous about it than the kingdom or the empire.

I couldn't give up, though. I *had* to learn of his origins, and I just couldn't let him be. And so, I set foot in the Black Forest. Quite honestly, I sort of resented the fact that my research had led me here.

"Wow, scary."

The trees themselves were dark, so it was difficult for me to see, but there was also dense foliage everywhere I turned, which hindered my line of sight. Humans were creatures that feared the dark. I should've already known this, but now that I was experiencing it firsthand, that fact had really started to sink in.

"If you're planning on entering the Black Forest, you shouldn't do it in early autumn."

The voice of guidance in my mind belonged to Lidy, an elf. According to her, many species would eat to their heart's content in early autumn to prepare for winter's scarcity.

I'd followed her advice, so it was currently summer. The heat this time of year was sweltering, but I thought that the harsh rays of the sun would peek through

the dense foliage, making it easier for me to see. However, it seemed like I had underestimated the trees here. Indeed, I now understood how the forest had gotten its name. The one saving grace was that I didn't really hear the cries of the animals—they were a bit more relaxed during this season, so there was no need for me to be wary when the thickets rustled. Regardless, I needed to remain vigilant. I couldn't know when the worst might happen, and this constant concentration sapped away my stamina.

If I'm going to get through this, I need to keep my chin up.

His products were of superior quality, so I knew he hadn't been just any old blacksmith, and his choice to live in this forest proved that he'd been quite the hardy man. Yet according to the accounts of those who had met Eizo, he hadn't been a burly or beefy guy. Quite the opposite, actually—I was told that he'd been more of a slender gentleman. However, his intimidating and somewhat scary gaze was a characteristic that had been noted by everyone.

This so-called “normal blacksmith” had supposedly lived in the dangerous Black Forest without any problems. I found this hard to believe, but everyone had assured me that he had indeed lived here. Eizo as a figure was hard to envision because he didn't seem to fit neatly into any category—there was a gap between the Eizo I imagined and the one described in my research.

Perhaps I can close that gap when I finally uncover his origin story.

Trembling within the dark forest, I pressed onward, using landmarks I'd heard about. *There—a small clearing.* I sighed in relief when I saw that patch of sunlight. I crept closer, pressing through the gloom toward the light. A splendid structure was soon revealed, showing its broad face from within the clearing. I guessed that the larger building was the house and the smaller one nearby was the forge.

“No one's living there anymore,” Lidy had said. She'd apparently visited the house a long time ago and had confirmed that it was vacant—not even a single rat had been inside.

“Pardon me,” I said as I gently opened the door.

Clack! The sound of a clapper echoed throughout the house, causing me to jolt in surprise and shrink back. No person (or any other being) jumped out at

me. The room was quiet.

According to Lidy, not a soul had been here for a long, long while, so the structure should have been in ill repair. Yet the walls, pillars, and roof didn't look damaged at all, nor did the tables and chairs. In fact, I couldn't spot even a speck of dust on the floor. It was like someone had regularly been sweeping.

"The fairies protect that area," Rike had told me. I'd thought she had been telling a tale, but now it seemed there was a shred of truth to her words.

I couldn't bring myself to approach the bedrooms. Obviously, I was curious about the inner workings of this structure, but it didn't feel right to just waltz on in. Had the house been completely dilapidated, I would've considered exploring more, but it was so well maintained that I felt like someone living deeper within could pop out at any moment. I was hesitant to take even one more step. And for my purposes, this was fine—after all, I was here to do some research, not to steal anything.

From where I entered, I could see the stove, but there weren't any cooking utensils or tableware; I guessed that they were elsewhere. Seeing how tidy everything was in the common area, I didn't think I'd be able to glean much from the bedrooms anyway.

It's for the best that I didn't try to enter them.

As I peered around, I noticed a door that was connected to the forge I'd seen earlier. I opened it. It was still summer, but a cool breeze blew through. I spied a few tools positioned around the workshop, likely meant for smithing. I didn't see small tools like hammers or tongs, but there was a forge, a firebed, and an anvil.

"It all started here," I whispered.

I gazed around the forge. Needless to say, there was no fire, and the room was quiet. But as I recalled the tales numerous people had told me, I felt like I could imagine Eizo and his friends enthusiastically working here. I slowly ran my fingers over each tool. They were covered in scratches, proving that they had indeed been used extensively.

I glanced up and noticed the setting sun. An orange glow spilled in through

the window, illuminating a certain area of the forge. High up on the wall, something glimmered.

“What is this?”

I strode over and peered up at it. Hiding under the shadows of the beams was an odd emblem—it resembled a shield with a tree inside. I quickly realized that light wouldn’t hit this spot until sunset, when the angle of the sun was just right. *Does that mean this item was placed here on purpose? Is it something that helped to tell time, perhaps?* I squinted my eyes, trying to get a better look at the emblem, but then, a wooden plaque underneath caught my attention. I’d missed it at first; the thing was rather small and didn’t stand out.

I read the words inscribed: “Black Forest Protector.”

I’d never heard this term before. Neither the people who’d told me stories of Eizo nor those who’d lived here had mentioned it. I hastily removed writing utensils from my luggage and scribbled a drawing of this emblem.

Just then...

“Hm.”

A voice. One unknown to me.

Shocked, I whirled around. Behind me stood a pale-skinned woman in loose-fitting clothes. She had green hair that flowed down her back in gentle waves.

I *had* been focusing intently on the emblem, but I knew I hadn’t heard the door to the forge open. The clapper hadn’t sounded either. *Did she somehow enter from the other door? I don’t think so. How did she get in here?*

Amidst my confusion, the woman spoke. Her voice was calm and composed. “I thought you might be someone who would wrong this land.”

Without thinking, I quickly shook my head.

“It seems I was wrong. Why did you come here?”

Awkwardly stammering, I managed to explain that I was chasing after Eizo. I told her of the rumors and stories I’d heard and spoke of my research.

“I see. Ah, well, he did say that I could divulge some stories...to a certain

degree. I don't think it will be a problem."

The woman introduced herself as Lluisa, and slowly, as though she was reminiscing about the past, she started to talk about "the good old days."

Extra Story: The Demon in the Royal Palace

“A demon dwells in the royal palace.”

When did this rumor start?

Faults and discrepancies that had previously been overlooked were now being brought to light; things that had been previously dismissed for dubious reasons were now easily accepted. There was always a reason given for these changes, and the arguments were so sound that no one could refute them.

And so, a rumor spread: “A demon who can manipulate rules resides within the royal palace, and under their eyes, anything can be woven on the loom of the law.”

A while after Count Eimoor successfully led the monster subjugation campaign, people began noticing oddities within the kingdom’s records. They would try to investigate the changes, scouring the details, but would come up empty-handed and soon give up.

The names of those who’d participated in the campaign had been concealed as an act of security and confidentiality. Normally, those who entered the military didn’t want their names to be obscured—after all, having military accomplishments tied to your name could enhance your reputation. Generally, there was nothing wrong with publicizing names, and concealing them only happened under extreme circumstances. Names were so infrequently struck from the record that many had forgotten there was an option to do so.

Still, rules were rules. Even if a law was old and forgotten, a *king* had created it—months or years later, the law was still in effect, as long as it hadn’t been repealed.

As far as Count Eimoor’s campaign went, no one really took issue with concealing the names. A few had grown suspicious, guessing that someone or something must’ve been hidden within the redacted records, but their investigations had come up fruitless. Important information had been cleverly

kept confidential—these investigators had wanted to narrow down the list of potential participants to a few dozen soldiers, but information about the campaign had been much too vague to provide any answers. And, even if they had been able to properly investigate all the names, there was no profit to be gained from that. Ultimately, mysteries remained mysteries.

“Uh, this is the baron’s.”

A petite woman spoke from a room in a corner of the royal palace. She was situated near a tall stack of materials and papers, and her small frame was almost buried by this mountain of documents. Despite that, she was skillfully clearing it all away.

The woman had been sent here a few months ago. Long after Count Eimoor had finished his monster subjugation, and long after the war expenditures had been sorted out, *someone* had noticed that the expense of the campaign had been far too little when compared with other similar military ventures. There had been a request to double-check these documents and confirm that nothing was amiss.

Her name was Frederica Schurter. Later, she would become known by her nickname: the Demon of the Law.

“If you ask me, some of this is a little wasteful.”

She raised a document in the air, putting it under the light. The letters were neat, but the contents were a jumbled mess, implying that it had been quickly scribbled down—perhaps based on a report the scribe had heard. According to the document, a large number of soldiers were needed to chase bandits out of a region, and the baron was asking for a bit of financial help from the crown. Normally, maintaining the safety of a domain was up to the lord of that land, and those expenses generally fell upon the lord. However, that was just a general rule, and there were always exceptions.

Of course, Frederica was well aware of these exceptions. For example, if a lord was tasked with protecting the safety of a main road, the expenses would be split in half and shared with the kingdom. This was because if the main road was deemed unsafe, many would begin to avoid the kingdom, and the crown

wanted to avoid a situation like that.

Frederica was currently scanning the baron's invoice. Someone had pointed out that his expenses were too much for the task he was trying to accomplish. Upon further examination, she found this to be true. Chasing away bandits was a smaller job than the monster subjugation campaign had been, and yet the baron was requesting more troops than had been on the campaign. Even when compared to campaigns that were less "efficient" than Count Eimoor's, the baron was still asking for too much.

However, there *had* been a reason listed for this extra expenditure. To ensure that some of the guards could gain experience, the baron had sent along a few new recruits—something that was not usually done. The kingdom had claimed that since this decision had been the baron's, it wasn't the crown's responsibility to foot the bill for extra soldiers.

Frederica found herself agreeing with that sentiment.

"Huh? But if I recall correctly..."

Near the baron's document was another large stack of papers. She rummaged through it, took out an old piece of parchment, and laid it out in front of her.

"Hm, I see."

Some insects had eaten away at the paper, but the words were faintly legible. It was a law regarding the maximum number of troops that could be dispatched. This document had been created during the Great War six hundred years ago. Resources at the time had been limited, so sending out troops and citizens like there was an unlimited supply would have exhausted the population of the kingdom. Therefore, this law had been conceived to restrict the number of people thrown into battle.

As Frederica mulled this over, she realized she could reverse this logic—since there *was* a limit, it meant that one could send out troops until they hit that limit.

"Ah, I knew it."

Frederica copied down what she'd found on a different piece of paper. In terms of troop size, the baron had sent out exactly his limit of soldiers. She

could hardly believe he knew about this—a law created six hundred years ago. But even so...

“Rules are rules.”

As Frederica muttered to herself, she tacked the old law onto the invoice. Since he’d been within the limit, the baron had every right to bill the kingdom.

“And if training improves the strength of the soldiers, then the main roads will ultimately be safer, resulting in an overall profit for the kingdom.”

That wasn’t all—the baron’s domain contained types of rare ore. If the kingdom did him a favor here, it would be easier for them to ask for these resources later. This would be an ace up the kingdom’s sleeve that they could play in the future.

Frederica gave a small smile and thought, *This arrangement works out well for everyone involved.*

“Now then, next on the docket—oh, this one is no good.” The invoice looked fine at a glance, but as she rummaged through old documents, she found grounds to reject it.

Frederica Schurter was a small demon dwelling within the royal palace...and her horns were growing by the day.

Afterword

Hi there. I don't know if "pleased to meet you" is a proper greeting anymore. But if it is, I'm so glad to meet you, and for the returning readers, it's been a while. I'm Tamamaru, the one writing light novels as a side gig. This is the eighth time I've been able to greet you all, and I think this series is starting to grow. I'd like to thank everyone here for reading and supporting these books.

This time around, Eizo was able to pull back the curtain on the origins of his new world. Though he only caught a glimpse of the Dragon of the Land, the world's intentions have been revealed just a little. But Lluisa hasn't told Eizo much, and we still do not know how the world will treat our blacksmith in the future.

Eizo and his family had a battle scene in this volume! I just wanted to see how Forge Eizo would fare if they went all out to fight an opponent. In the web novel version, the monster went down pretty quickly—Forge Eizo completely dominated. It would be great if that was reflected in this volume, but I wonder if that will be the case?

Now for the acknowledgments. Thank you to my editor, I-san, who was in charge of me once again. I always appreciate your precise instructions. I'd also like to thank Kinta for the wonderful illustrations! When I look at your rough drafts and final illustrations, I always say, "This is my vision." Thank you so much!

Thank you to Yoshino Himori, who is in charge of the manga. As I read it, I'm always thinking, "Damn, I should've developed the scene like that!" Rike, Samya, Diana, and Helen are so cute! They always soothe my eyes and soul. The manga has been received quite well, so if you haven't read it yet, I encourage you to do so!

I also want to express my gratitude to those involved in creating the audiobook and releasing this volume overseas.

Thank you to my mother and younger sister; my cats, Chama and Konbu; and

to Shijimi, a cat that might become a part of my family by the time this volume is out. To my friends who are always giving me their energy—I appreciate your support.

Lastly, I'd like to give my biggest and most heartfelt gratitude to the readers who have continued to follow this series. Let us meet again in the next volume!



...GIZELLE...

Chief of the fairies
within the Black Forest.

*"I am
grateful
that you
have
heeded my
request,
human
child."*

In the
next moment,
a large flash of
green light
appeared in front
of us, and a clothed
woman gracefully
emerged from the
breathtaking
glow.

My Quiet
BLACKSMITH
Life in Another World

8

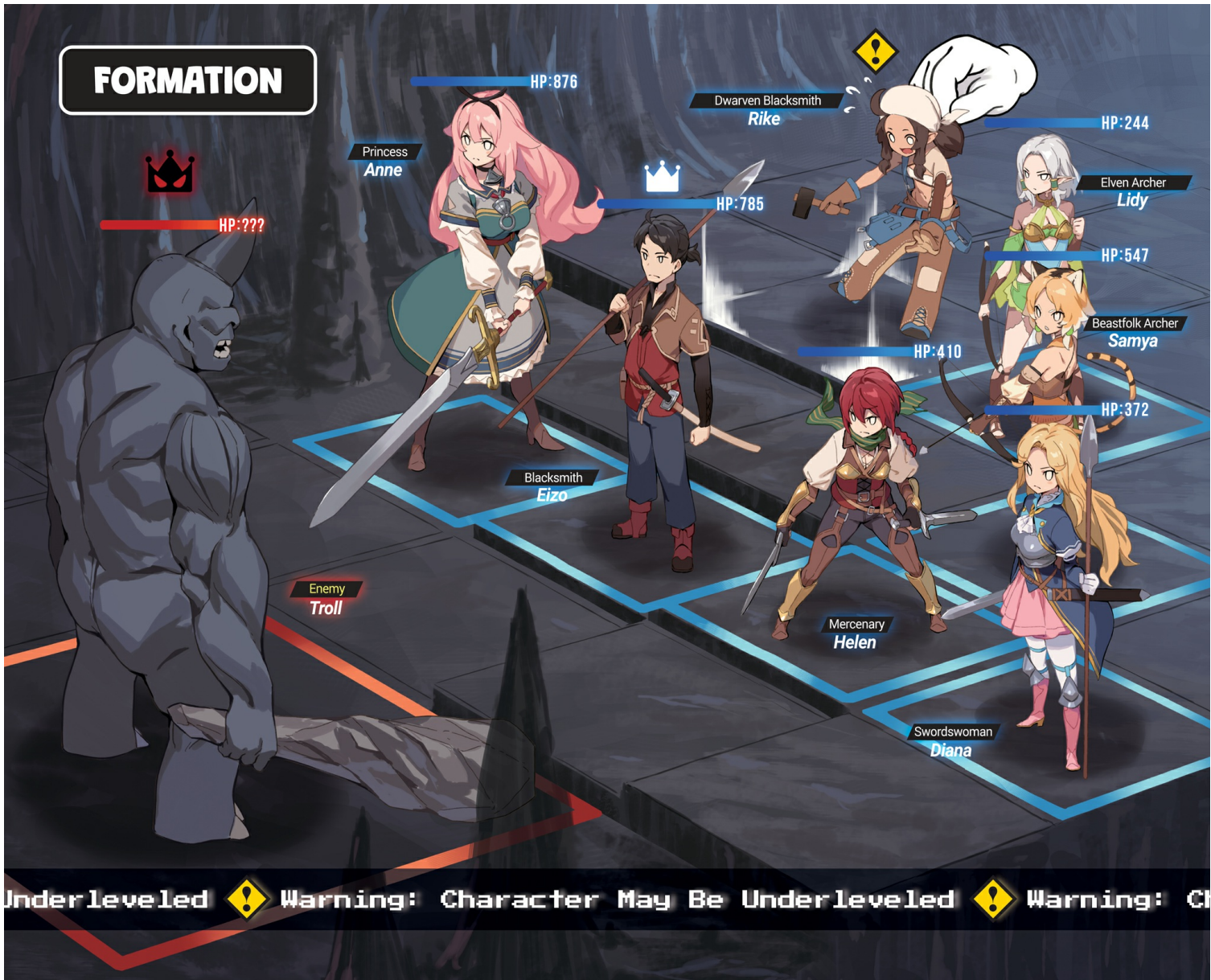
...EIZO...

A former corporate
drone who loves cats and
working with his hands.

...LLUISA...

A dryad. Master
of the Black Forest.

FORMATION





Tamamaru
Illustrator Kinta

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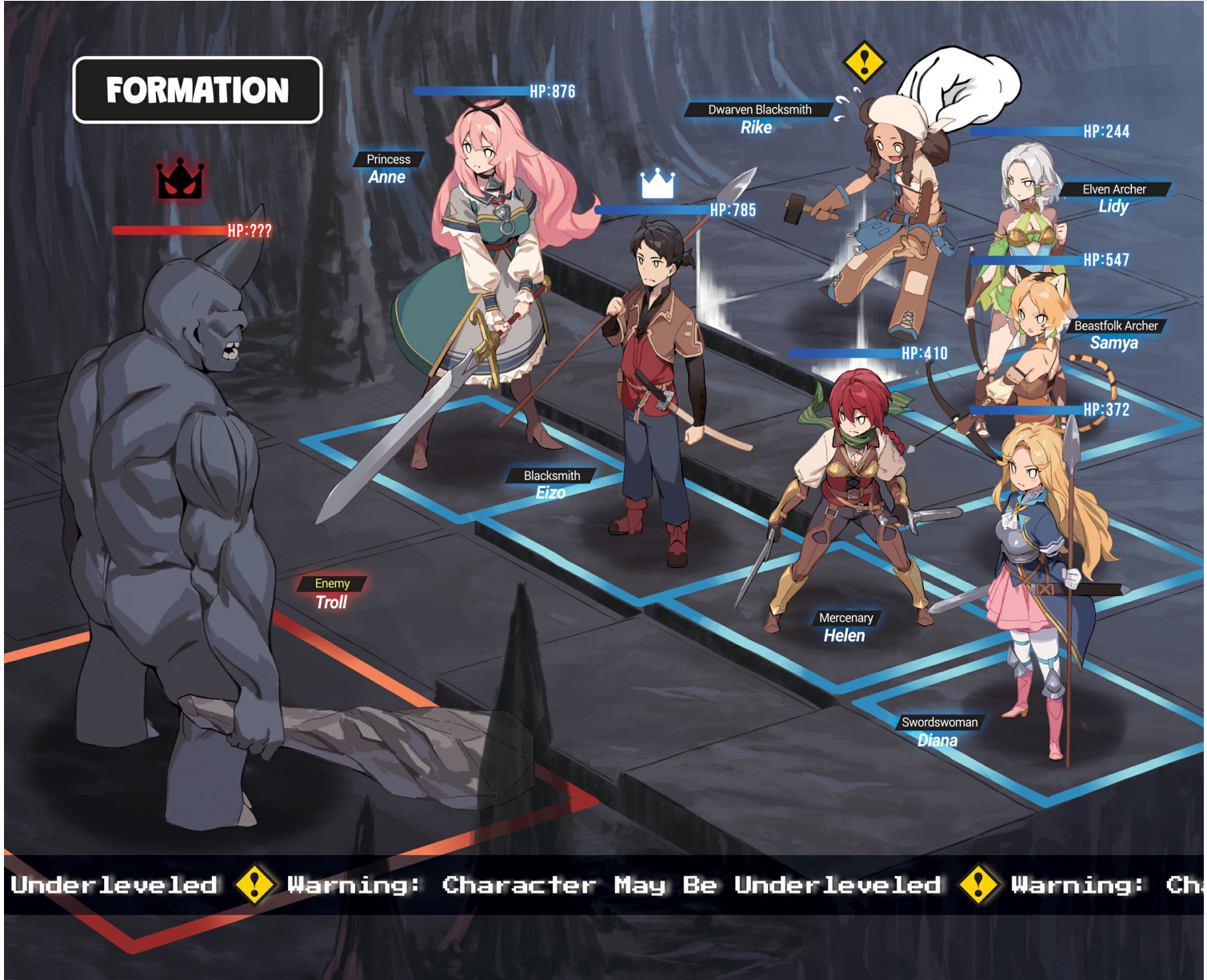


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My Quiet Blacksmith Life in Another World: Volume 8

by Tamamaru

Translated by piyo Edited by C.D. Leeson

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