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Novel
9

The Saint's *Magic Power is* Omnipotent

Table of Contents

[Color Inserts](#)

[Table of Contents Page](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Characters](#)

[Summaries](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Act 1: Betrothal](#)

[Act 2: Tidings from Abroad](#)

[Behind the Scenes I](#)

[Act 3: The Itinerary](#)

[Act 4: Closed Borders](#)

[Act 5: Investigating?](#)

[Behind the Scenes II](#)

[Situational Audio Drama](#)

[Drama 1: Going to Pick Her Up for a Date](#)

[Drama 2: Surprise During the Picnic?!](#)

[Drama 3: I Won't Flirt with Her While I Escort Her Home... Or Will I?](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Newsletter](#)



*They set off across the seas for Zaidera!
What new adventures await Sei in this new land?!*

The Saint's
*Magic Power is *
Omnipotent



Table of Contents

ACT 1 Betrothal

ACT 2 Tidings from Abroad

Behind the Scenes I

ACT 3 The Itinerary

ACT 4 Closed Borders

ACT 5 Investigating?

Behind the Scenes II

Situational Audio Drama

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WRITTEN BY
Yuka Tachibana

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Seven Seas Entertainment

Characters

*The Saint's Magic Power
is Omnipotent*



Johan Valdec

The head researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora. Keeps an eye on and takes care of Sei. Friends with Albert since childhood.



Yuri Drewes

Grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly. His only interest is in research related to magic and magical powers. Has taken a keen interest in Sei.



Oscar

An employee of the company that handles the sale of Sei's products.



Aira Misono

A high schooler who was summoned to this world like Sei. Studying magic at the Royal Magi Assembly.



Elizabeth Ashley

The daughter of a marquis whom Sei befriended at the library. Looks up to Sei.



Erhart Hawke

Magus of the Royal Magi Assembly and Albert's older brother. A man of few words who has common sense. Always being manipulated by Yuri.



Sei

Sei Takanashi, an office lady who was summoned to another world to be the Saint. She's been healing people and purging monsters, and recently has been troubled by the fact that all over the place, people have begun to worship her. Enjoys cooking and making cosmetics.



Jude

A researcher at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora and in charge of teaching Sei. Caring and friendly. Frequently comes to snatch the food Sei makes.



Albert Hawke

Knight commander of the Knights of the Third Order. Known as the "Ice Knight" for his supposedly frigid demeanor, but toward Sei, he's...?



May

Grew up in the orphanage with Zara, who sees her as a little sister. The large burn scars on her face were healed thanks to Sei's beauty cream.



Zara

Grew up in an orphanage and as a spy for the royal family. Currently the secretary for the supervisor of the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora's annex.



Ceyran

The captain of a Zaideran trading vessel. Ten'yuu came to Salutania because of the potion Sei once gave him.



Ten'yuu

The eighteenth prince of Zaidera. Studied abroad in Salutania while searching for a cure for his mother's disease.



Rayne Salutania

The second prince of Salutania. Currently acting head of the student council.



Kyle Salutania

The crown prince of Salutania. Was suspended from school for a time, but since graduation has traveled to Zaidera as an ambassador.



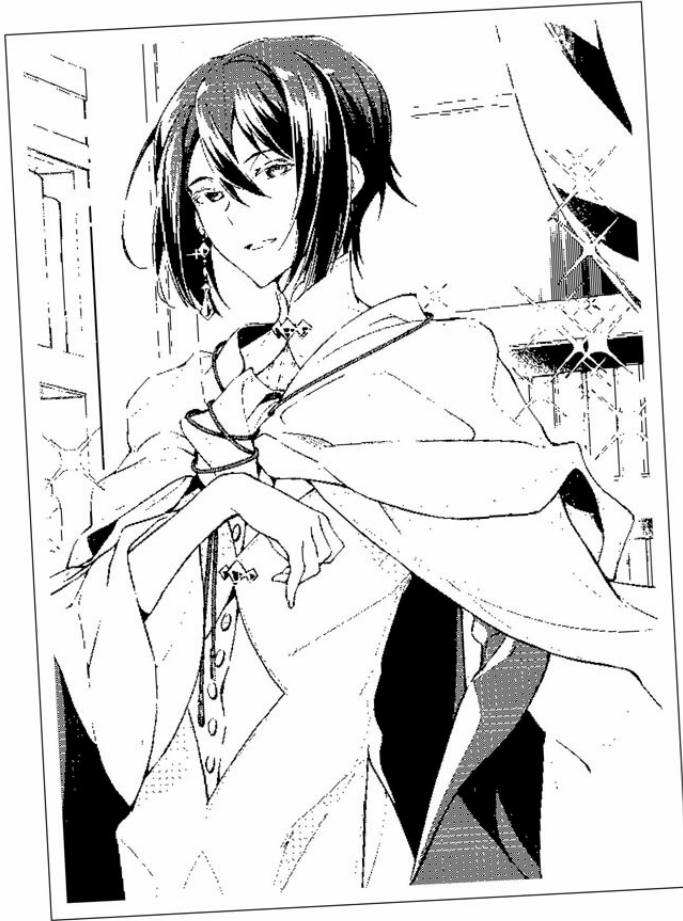
The moment she got home from working overtime at the office, Sei Takanashi, an office lady in her twenties, was abruptly summoned to another world. Although Sei was summoned to be the Saint, the crown prince of the kingdom exited the room with only Aira Misono, the cute high school girl who had been summoned with Sei, leaving Sei behind.

Sei had no notion of how to return to Japan, so she soon decided to begin working at the palace's Research Institute of Medicinal Flora.

Although Sei realized that she was indeed the Saint, she concealed the truth in order to live her life as an ordinary person. However, Sei displayed tremendous magical ability, astounding everyone with her skills in potion-making, cooking, and concocting cosmetics.

Starting from the day she used one of her high-grade HP potions to save Knight Commander Albert Hawke's life, Sei performed one miracle after another. In time, rumor in the palace began to suggest that Sei Takanashi was the true Saint.





Although she was summoned by the Royal Magi Assembly to be the Saint, Sei managed to avoid being outed for some time. She took up intensive magical training under the guidance of Grand Magus Yuri Drewes, and her days were busy yet fulfilling.

Perhaps as a result of her training, or perhaps by mere coincidence, Sei performed another miracle with her gold-colored magic, strengthening suspicions that she was the Saint. However, Crown Prince Kyle denounced those suspicions, stubbornly upholding Aira as the true Saint.

Nonetheless, on a monster-slaying expedition, Sei once and for all proved her Sainthood. When Knight Commander Albert Hawke was in danger, Sei called on her golden magic to instantly cleanse the black miasma producing the monsters.

As a result, Crown Prince Kyle was confined to his quarters for accusing Sei of being a false Saint. Furthermore, Aira, who had been isolated by Kyle once she arrived in the kingdom, was finally able to make friends at the academy, and with Sei. She, too, now strives for a peaceful life.





Due to the miraculous power of her golden magic, Sei was finally recognized as the true Saint. However, she still couldn't figure out how exactly to consistently call on her Saintly power.

Even so, Sei received a request to visit Klausner's Domain—the alchemist's holy land. She enjoyed the trip at first, where she became the apprentice of a master alchemist, befriended the captain of a mercenary company, and explored the possibilities of medicinal cooking.

Then, while working with her new teacher, Sei came across the memoirs of a previous Saint. Thanks to a hint in the memoirs, Sei finally figured out how to use the Saint's special powers—but the key to calling on them was so embarrassing that she couldn't tell anyone. She had to think about Knight Commander Hawke!

However, now that Sei could use the Saint's power, she could do what she had come to do: go into the forest with the knights and mercenaries, and slay the monsters within.





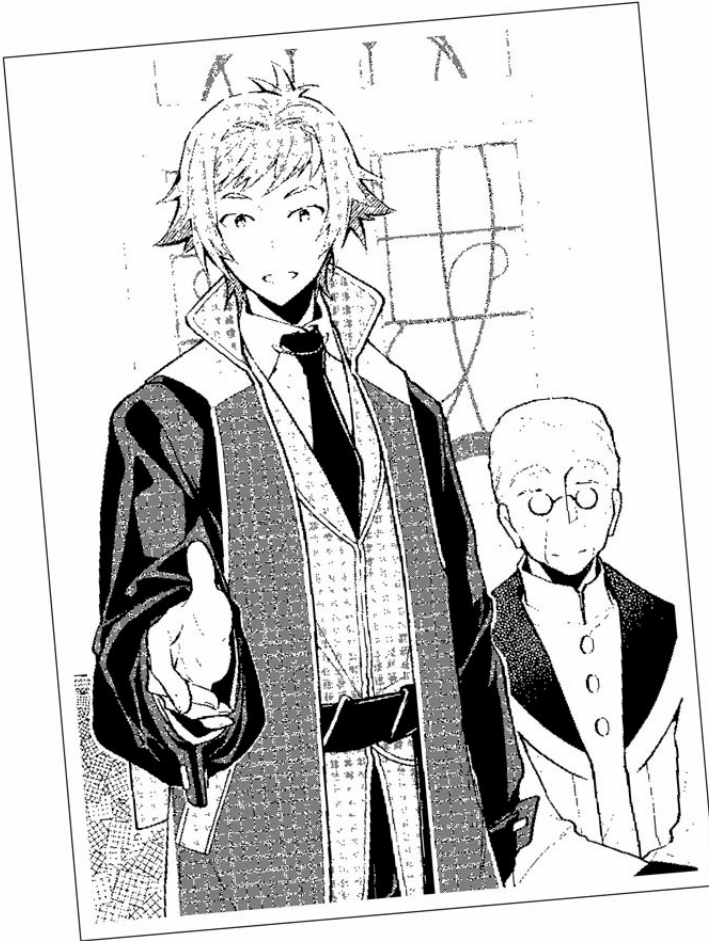
With the help of these powerful reinforcements, Sei successfully purified the forest and brought peace to Klausner's Domain. However, one thing still troubled Sei: the tragic state of the forest devastated by the slimes. In secret, Sei used the power of the Saint to miraculously revive the forest.

During the victory banquet, Sei and Aira helped with the cooking and grew closer with the mercenaries. However, with her Saintly mission now completed, it was time to leave. Though it pained Sei and company to say farewell to their new companions, they couldn't help feeling cheerful as they made their way back to the capital.

Now able to use the Saint's power at will, Sei headed into the forests of Klausner's Domain, where valuable herbs grew in abundance. Though she was protected by the knights and mercenaries, as they proceeded into the forest depths, they encountered slimes—monsters resistant to physical attacks!

They were soon surrounded. After a grueling fight, Sei and her companions managed to escape back to the castle. There, they discussed how to reach the forest's heart, as they lacked the magical firepower to defeat the slimes. Luckily, Grand Magus Yuri Drewes arrived, Aira in tow.





Sei returned to the capital from Klausner's Domain. In gratitude for her work there, she received rare herbs and seeds, which she used to develop new types of skincare products. The recipes for Sei's products were incredibly popular across the kingdom, and they flew off the shelves the second they were put on the market. At her friends' suggestion, Sei finally decided to establish her own company. She opened a shop in the capital, run by Oscar and Franz. One day, when she was visiting it, she discovered that coffee existed in her new world!

Interested in what other imported products might be available, Sei started searching for Japanese food. She went to a port city known for trade, hoping that she might find something there. Before her search could begin, she ran across someone in need. The captain of a ship was searching for a mage to heal his injured crewmate. Sei helped him by giving him a potion that she had made, and she hit the jackpot: the foods this crew had brought from their country! Sei was delighted to finally be reunited with rice and miso, which she had sorely missed.





An exchange student from abroad came to the palace. Upon hearing that the student was a prince from Zaidera, Sei started to panic, thinking that his arrival might have something to do with the Zaideran ship captain she recently helped in the port city of Morgenhaven.

Although Sei had done this in the name of helping someone, she had given the captain one of her special high-grade potions, which weren't available for sale to the general public. She feared that this good deed had come back to haunt her. However, the Zaideran prince's objective wasn't the Saint at all. Rather, he hoped to learn about the Kingdom of Salutania.

Sei was especially careful to avoid the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora whenever the prince visited it, but on one unlucky day, he accidentally happened upon her.

Through Sei's conversations with the prince, she learned that he was searching for a medicine that would aid his ailing mother. Using her knowledge from her life in Japan, Sei managed to successfully create a panacea: a potion capable of curing every kind of status effect. The panacea was given to the prince, though the kingdom kept the identity of its maker secret.





One invitation was for a tea party to be held at the house of Sei's friend Liz, which Sei gladly accepted. There, Sei heard about the food products that each region of the kingdom was known for, and she came up with an idea. She would host a food festival where she would introduce these products to the nobility. With the help of the palace and the second prince, Prince Rayne, the food festival was a huge success. However, it only encouraged people to send Sei even more invitations.

Aside from the ongoing deluge of invitations, Sei was on the verge of welcoming the end of her miasma-purifying trips around the country. The general situation had greatly improved, and Sei headed to the location where it was believed she would find the final black swamps: the borderlands known as Hawke's Domain. Sei, Albert, and Yuri responded to the domain's request for help and traveled there together. In the end, Sei purged two black swamps.





After taking care of the black swamps in Hawke's Domain, Sei got to enjoy the region's delicacies: dried sausages and cheese. Sei also indulged in a dip in a hot spring before her return to the royal capital. Once home, she devoted herself to her daily life, studying and concocting medicines, though she also threw herself into using her Saintly powers to cultivate herbs at the newly built research institute annex.

But things weren't all sunshine and roses—the rest of the world was set on finding Sei the perfect husband. Rumors had begun to spread that Yuri might be the Saint's most suitable match. But though navigating high society remained confusing for Sei, when she thought of potential partners, only one man ever came to mind: Albert Hawke.

Albert was beginning to feel the pressure as well, and so he finally proposed. Now, at long last, the two are engaged to be wed.



SEIJO NO MARYOKU WA BANNO DESU VOL. 9

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Act 1:

Betrothal

ONE SUNNY DAY, I was busily making potions, just like always—these were the mid-grade variety. However, the batch size was far smaller than usual, as the knights had been placing smaller orders. Monsters really did seem to be spawning less often these days.

I guess my job as the local black swamp purification squad has finally come to an end. I was beginning to feel like I might actually be able to lay down my Saintly duties sooner or later.

By now, I was so accustomed to brewing mid-grade potions that I could pretty much do it in my sleep, so before I knew it, my mind was drifting back to certain recent events.

A frozen cluster of trees sparkling in the light of the setting sun...

Albert, dressed far more handsomely than usual...

And...

"I love you."

At the memory of his voice, my hands came to a standstill and warmth bloomed in my cheeks.

Gah! No! Stop! Don't think about that right now! I'm supposed to be working!

The recollection filled me with a mix of giddiness and embarrassment that made me want to squirm. I shook my head back and forth, trying to extinguish the thoughts.

I had accidentally fallen into a reverie about my recent outing with Albert.

It had been just the two of us, and he had prepared a romantic scene where he declared his love for me. And it had been no mere profession of desire—he had *asked me to marry him*.

I'd been there the whole time and I still couldn't believe it had really

happened. But it had.

And ever since his proposal, I had been a bit busier than usual. I might have been in a different world, but even in this one, there was a mountain of things that needed doing once you got engaged.

For one, we had to inform his family of our engagement. This was common practice in both the world I'd come from and in this one. It turned out that here, though, marriages between noble houses also necessitated a contract between the involved families, so the whole thing was even more rigorous. Since it was a requirement, we had to arrange a meeting with Albert's family.

However, it was quite a while after the proposal before we figured all that out, as his family was so busy.

It was understandable enough. Both the lord and lady Hawke were busy with their duties in their dominion, and his oldest brother was the minister of military services, and his *other* older brother was the magus of the royal magi assembly—meaning, in short, that they all worked for the crown. Albert himself was also the knight commander of the Knights of the Third Order, so honestly I was probably the one with the most wiggle room in my schedule. Some familiar voice in the back of my head was telling me that wasn't true, but that was probably just my imagination.

"I can't believe tomorrow's finally the day," I mused to myself, reflecting on that very upcoming meeting as I worked.

We were scheduled to convene at the Hawke estate in the capital tomorrow afternoon. Albert had handled everything, so all I really had to do was prepare a gift. There was also the matter of what to wear—which I still hadn't decided.

I was actually kind of worried that I might be missing something. I mean, this country—in fact, everything in this whole world—was so very different from Japan. I didn't really know what was common practice for this sort of thing back home to begin with, so I wouldn't be the least bit surprised to hear I'd completely dropped the ball somehow or another.

With that thought in mind, I turned to my greatest ally for advice: my etiquette teacher. I had been taking lessons from her for a while now, and I had no trouble approaching her with this kind of question. More importantly, she

was an expert on precisely this matter. With her seal of approval, I was sure to succeed.

Turned out I'd been right on the money. As one might expect of a professional, she was able to get everything squared away at a moment's notice. She declared that it would all be ready for me at the palace on the big day.

It won't shock you to hear that when nobles meet with other nobles of high status—such as a count—you're pretty much required to wear a fancy gown. The kind of gown you need help putting on. So, just as I did on the days when I had etiquette lessons, I needed the assistance of my maids at the palace to get me prepped. I hated squeezing into those things, but one had to dress appropriately for such occasions. As such, I humbly accepted my fate.

Perhaps it was because I showed so little resistance, or perhaps it was because we were preparing for a meeting with my future in-laws, but when the maids received their assignment from my instructor, they were even more enthusiastic than usual.

Even Marie, who rarely showed any emotion, seemed pleased by the task, going as far as to say, "I suggest that you stay the night at the palace so that we may begin the necessary preparations as soon as possible."

How could I possibly say no to that level of excitement? "It's a good thing I asked for an evening engagement instead of first thing in the morning."

My meeting with my future in-laws was officially tomorrow. It was almost time to begin the ordeal.

The looming date was making me nervous, but at the same time, I felt like I was walking on air.

Nothing on the docket was especially different from my usual lesson prep work, so it was weird that my feelings on the matter had taken a 180-degree spin.

"Not long before it's go time." What I needed to do for now was pull myself together and focus on work. I mulled over how much I could get done before evening fell and zeroed back in on potion brewing.

And then the day finally arrived.

My maids woke at the crack of dawn and really put their all into dolling me up, so thankfully I actually looked really nice, instead of like someone had slapped lipstick on a pig.

The gown the palace had prepared for me was lemon-yellow layered with white chiffon. The chiffon was embroidered with little white flowers, which were the perfect touch for this time of year. My hair was drawn into a half-up style and adorned with white carnations. I honestly loved it.

I was a bit exhausted by the time we reached the end of the whole process, but I was reenergized by the sight of myself in the mirror.

Once I was ready to go, I stepped into the carriage provided for me by the palace and rode to the count's estate in the capital. I also went by myself. Strictly speaking, I was accompanied by some guards and attendants, but it was really just me by my lonesome.

By all rights, I should have had a guardian at my side, but I had politely declined the offer. After all, that guardian would have been His Majesty the King himself.

I'd declined first and foremost because I would have felt awful asking him to put off any king business just to accompany me to meet my future in-laws. But I also had to assume bringing the king to meet your new family would be unspeakably awkward. Then again, maybe I would have felt that way even if my legal guardian weren't a *ruling monarch*.

In any case, I had decided to go alone.

We arrived at the entrance to the count's estate to find the entire Hawke family lined up to meet me. I got kind of nervous, seeing every single member of his family. After Albert, there were his parents, his brothers, and even their servants, all waiting for me as I stepped out of the carriage. However, their reception was both immediate and warm, and my anxiety melted away at once.

The meeting itself went off without a hitch. I had already met Albert's parents in their domain, and I'd met his eldest brother, the minister of military services,

and his lady wife at a party. I was also well acquainted with his other older brother, Lord Smarty Glasses, as he was the magus of the Royal Magi Assembly, which I worked with all the time.

It was kind of odd seeing both Albert and Lord Smarty Glasses dressed up like gentlemen, but they were still entirely themselves.

Also, since I knew everyone already, we got straight to a lovely luncheon. As we ate, we discussed all kinds of things, like Albert's recent expeditions as knight commander, what life was like in the world I'd come from, and recent goings-on with the rest of the family.

I did get the feeling that Albert's mother, father, and eldest brother and his wife were smiling a bit awkwardly while I described my life back in Japan, but that was probably just my imagination.

I absolutely loved listening to Albert's mother talk about him and his brothers. The boys positively squirmed as she told her tales—with the oldest wearing a crooked smile, Lord Smarty Glasses furrowing his brow, and Albert looking faintly embarrassed. I hesitated for a moment, but I totally joined the minister of military services' wife as we begged Lady Hawke for more stories.

Before I knew it, we had finished dessert.

"Time certainly flies in such pleasant company," Lady Hawke said.

"So true," my future sister-in-law enthused. "Please forgive me—once I started asking you for stories about my husband, I couldn't resist."

"Why, the pleasure was all mine. You're my darling daughter now, after all." Lady Hawke then turned to me and inclined her head. "However, there is something I must discuss with you. Would you mind joining me in the parlor?"

What was this now? And here I'd thought we'd accomplished all our goals. What else could there be? But if she said something needed doing, I wasn't going to argue.

I agreed to accompany Lady Hawke, and she smiled and encouraged everyone to join us as we headed into the other room.

Once everyone was settled with plenty of tea and cookies on hand, Lady

Hawke said, “Now, let’s discuss how things shall proceed from here.”

“How things shall proceed?” I echoed, having no idea what she might be referring to.

Lady Hawke didn’t even frown at my bewilderment. “First and foremost, we must see to the formalities of your betrothal, yes?”

“Oh, yes. His Majesty mentioned that to me the other day.”

“Ah, Albert explained that the king would act as your guardian in this matter.”

“That’s right. I heard that you and he would be the ones sorting it out.”

“I see, I see. I shall be sure to contact him posthaste to discuss the details.”

As I had just explained, the king was handling all formalities regarding my betrothal in his capacity as my guardian. Though I had declined his offer to accompany me today, he had insisted on taking care of other relevant obligations. This included my dowry, as well as other things that noble families traditionally arranged when their daughters become engaged.

I tried to pay for my own dowry at first, since I was so grateful for everything else he’d done for me, but His Majesty refused.

I had been informed that I was owed a great reward for, among other things, creating the panacea, purging all the kingdom’s monsters, and various other contributions to Salutania, and since I had refused a title and land, the king had been striving to figure out another way to repay me. Thus, he strongly urged me to accept this proposal as his way to make good on his debt to me, and despite my reservations, I felt compelled to agree.

Well, it’s just a dowry. Not a title or land or anything. Just money. It’s not something I feel ill-equipped to handle, so it should be okay.

“In that case, I shall leave the handling of these things to you. However, we also need to host an announcement party.”

By that, I was fairly certain she meant announcing the engagement itself. The king had described these parties when we discussed the terms of his guardianship in this matter. I was pretty sure I remembered him asking if we wanted to make the announcement during a ball they would be hosting at the

palace—a celebration for the final elimination of the miasma.

Albert had been present for this conversation as well, so I figured I ought to double check with him. He was sitting right next to me, so I turned to him and said, “Lord Hawke.”

As one, the men shifted their focus onto me. I flinched, taken aback for a moment, but I swiftly realized what was going on. In short, *all* of the men in this room were “Lord Hawke.”

What should I do? The knight commander is the one I’m trying to talk to...

The eldest Hawke brother, the minister of military services, was the first to notice my troubled look, and he offered me a way forward: “Why, Lady Takanashi.”

“Y-yes?”

“We’re all about to be family. Please, do me the honor of calling me Josef.”

Josef. Lord Josef.

I nodded, agreeing to the cheerful suggestion of the minister of military services—a.k.a. Lord Josef.

His wife, who was sitting right next to him, immediately piped up with sparkles in her eyes, “In that case, please, call me Elfriede!”

“Thank you! Likewise, I would very much like it if you all called me Sei,” I responded with a smile.

A lovely smile spread across Elfriede’s face in turn. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, of course!”

After them came Lady Hawke, chiming in with a positively dazzling voice, “My, what a loving family we’re becoming! Please, I must insist that from now on, you refer to me as Mother.”

“And call me Father.”

Mother and Father... Yeah. Now that I think about how my life’s about to change, those aren’t unreasonable requests. I’m a bit shy about doing it, though.

The two of them beamed at me. When I nodded and agreed that I would do so, someone quipped, “Now, that’s not fair.”

I turned to the speaker, Josef, who gazed back at me serenely. “If you’re going to call my parents such things, then I’d much rather you call me ‘Brother.’”

“But wouldn’t she have to call me the same thing?” Erhart asked.

“True. Very well, call me Elder Brother Josef.”

“And likewise, call me Elder Brother Er.”

Whoa, hold on just a moment there, guys! That wasn’t the kind of thing that the minister of military services and the magus of the Royal Magi Assembly should say with completely straight faces, right? What in the world had gotten into those two?!

They continued their discussion as I watched with an awkward smile on my face. Josef turned to look at me with a much more relaxed smile than mine.

Huh? Wait, were they just bantering? Was Lord Josef actually more of a joker than his appearance let on?

I was beginning to feel fidgety about this unexpected turn of events when Josef swiveled his attention to Albert instead. Since they had grown up together, Albert must have known what Josef wanted without him even needing to speak, and he frowned even more deeply than he already had been. Whatever it was that Josef was trying to communicate, it seemed that Albert didn’t care for it.

How much time passed in that next stretch? It felt like *forever*, but I was sure it was only just a moment before Albert cleared his throat and gathered his resolve to say to me, “And you should call me Al.”

“Al,” I slowly repeated—and then, for some reason, was overcome with embarrassment. I mean, all I had done was say his name!

Albert’s lips curled into a smile that grew in direct proportion to the heat in my cheeks.

It took a few seconds before I realized that everyone else was looking at this interaction with true warmth—at which point I started internally screaming.

Not long after my luncheon with my future in-laws, I began to receive frequent summons from the palace. While the king and prime minister were taking care of the nitty-gritty details of my marriage into House Hawke, there were still some things that I had to do myself. The most important of these was to sign the engagement contract. You should always read the fine print before signing any kind of contract, so this took some time—especially since this contract had far more pages than I had imagined it would. This was because it had to clearly state who owned the rights to my company and the products that it sold in partnership with my new house.

I had assumed that since I was the one who owned the rights, we wouldn't need a contract, but that turned out to be a bit naive. Something to do with the laws of the land.

I did manage to read through it, more or less. However, if you can keep a secret, I actually skimmed most of it—I was always utterly exhausted by the time I got to read it. Besides, the king and prime minister had prepared the contract, and they had always treated me well. I wanted to trust them, and I doubted they would sneak any strange clauses in there.



Thus, as I spent my days juggling my work for the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora with whatever needed doing for my engagement, I received an invitation from the palace to a ball. This was the celebratory event for the purification of the miasma that the king had discussed with me. In other words, the Saint's engagement announcement party.

Naturally, as the central figure in the end of the miasma problem, as well as one of the key people involved in this engagement business, I couldn't possibly duck out on this one. And, as always, as the Saint, I would arrive at the same time as the king.

I passed through the doors just behind him. After a moment, the hall was awash with murmurs. They weren't loud, but I could tell from the fact that they were whispering amongst themselves that a number of people were shocked. I had a feeling I knew why they were surprised, and I nearly broke out in a crooked smile—but then I imagined how mad my etiquette instructor would be if I lost my composure, and I managed to suppress it.

"I'm sure that by now you have all realized that, despite the many long years for which the monstrous hordes have plagued us, their numbers have at last diminished." The king stood on a platform raised over the crowd, and the murmurs went silent as he addressed the guests. "For many terrible years, we were unable to discern the cause of their increase, but not long ago, we identified their source: They were born from what we call the black swamps, which were composed of concentrated masses of miasma."

I remembered the very first time we discovered a swamp—it was by accident in the Ghoshe Forest, to the west of the capital. We'd watched as all kinds of monsters spawned from it, one after another. I believe it was Grand Magus Yuri Drewes who identified that the swamp was made of miasma.

"While we hoped that we could dispense with our monstrous foes once we identified their source, this was easier said than done. Establishing an effective solution always takes time, and the matter of the black swamps was no different. As this was a new discovery, we had no experience in dealing with them."

The king was right: Just because you know what the problem is doesn't mean

you'll figure out how to solve it right away. That was what had happened as we struggled with the riddle of the black swamps.

If we'd been facing a monster made of concentrated miasma, then we could have defeated it like we had every other beast up until that point. However, you couldn't exactly rely on those conventional methods to defeat a swamp. It took a great deal of study and testing to figure out how to get rid of it.

"It was the Saint herself who destroyed the first, and in one fell swoop. Just as the legends of old have come to tell, the powers of the Saint have eradicated the black swamps and the monsters at astounding speed."

Your Majesty, aren't you embellishing a bit there?

From the way he said it, it sounded like I had defeated all the monsters in the kingdom single-handedly. Granted, it was true that once I purged the black swamps, all of the monsters in the vicinity disappeared. However, the knights and mages who had escorted me on these expeditions had also played their part.

I realized that the king was probably obliged to commend me in exaggerated tones in a public speech, but I still felt awful, because it sounded like I was robbing everyone else of their contributions.

My cheeks were beginning to cramp, but I did my best to not let my expression falter as the king continued.

"After healing Ghoshe Forest, the Saint traveled across our lands. I'm sure many here today met with her when she came to your domains."

Looking around the venue, I saw many people nodding. I recognized them all. These were the lords and ladies who ruled the lands that I had visited on my monster-slaying expeditions.

When I had first met these nobles, many had worn smiles on their faces, but I had seen the desperation in their eyes, and their imploring gazes. They had all carried terrible tension.

Now they looked different. They seemed at ease, and the smiles on their faces were genuine. And I was sure that the peace that they had come to know would continue.

My relief lasted only a brief moment. I would like to omit what the king talked about next! He started talking about how I first went to Klausner's Domain and then all the things I'd done in the other regions after that—but why in the world was he bringing up things that had nothing to do with monster-slaying?! In fact, the majority of it had to do with, of all things, *food*.

Would that I could just disappear right now...!

After regaling everyone with all the embarrassing things I'd done, the king finally brought his speech to a close. He ended it by saying that the final black swamp had been purged just recently and that the palace had confirmed that the numbers of monsters had decreased to their old levels. And...

"I hereby declare that the monster plague has come to an end."

With that, the entire venue broke out in applause. Everyone I could see was overjoyed, their expressions sparkling. It had taken so much to get to this point, but seeing their happy faces and knowing that I was the reason for their smiles made it all worthwhile.

I was feeling all warm and fuzzy inside as I gazed out at them. When the applause came to an end, the king said, "And today, I bring you yet another happy announcement."

Which meant that it was my turn.

Everyone's excited murmurs were instantly silenced, and a portion of the crowd turned to stare at me. The gravity of their gazes made the air itself grow heavy.

"The Saint is now betrothed to Knight Commander Albert Hawke of the Knights of the Third Order."

The crowd erupted in murmurs again—much louder ones than when I had initially entered the room. However, Albert, who was standing at an angle from me, didn't seem remotely fazed.

Once the murmurs had just about died down, he came to stand next to me and bowed to the crowd. Normally, someone of his station would never stand on the same platform as the king, and people had likely started talking amongst themselves the minute they noticed him enter on my heels.

But today was a special day, because the fact of the matter was, Albert was m-my—my *fiancé*.

There was one other reason they'd all started whispering: my dress.

My outfit was appropriate for an evening ball, but the people in the know had evidently noticed something else.

I was wearing a ballgown that, as usual, the palace had prepared for me. In the Kingdom of Salutania, it was the typical custom for the man's family to supply his bride-to-be with the dresses and accessories that she wore at social events. However, there hadn't been enough time for the Hawkes to order me new dresses, so I'd decided beforehand to stick with the one the palace already had for me. Both Albert and Mother had seemed terribly regretful that they hadn't been able to prepare my attire, but there was nothing to do about it.

So, as a compromise, I was wearing jewelry that had been passed down in the Hawke family for generations.

I was incredibly worried about possibly losing them, but Mother had refused to let me go without. Specifically, she had lent me a necklace with a matching bracelet and earrings. Each featured a clear blue-gray stone as its centerpiece, with numerous colorless, translucent gems arranged around that main stone. Maybe they were diamonds? Either way, I'd only seen this kind of jewelry in museums.

Meanwhile, my gown was made of several layers of the same thin chiffon as the dress I had worn when meeting my in-laws. As was appropriate for an evening party, this one was far lacier, with more embroidery, and it was all around way fancier. Importantly, the undertones were blue-gray.

That's right—both my dress and accessories were the same color as Albert's eyes, a defining trait of House Hawke. And, as it so happened, adorning yourself in the colors of your betrothed's hair and eyes was common practice in the Kingdom of Salutania.

That all being said, it was pretty easy to guess why people started talking the second they saw me, right? I was decked out from head to toe in my fiancé's colors—so much so that, when Albert came to fetch me as my escort and first laid eyes upon me, he had gone wide-eyed and been momentarily too stunned

to move.

Then that shock had melted into the most heart-pounding of smiles.

A part of me felt uncomfortable in such a lovely dress and jewelry, but that didn't mean I wasn't happy to wear them. I was also over the moon when Albert complimented my appearance. But whether that made me feel shy or not was a completely different matter... Urk!

"Furthermore..."

I got so lost in remembering everything that happened just before I arrived that I belatedly realized the king was still speaking.

Huh? I'm pretty sure the end of the monster crisis and my engagement was the whole story, right? I didn't hear about any other announcements, at least. Is there some kind of urgent news he has to relay? I wondered as I turned back to the king.

The next thing he said left me completely stunned.

"Second Prince Rayne is now betrothed to Elizabeth of House Ashley."

The second the king finished speaking, we heard the biggest commotion thus far today.

I wasn't the only one caught off guard; a ton of others were stunned as well.

Wait, Prince Rayne? Engaged to Elizabeth of House Ashley? Elizabeth Ashley? Huh? Wait, does he mean Liz?! Upon realizing that the prince's betrothed was my close friend, I searched for her in the crowd.

I spotted the two of them right away. It didn't take much looking. They had suddenly appeared at the bottom of the platform we stood on. They turned toward the crowd and bowed, at which the audience broke out into applause. It was just a few people at first, but eventually the whole crowd joined in.

After receiving the people's blessing, Liz and the prince exchanged smiles with one another.

Meanwhile, all I could do was stare, stupefied by the new couple.

In a corner of the palace, I was holding what one would call a tea party with my dear friends. In other words, I was having yet another girls' day out at what had become our usual spot: a gazebo in one of the gardens.

"You really caught me off guard there. I had no idea," I said.

"I apologize for that. We kept the whole thing private," Liz confessed.

"Ooh. So you didn't know either, Aira?"

"No! But I had heard a rumor from one of my seniors at work, so I knew it was a possibility."

Right from the start, we jumped straight into discussing Prince Rayne and Liz. To me, the announcement of their engagement during the celebration had hit like a bolt from the blue, but Aira had already known a bit.



By her “senior at work,” she doubtless meant one of the mages at the Royal Magi Assembly. If they’d been talking about it, then it was likely most of the nobility had also already been in the know. A lot of mages in the Assembly were nobles, after all.

Of course, there were also nobles at the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora, but we only ever talked about herbs and potions. We hardly ever discussed high society. At least, I hoped I wasn’t the only one ignorant of the goings-on in the greater world.

“Have you guys been negotiating it for some time, then?”

“Yes. But it was only just recently that everything finally aligned. We decided that since a celebration was already being held, we would take the opportunity to announce our engagement at that time.”

“Just like us, then.”

“Oh, that’s how it went for you too?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

When I thought about it, Liz had probably been planning her engagement to Prince Rayne ever since her original engagement to the crown prince, Kyle, was broken. When I asked about it indirectly, she confirmed my suspicions. By “everything finally aligned,” she was likely referring to some behind-the-scenes maneuvering she had been doing. When they’d finally reached the point of announcing their engagement, they’d come up with the idea of using the party to do so, just as it had happened with me.

But why did she break off her engagement to Prince Kyle? The question popped into my mind, but I didn’t ask it out loud. I had a feeling I knew why, and that even if I were to ask, she wouldn’t give me a straight answer.

What if, for instance, it was because Prince Kyle had lost his right to the throne after he had treated the Saint with such insolence? If that was the case, then I doubted she would admit it to me, since I was an involved party. Liz, considerate as she was, wouldn’t want to make me feel guilty by association.

“Were you okay with folding your announcement into another celebration?” I

asked. (The question had just popped into my mind while I was trying to think of another topic.) “I heard the proper thing to do is to have a party specifically for the event.”

If they had been planning this for a while now, then surely they could have arranged their own special party just for them. Engagement parties weren’t really a thing back in my original world, so I didn’t have any emotional attachment to the idea, but I thought Liz might.

Liz smiled and shook her head. “Oh, I wasn’t bothered at all. As it happens, when a member of the royal family gets engaged, it’s typically announced at the annual ball hosted by their family.”

“I see.”

“It’s also more cost and time efficient to wrap all of these sorts of things into a single event rather than hosting several.”

“Oh, Liz. There you go again.”

That sounded weirdly pragmatic. She said it in a joking tone, so surely that wasn’t the main reason. I certainly hoped that was the case.

“What about you, Sei? You could have hosted your own special party as well.” Liz turned my question right back on me, but honestly? I had no problem with it either.

“I was grateful for the way it came together, actually. My guardian is the king, after all. I’m sure it would have been a pain for him to make time to attend multiple parties.” I was surrounded by my close friends, so I answered honestly, eliciting their lovely laughter.

“Now that you’ve announced your engagement, are you going to start preparing for the ceremony?” Aira asked excitedly.

“I guess that’s how it goes, right?” I had assumed as much myself, but I had yet to hear about anything from anyone, which made me wonder if there was another step to the process. I looked at Liz for confirmation.

“Indeed,” she said. “I am planning for our wedding to be held next spring, so I’m already in the thick of preparations.”

“Whoa, that was fast!”

She didn’t mention the date, but at the soonest, it would be nearly a year from now. Hearing that she was already gearing up for the wedding, I couldn’t help but tease. But Liz stared at me with open shock.

“What do you mean? Selecting and preparing the venue, determining the guest list, having your dress made—it all takes quite a lot of time.”

“Right, I suppose you have to do all that stuff yourself, don’t you?” I had never had to pull a wedding together, so I didn’t really know just how much work it entailed. But I got the gist well enough; it was clearly going to require *a lot* of time and energy. The venue stuff alone was sure to require a whole slew of things to be picked out and decided.

Back in my old world, royal weddings had involved sending invitations to a ton of people from both inside and outside the country, and I was sure that in Salutania, it was more or less the same. Part of my old job back in Japan had involved organizing drinking parties between multiple departments, which hadn’t exactly been a cake walk, so I could easily imagine how much more difficult this would be.

And as for having your dress made? Well, I wasn’t so sure about any of that. I imagined I’d just leave everything like the design and so forth to Mary and her crew, just like I usually did. Which meant that all I had to do was let them take my measurements, then come back again later for the first fitting. But there was no way they could have a custom dress made in only a couple of days, so that part would definitely take a lot of time too.

Furthermore, this time they would be making my *wedding dress*. Even back in my old world, women fantasized about the day they’d get to wear that kind of dress, so this time, I doubted I would be able to leave *everything* up to my maids. They were probably going to ask me all kinds of things, like what kind of cut I wanted, etc., etc.—all things that I doubted I would be able to actually answer.

Back in Japan, I had never experienced any kind of romance, and I had never once pictured myself getting married. So, I had never daydreamed about what I’d like for my wedding dress, let alone the ceremony. It would be a bit

troublesome, but perhaps I needed to start thinking up some answers now so that I was ready for the inevitable questions.

I grew weary as I imagined what awaited me in the coming months, which prompted a chuckle from Liz.

“Don’t worry, you won’t have to figure it out all by yourself. I myself have received a great deal of help.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve been given all manner of advice as to the design of the dress and the arrangement of the venue. And as for guest list, we are obliged to invite all the associates of our families, so we have, of course, been consulting with our houses.”

Hearing these words gave me at least a bit of relief.

Right. I could just ask for help with all that, just like I did for my wardrobe. Also, though it had only just occurred to me when she mentioned “consulting with our families,” I wasn’t the only one getting married here! The knight commander was too. Which meant I should consult with House Hawke.

We continued discussing wedding ceremonies as I started plotting my strategy in my head. Thus, the day after our wonderful tea party, I decided to go and speak directly with Albert.

But then the unthinkable happened.

Act 2:

Tidings from Abroad

AFTER SUCH A FUN DAY OFF, I was full of enthusiasm for work the next day. I was on my way to the institute, thinking about how to start tackling my to-do list, when Johan called me over. That in itself wasn't anything out of the ordinary.

What could he need? Maybe he's going to ask me to deliver some document or something to the knights or the mages? I thought as I headed over to him. He made his way over to me as well.

"Do you need something?"

Johan's answer to my question was brief. "You've been summoned."

"I have?"

The palace had requested my presence, so a carriage was waiting for me at the entrance to the institute. As it turned out, there was an official waiting as well, whom I assumed had been sent to fetch me. It seemed important, if he had been told to bring me to the palace at once.

Had something pressing come up? The official seemed kind of tense. But when I asked, he claimed that he had only been told to escort me to the palace and that he didn't know why.

At any rate, I knew I was going to see the king.

"I apologize for summoning you on such short notice," the king said.

"It's all right."

"Please, have a seat."

At the king's suggestion, Johan and I settled on the sofas. We were in the king's office, as we had been so many times before.

Curiously, the prime minister sat down as well, which led me to believe that this was going to be a long conversation—and on a topic that required absolute

secrecy, at that.

After the four chamberlains had served our tea, they were ordered to leave the room. Usually, the guards were permitted to remain, but even they were asked to exit.

I glanced at Johan, and even he looked unusually tense.

Once it was just the four of us, the king told us, “We have received an urgent letter from Zaidera.”

An urgent letter? The first thing that popped into my head was Prince Ten’yuu’s mother. But hadn’t they told us that the panacea had healed her? I held my tongue for now; I had no idea what else this letter might be about.

The king continued, “It said that a member of the delegation sent to Zaidera has fallen ill.”

Did he mean the team that had been dispatched to Zaidera as a cultural exchange kind of thing? The one that came about after Prince Ten’yuu came to Salutania to study abroad? If I remembered correctly, the crown prince was part of that delegation.

“Fallen ill? Is there an epidemic or something?” Johan asked as he furrowed his brow.

“It is as yet unclear. At the time when the letter was written, only one member had fallen ill.”

So we had no idea yet if anyone else had contracted this disease, whatever it might be.

“Just the one? But if a letter was sent regardless... Does the illness come with peculiar symptoms?”

“At first it was a high fever, headache, and nausea. However, a few days after the first signs of illness, they fell unconscious and have remained so ever since.”

“And that’s why they sent the letter?”

“Indeed. However, though the symptoms are troubling, it is but a single patient—hardly what we would consider an emergency. Unfortunately, the patient is of high rank, and as such they have submitted a request that we

dispatch someone able to treat him.”

Johan’s frown deepened.

It was just as the king said; I found it hard to believe that a single sick person who’d caught what sounded like a bad cold would be considered a crisis worthy of sending an urgent summons abroad. This world’s means of communication were quite limited compared to my old one, and correspondence took time.

The most concerning parts of this were the facts that the patient was still unconscious, that they were worried the illness might spread, and that the patient was of high status.

A person of high status... Did they mean Prince Kyle? But surely they would have made that clear if that was the case. So maybe the patient was from the house of a marquis or someone of even higher standing? Since the delegation had gone abroad, I doubted any families would have sent their heirs, but they could have sent other children of notable skill. I could see how someone who was both of high rank and exceptional skill falling unconscious would be a reason to send an urgent letter...

“If you’re going to send someone who can cure this illness, then does that mean your candidate will need to be capable of using Holy Magic?” Johan asked in a somewhat accusatory tone.

With a sigh, the king nodded. “Yes.”

Common practice in this world was to either wait for a sickness to pass on its own or to drink a concoction of boiled herbs. It was also common to drink status cure potions. They weren’t so dissimilar from the kinds of medicines that were prescribed back in my old world.

However, these potions were all of high grade. The herbs used to make them were expensive, and very few people could actually make them—meaning that the potions themselves were *incredibly* expensive. Furthermore, each type of potion used a recipe specific to the ailment it was meant to cure, so you couldn’t exactly become an expert overnight.

Because of this, when trying to aid someone far away, it would make more sense to send a mage who could use Holy Magic rather than someone who

needed to rely on specific potions. But mages were *even more* expensive to hire than the cost of any given potion. What's more, even Holy Magic had its limits—it couldn't just cure everything. While it was simpler to deploy than complicated potions, a mage's healing capability depended on their level in Holy Magic. All that being said, I could assume that the king was planning to send someone who fit exactly that bill.

As it so happened, I was, beyond a doubt, the person with the highest Holy Magic level in the entire kingdom: Despite the fact that Level 10 was thought to be the highest level in elemental magics, I was Level ∞ .

No one had any idea that I possessed this specifically absurd level, but they did know my level was high, because I had mistakenly let it show on multiple occasions. As such, I could pretty much guess that they were planning to send me.

Considering they had summoned me here, Johan had likely come to the same conclusion. That was the reason that Johan was practically interrogating the king.

However, it seemed we were wrong.

"As it so happens, this time, we're considering just sending a potion."

"One for curing status abnormalities?"

"No, actually. The panacea that Sei made."

At this, both Johan and I stared at the king in shock.

It was true that with a panacea, the ill delegate would be cured, no matter their ailment. The grand magus himself had determined as much with his Appraise spell, and we had moreover heard that Prince Ten'yuu's mother had made a complete recovery thanks to it.

The prime minister then stepped in to explain that they had indeed decided to send a mage to Zaidera, but as they didn't know if the mage would be able to heal the patient, they were thinking of sending a panacea along with them—just in case.

I had entrusted the king and prime minister with all the panaceas I had made,

so it seemed they just wanted to have my permission as a show of good faith.

“You don’t mind, do you?”

“Of course not. Please, feel free to use it as you see fit.”

But didn’t we decide that the fact of the panacea’s very existence was supposed to be a carefully guarded secret? Although I guess if the king and prime minister decide that this is fort the best, then I have no reason to object. I did make them to cure illnesses, after all. They should be used for their intended purpose.

With that sentiment in mind, I gave my permission, at which the king and prime minister both smiled.

Johan also looked relieved; he was just glad that this meant that I didn’t need to go.

That was thankfully the end of our discussion, so we said our goodbyes and left the office.

The day after I had been summoned by the king, I was having my magic class at the palace when Grand Magus Yuri Drewes casually said, “Oh, by the way, it will be a while before our next lesson.”

“Are you going on an expedition?”

Yuri was obsessed with magic, so he saw our lessons as a bit of private fun for himself—especially because our practical lessons gave him a chance to observe the Saint in action. In short, he never canceled lessons unless he had to go out monster-slaying, which led me to my question. But by the sounds of it, he wasn’t going anywhere nearby.

But the king had only just recently announced that the monster threat was over now... It was this very doubt that had led me to ask.

His response took me by surprise. “Of a sort. To Zaidera, this time.”

“What? Zaidera?!” I raised my voice unthinkingly—we’d only just been discussing that country yesterday. The king had said he would be dispatching a mage. Did that mean he was sending Yuri?! “Does this have to do with Holy

Magic?”

The king had said that this matter was strictly confidential, so I wasn't sure how much I could say.

But since he's been told enough to know where he's headed, it should probably be okay to bring up that they were looking to send someone like him, right? I thought before I asked, only for him to respond with a similar question in turn.

“Oh? Did you receive the same request?”

“Not quite. They asked for one of my potions.”

“Ah, I see.”

I didn't mention the panacea by name, but Yuri seemed to grasp what I meant and nodded to himself.

In short, Yuri was probably the one going to Zaidera, since he was a mage and could call on Holy Magic. He had been selected because, of all the mages in the Royal Magi Assembly, he had the highest level in that element.

I had heard that he could use all known Holy Magic spells, but today I learned for the first time that he had also reached Level 10 in every elemental category.

Level 10 is the highest level you can reach for elemental magic, right? So, wait a minute—does that mean he's hit max level for everything? At this realization, two thoughts popped into my head simultaneously: “Well, that's no surprise,” and, “Addict.”

By the latter, I definitely meant the kind of person who gets so obsessed with something that it negatively impacts their lives—like someone who gets addicted to games. But while Yuri wasn't addicted to games or drugs, he was so obsessed with slaying monsters that one could say that it had definitely had an unfortunate side effect on the rest of his life.

At any rate, I was surprised that Salutania was sending the grand magus himself. He was one of the strongest assets in their military, so I would never have assumed they would just allow him to waltz over the border.

Perhaps it's because they don't have to worry as much about monsters? On

the other hand, Zaidera is pretty far away. So it makes sense to send your strongest mage from the start, as you can't just blithely send more if the first doesn't work out.

"I hear that Zaidera practices magic that we don't even have, so I'm very much looking forward to this trip."

While Yuri was being sent to go cure someone of their illness, his mind was on other matters. He was all smiles as he described these new arcane secrets.

At least he's predictable... But is this really okay? Although I feel like pointing it out would only be an exercise in futility. I think I'll just keep my mouth shut, I thought as I watched him weakly and held up my end of the conversational bargain with an appropriate response. "Unknown magic, huh?"

"That's right!" he said excitedly. "They have these things called talismans. Enchanted objects."

"Talismans?" The word made me think of the Chinese talismans I had seen in old movies. I couldn't really remember any particulars, but I tried to conjure an image in my mind.

As I was mulling over these memories, Yuri's eyes sparkled. "I hear that they draw some manner of pattern on them using a special ink. The pattern is what determines the nature of its magical effect." Then he clapped his hands together as if something had just occurred to him. "And they have rice dishes too!"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure they must have an entire region dedicated to growing it."

"They have all the dishes you've made for us already—and so many more. I can't wait to use this opportunity to try them!"

Depending on a person's Cooking Skill, their dishes could come with all sorts of effects, such as HP recovery or increasing the might of physical attacks. The effects differed depending on the ingredients of the meal, and meals made with rice happened to be particularly effective with enhancing magic. As a result, Yuri *loved* rice.

As it happened, this very main ingredient for these dishes wasn't cultivated in the Kingdom of Salutania. However, they did grow it in Zaidera, so meals with

rice were considered Zaideran. A lot of Zaideran cuisine reminded me of Chinese food. Of course, there were sure to be dishes I had never tried before there too. The grand magus was so excited specifically because he wanted to eat these foods he had never been able to try.

This is great and all, but he hasn't forgotten the primary purpose of going to Zaidera, right? He's going there to heal a sick person. Can we really leave this mission in his hands? He's not going to forget to help the patient and just spend all his time on some kind of restaurant crawl, right?

Driven by this concern, I said, "Right, but make sure you actually see to that patient."

"Of course I'll see them," he assured me.

Yeah, I'll just try to believe in him...

The next day, while I was stirring a cauldron full of potion ingredients, for some reason, my thoughts started drifting to Zaidera.

I didn't spare too much thought for the unconscious patient, because I had no choice but to entrust the task to the grand magus. I figured it ought to work out in the end, given his gift in Holy Magic; he would surely be able to cure the most pressing symptoms.

The previous day, our conversation had mainly turned to the topic of rice, but Zaidera also had other ingredients that couldn't be found in the kingdom of Salutania.

They had vegetables and spices that I recognized from Chinese cuisine, as well as seasonings like miso and soy sauce. Prince Ten'yuu had also told me that they cultivated all manner of tea, such as non-fermented green tea, semi-fermented oolong, and even flower teas like jasmine.



I mainly drank herbal teas these days, but I sure would have loved to drink some green tea. And oolong and jasmine too, of course. But imports were exceedingly expensive, so they weren't easy to get ahold of. This was why I wanted to start growing tea plants here in Salutania, but unfortunately, I didn't know how. I couldn't stop thinking about how nice it would be if I could go to Zaidera and learn how to grow rice, how to make miso, and all kinds of things like that.

Come to think of it, I'd had a similar conversation about herbs once. Prince Ten'yuu had sent a ton of herbal seeds and seedlings that were native to Zaidera as a thank-you for letting him observe us at the institute. They were being grown in the fields of the institute and annex, but some of them weren't taking very well, probably because of the climate.

My coworkers and I were trying to figure out exactly why, but we weren't making much progress. The problem was that we had never seen healthy versions of the plants, so there were a ton of things we had yet to learn. I would have loved to see them growing in their natural habitat in order to solve this riddle—or to interview people who knew how to properly cultivate them, if possible.

While I was full of desire to do just this, it would probably prove pretty difficult to actually make it happen. While we had magic in this world, methods of transportation were much more limited, so it was no mean feat to travel to other countries—to say nothing of the fact that I was the Saint. My position alone made it doubtful that I would be allowed to just hare off wherever I pleased.

Plus, I had so many other things on my plate—first on the list being my wedding ceremony. I had to coordinate with not only the king, who was my guardian, but everyone in House Hawke, so it all weighed heavily on me in terms of workload. There was just so much to do!

For now, I need to figure out a good spot for Albert and I to discuss things. Then I need to schedule a time to do so.

“All right, done.”

I'd finished brewing my potions while I was lost in thought. It was amazing

what I could get done now that I was used to it. At this point, I could make mid-grade potions while my mind was entirely elsewhere.

Now all I had to do was wait for the pot to cool and then bottle its contents.

As I took the pot off the burner, I inadvertently let my guiltiest, innermost thoughts slip out, “But I really do wish I could go.”

No one else was in the institute with me. I had spoken this private wish aloud because I knew there was no one to hear it.

But it turned out that I had miscalculated.

“Go where?”

I recognized the voice terribly well. I whirled around to find the knight commander standing right behind me.

H-how long has he been there?!

“Uh, um,” I stammered. Albert was the last person on the planet I’d wanted to overhear that.

How could I answer? A noble lady would find a way to cover up her slip with a smile, but that wasn’t really in my repertoire. Maybe if we were at a party I could have managed a smile, even if it was forced. But unfortunately, we were at the institute. Between that and how I’d let my guard down, I had no hope of glossing over this mistake.

My thoughts froze from shock and panic, and I began looking around wildly.

Oh, I know!

“L-Lord Hawke. What are you doing here?” I met his question with a question—it was the first thing that popped into my mind! Sure, it was impolite, but he didn’t seem to mind.

“I needed to speak with Johan. And I always want to see you.” Albert smiled, launching a powerful attack—a critical hit upon my heart. And now that I had left myself open, Albert seized his chance to ask, “Just where is it that you want to go to?”

“Oh, uh—” In the end, I said the unthinkable. “Abroad...I guess?”

Why had that come out as a question? Because even my heart was poking fun at me.

“Abroad?”

“Uhhh, I always wanted to travel abroad at least once in my life,” I reluctantly admitted.

It was true that this had been my dream even back when I lived in Japan. I had always wanted to travel, to see all the sights, and to try every food I could find. Unfortunately, I had worked at a company where it was normal to work even on the weekends, so I’d never had the chance.

Albert thought for a moment before he said, “Do you want to go to Zaidera?”

“H-how did you know?!” I yelped in surprise.

Albert smiled crookedly and lowered his voice to explain, “I’m afraid I heard that they’re planning to send a second delegation to Zaidera. It was a reasonable guess.”

Albert *was* in the upper echelons of the military. I didn’t know who he’d heard this from, but it made sense that he knew the grand magus and some other mages were headed to Zaidera. From the way he said it, he probably knew the panacea was being sent as well, and that I had been summoned by the king.

“I’m sorry. I know they’re not going to Zaidera for the fun of it, but after hearing about the delegation, I started wishing I could go.” I wasn’t a very good liar, especially not to someone I was close to; I always started feeling really guilty. So I just gave up and told him the truth. I even forced a smile as I said it; I was already feeling awful about having these feelings to begin with.

But Albert didn’t rebuke me. “Please, don’t apologize,” he said. “We hardly ever get the opportunity to travel abroad. If you dream of seeing other countries, then of course you’d start to feel such things.” He made me feel it was okay to have these yearnings. The guilt wasn’t entirely quashed, but his kindness warmed my heart.

“Thank you. But it’s just a wish. I know I’ll probably never get to go.” I had no

intention of really reaching for it either, especially because I didn't think it was possible. These were my honest feelings. I told him as much, as I didn't want him to worry, but he just gave me a puzzled look.

"Why do you say that?"

Huh? Had I said something weird? I felt a bit shy asking and hesitated as I said, "Uh, because we'll be busy getting ready for our wedding?"

Actually saying it out loud made me suddenly even shyer, and a heat bloomed in my cheeks. I found it hard to keep his gaze.

Albert looked a bit bashful in turn. "True. We will." He covered his mouth with his right hand as he nodded.

"Y-yeah. If we're going to have our ceremony in, like, a year, then I should probably start getting my dress ordered and stuff." Encouraged by his agreement, I started reaching for things I knew I had to do. According to Liz, the dress-making took the longest time, which is why I brought it up first, but Albert seemed stuck on a different part of what I'd said.

"In a year?"

He gave me a quizzical look, so I said, "I heard that the shortest appropriate engagement is usually a year?"

In fact, several people had told me this.

Albert seemed to have heard the same. He pondered it over for a moment, resting his chin in his hand. Then, he nodded. "Oh, you meant that's how long you would want for preparations." But he seemed to have his reservations about this, because he then said, calmly as ever, "But that's just the shortest time, right? I'm pretty sure wedding ceremonies can wait for longer than a year."

"I suppose that must be true."

"Then you could wait to get started until after you return from Zaidera."

"Huh?" I stared at him in surprise.

It made sense. We didn't need to get married in *exactly* a year from now. I hadn't even begun to discuss dates with the king. I probably *could* go to Zaidera

and then just start on the wedding stuff after I got back, just as Albert had suggested. But surely there were other factors that would interfere no matter how badly I wanted to go? I couldn't just blithely agree with him.

But Albert seemed able to read me.

"I'm guessing you're also worried about whether you can take such a long break from work. Or are you worried about the cost of the voyage? Oh, and let me guess—your social standing too?"

How did he know me so well? Everything he had said was exactly on point.

I laughed awkwardly, which he took as my response, as he proceeded to persuade me otherwise—first saying that if I wanted to take time off, I'd have no trouble getting permission. If anything, they would be happy that I requested it, as they believed I worked too much as it was.

I still couldn't tell when my work drive was worrying people, and Johan had on occasion forced me to take time off, so I couldn't argue with this assessment.

Next, Albert said that the palace would gladly fund my journey without a second thought. Unlike the world I came from, traveling abroad was outrageously expensive for the common people. However, if I joined the official delegation, the cost would be minimal.

"But I can't just decide I'm going," I protested, to which Albert suggested that if I was worried about getting in the way of the mission, then I should ask the king to be allowed to go *as a reward* for all I had done for the kingdom already.

True enough, the last time we'd spoken, the king had yet again mentioned that they still owed me a great debt—and one of the reasons for that was my continued refusal of most of the king's attempts to repay it. As such, Albert figured they'd actually love to fund my trip.

He's not wrong. And doing this would put a dent in that debt...

Mind you, in Albert's opinion, they probably wouldn't count this toward a reward. The delegation was going to Zaidera in order to cure someone who had fallen comatose. If I went to Zaidera to help, I would be going for work and they would fund my trip as a related expenditure. Of course the palace couldn't

consider that a gift.

What if I went without offering my assistance? That didn't really feel possible for me personally, though. Of course I wanted to help. After all, if I put my all into it, I knew I would be able to heal this patient.

That was why Albert had stated that definitively. He didn't think for a moment that I would be able to stop myself from getting involved.

Huh? Why does he seem so confident in that?

"So, all that being said, you don't have to worry about taking a leave of absence or about the cost. Which leaves the matter of your rank..."

Was the Saint even allowed to go abroad? Albert mulled over the last potential roadblock. However, he seemed to have some difficulty articulating his thoughts. Up until this moment, he had spoken with such sure eloquence, but here he paused multiple times, choosing his words with care.

He agreed that he couldn't picture the palace enthusiastically sending the Saint abroad. The biggest problem was security. It was easier to protect a person within your own territory than it was in someone else's.

They'd already had to think about this a ton when deciding who to send to Zaidera for this mission, and they had opted to send their most powerful mage as well as a significant resource—resource in this case referring to the panacea.

Which meant that for personnel, without taking anything else into account, I would have been their top pick, what with my absurd level in Holy Magic. However, letting me leave the kingdom had posed a problem, which was why they had elected to send their second best, the grand magus.

"So it really would be difficult for me to go, then." It was disappointing, but it sounded like I would be best served by giving up on this dream.

But Albert seemed to think it was too soon to surrender. "If you have your heart set on it, I'm sure you have room to negotiate."

He then revealed that the higher-ups had spent quite a bit of time deliberating between me and the grand magus. So, Albert believed that if I said that I wanted to go to Zaidera, and it looked like my security wouldn't be a

problem, then the palace wouldn't refuse.

"Then you mean that the only real problem would be safety measures?"

"Indeed. And it just so happens that I have an idea as to how to solve that."

"What is it?"

"I shall go with you."

"What?!"

I couldn't believe what I'd just heard. Had Albert really just offered to go to Zaidera with me, or had I imagined it?

Doesn't he have his responsibilities as knight commander?!

It was like he could read my thoughts! "It will be fine," he assured me.

"Protecting you is just part of my job."

That's true. Protecting the Saint is a priority for the palace knights. But I'm pretty sure that's not his only job, being a commander and all. I'd feel terrible if he shoved all his other duties aside just to indulge me on a field trip.

I tried to argue that I'd be just fine staying, but he said, with a smile that brooked no argument, "But if you stay, how can I make your dream come true?"

His smile was even more devastatingly charming than usual. And this *had* all started because I genuinely really wanted it... Partly because of this, and partly because I was easily persuaded to just go with the flow, I lost all will to argue.

"Nngh... O-okay. Please...come...with...me."

And so, Albert talked to the king on my behalf, and soon...I was going to Zaidera.

Behind the Scenes I

THE NEWS ARRIVED a few days after the ball celebrating the end of the monster threat, when the prime minister received a letter from the delegation that had been sent to Zaidera. It was stamped to indicate its urgency, so the servant immediately delivered it to the prime minister.

The prime minister carefully broke the seal and read it over. The contents made him furrow his brow. The second he was done, he stood from his seat and headed to the king's office.

As the prime minister entered, his demeanor was, at a glance, no different from usual. However, the king had known him for a very long time, so he detected that something was amiss. That something terrible had happened.

This hunch turned into confidence as the prime minister asked everyone else in the room to step outside.

"What's happened?"

"Read this first."

The king stopped working to accept the proffered letter. His gaze moved left and right as he read, but for a moment, at a certain point, it stopped. Then he continued. As the king came to the end of the letter, he heaved a deep sigh.

"So, someone in our delegation has fallen ill."

"Indeed. And their symptoms include headache, high fever, and nausea, until they fell unconscious. They have yet to wake."

"Is it contagious?"

"It seems only one person has contracted the illness thus far, but the situation could have changed since this letter was sent."

"So we don't have any further details. The letter doesn't even indicate if it's a local disease."

"Indeed."

The king smiled, as if he had solved some manner of puzzle. “Quite sparing in the details, despite the urgency of the missive.”

“This is true. Which brings me to the points of concern.”

The king looked up from the letter. “Which are?”

Now that the prime minister knew he had the king’s attention, he explained himself. The things he’d noticed weren’t technically concerning, given the context. First, the letter had come from an individual other than the leader of the delegation, who would typically be the one who sent such reports. While this individual was themselves of high standing, they weren’t even the leader’s assistant. However, this wasn’t wholly unusual given the crisis they were dealing with.

Second, the prime minister was troubled by the ship that had brought the letter. The regular reports were typically carried by Salutanian vessels. However, according to the servant who brought this report, it had arrived on a Zaidaran merchant ship. This was also technically understandable, when one considered the urgency with which the report was sent.

“What about the seal?”

“It was legitimate. And there are no traces of the letter being opened.”

“But this still concerns you.”

Seals were used to verify the sender and prevent people from peeking at or doctoring the contents of a letter. The crest on the seal was meant to prove beyond a doubt that the letter was legitimately from its sender. The wax seal was intact, so the contents didn’t appear to have been falsified en route.

However, the prime minister couldn’t shake the feeling that something was off. It was a hunch, but the king trusted his prime minister and the intuition he’d built over his long tenure. So, the king was willing to consider that the letter might have been forged. If this report was false, then they could simply ignore it. However, the letter’s claims could not be so easily ignored.

“The unconscious patient is the greatest concern,” the king said, his tone troubled.

“Yes,” the prime minister responded with a look of pointed calm.

The letter had named the person who was now unconscious. The king glanced back at the name and furrowed his brow.

It was his son: the crown prince, Kyle.

As the ruler of the nation, the king was prepared to abandon his son, should it ever prove necessary. However, Kyle was one of his sons by his late wife. At present, he didn't have enough concrete evidence to dismiss the contents of this letter. And his heart wanted to send aid.

“It would take a great deal of time to confirm the veracity of this letter,” the king voiced his thoughts.

The prime minister understood what he was getting at. “At any rate, I believe it would be wise to deploy a mage to Zaidera. If the letter is indeed true, then the prince's condition could very well worsen while we await verification. Others may even contract the disease.”

The prime minister provided multiple justifications, but he said this more because he knew the weight of the king's feelings.

The king allowed a small smile of appreciation for his prime minister's consideration, thanking him from his heart as he accepted the proposal. “Yes. As for who we should send, our choices are few, as they will need to be able to use Holy Magic.”

Since the patient was the king's son, it was only natural that he would want to send the best. However, that posed a problem: the person in Salutania most gifted in Holy Magic was the Saint.

A king rarely left his kingdom because of all the potential problems that entailed. If he were to do so, the kingdom would need to enact all manner of security measures, and he would require numerous guards. This went for the Saint as well, since her rank was equivalent to the king's.

Furthermore, the Saint possessed powers far beyond her commonly known ability to purify the miasma. If the kingdom lost her while she was abroad, it would be an immeasurable loss. As such, both the king and prime minister were reluctant to let her go—especially as there was an even more pressing reason

not to do so.

“If all we needed to do was treat the prince, then asking Lady Sei to lend her aid would be the surest way forward. But given the possibility that the letter is fraudulent, it would be wisest to send someone else.”

“That may be so, but this isn’t the sort of thing we should ask of Sei to begin with. She has already more than fulfilled her Saintly duty on our behalf.”

Sei had originally been summoned to their world to slay monsters, which had been spawning from the thickened miasma at an unprecedented rate. By performing the Saint Summoning Ritual, they had brought her here without her consent, and thus she had no obligation to do as they wished. Nevertheless, Sei had accompanied the knights and mages across the land to use her magic to purify the black swamps from which the monsters had endlessly crawled. She had only just purified the last one, meaning that the Kingdom of Salutania was now freed from the monstrous pall.

It was just as the king had said—she had more than done her duty. The king understood duty and obligation better than anyone, having been raised to shoulder the burden of responsibility for the whole kingdom from an early age. Therefore, he was exceedingly grateful to Sei for stepping up to her role to save his kingdom even though she was neither royalty nor nobility, nor even from his world.

At the same time, he was reluctant to ask any more of her beyond monster-slaying. He had as yet been unable to repay her for everything she had lost when she was summoned to their world, nor had he been able to properly reward her for what she had accomplished as the Saint.

“Then I suggest that we dispatch Grand Magus Drewes,” the prime minister said. “He is proficient in Holy Magic and, should matters come to that, can handle himself in a fight.”

“A fight? Do you think that likely?”

“Should the letter prove false, then I believe it may be a possibility.”

“If it is a fake, what do you think their aim is?”

“An excellent question, Your Majesty. I doubt they are targeting the Saint.”

They had both quickly considered whether the sender might be trying to lure out the Saint by asking for critical medical treatment. However, the prime minister dismissed that idea out of hand. After all, the delegation sent from Zaidera had not known very much about the Saint.

While the delegation visited Salutania, the palace had ordered everyone to keep quiet as to the Saint's abilities. Therefore, they were sure that the Zaidेरans only knew as much as the general populace did—that the Saint was proficient at slaying monsters. They had concealed the Saint's appearance, as well: She had only been brought before the delegation once, and during that time she had worn a white veil to obscure her features. They also knew that when Prince Ten'yuu had come to Salutania, he had not sought the aid of the Saint to heal his ailing mother. Rather, the Zaidेरans had been interested in the potions concocted by the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora.

"In that case, they must be after the panacea."

"I believe this is likely the case," the prime minister agreed.

The panacea was a potion that could cure any ailment. It was unprecedented; no potion before it had been able to cure any and all conditions. Typically, potions that cured status abnormalities were tailored to specific statuses, and each required a different recipe. If one suffered from multiple conditions, one needed to drink several separate potions for each one. Given that, the panacea's true value was blindingly obvious.

The panacea had initially been created to cure Prince Ten'yuu's mother. Sei had been moved by the prince's devotion to finding a cure and developed the recipe herself.

"Which means that someone with an eye on what we gave Prince Ten'yuu has finally appeared, just as we predicted."

"Our plan to obfuscate the origin of the panacea worked."

"Yes. That work is likely the only reason they haven't set their sights on the maker instead."

The king had given the panacea to Ten'yuu with his own hand. However, just as the prime minister said, they had kept Sei's role in its creation a secret from

him. This was because the panacea could not be made without the Saint's powers. As Salutania followed a mandate to conceal the powers of the Saint to the best of their abilities, they had no choice but to keep the panacea's origin a secret.

Therefore, they had told Ten'yuu that this precious potion had been kept in the royal vaults for generations and that they had no means of making more.

"Since we gave Prince Ten'yuu three doses, they must assume that we have more."

"You are surely correct, Your Majesty. They can't possibly believe that we would simply hand over our entire stock of something so valuable without asking for compensation in return."

"Indeed. Which I suppose means that we should likely send a bottle of panacea as well."

"If they manage to steal it, they might even leave us be. And if we manage to catch whoever steals it, then we may be owed some manner of debt."

"Yes. Let's send the panacea then, to ensure they don't shift their focus to the Saint instead."

And so, they decided to send the grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly to Zaidera, along with the panacea.

However, several days after this conversation, their attempt to protect Sei came to naught. Knight Commander Albert of the Knights of the Third Order informed them that Sei wished to join the delegation.

It was difficult to accept this request, from a security standpoint. However, if the letter from Zaidera was indeed genuine, then Sei was most qualified to handle this case.

The king was troubled, but Albert was persuasive. Ultimately, they agreed to let her go.

Act 3:

The Itinerary

TWO DAYS AFTER I accidentally let Albert figure out that I wanted to go to Zaidera, an official arrived from the palace to tell me that I had been given the okay.

He really didn't waste any time! Motivated men are like a different species! I was so excited that I couldn't stop singing his praises even in my own head.

I started packing right away, and before I knew it, I was on board a ship. It was my first ever voyage, and it was way more comfortable than I expected. The ship was the kind used long ago in my old world. I had assumed it would rock a whole bunch, but, to my surprise, it hardly rolled at all.

Perhaps it was because the seas were calm, but it might also have been thanks to some sort of magic, which my old home obviously hadn't been able to take advantage of. The mages did seem like they were busy all the time.

And of course, Albert was with me, just as we had discussed. He was as good as his word and had come as my guard. It turned out that his company was one of the conditions of my leave to travel, though. I had one other guard as well, as stipulated by that agreement—someone we knew quite well.

"I suppose we won't be seeing any monsters on this trip," the grand magus grumbled into the wind, sending an accusatory glance my way.

Yuri wasn't just my guard, he was my cover. The final condition for my trip to Zaidera was that I would have to keep my identity a secret. For that reason, I had been assigned a position that was neither Saint nor researcher from the Research Institute of Medicinal Flora: I was here as the grand magus's attendant. Since that lowered my rank, Albert was here under the guise of being Yuri's guard instead.

I thought it might be suspicious for the grand magus to even have a guard, but this measure ensured that the three of us would stick together, so we were letting it slide.

I had been given this specific position because if I wound up being the one treating the patient, we could say that Yuri had done the healing. As such, all focus would be on the grand magus while we were in Zaidera, and I could remain inconspicuous.

We would of course tell the king and prime minister what really happened, and I would be properly rewarded for whatever part I played. The king told me he just wanted me to be safe.

“Yeah...” I had a feeling I knew why the grand magus was looking at me like that, but it wasn’t like I was doing it on purpose!

I can’t exactly toggle the “keeping all the monsters at bay” skill! It’s a passive that’s always activated, I thought, pretending not to notice how he was eyeing me.

But I wound up having to look away from him, so I had a feeling that it didn’t entirely work.

“And here I was, looking forward to learning what manner of monsters there might be at sea,” Yuri grumbled.

“You never know, something might show up,” Albert said, in the hopes of pacifying him.

Normally, that would have been the job of Lord Smarty Glasses, but unfortunately, he wasn’t here. So, as his attendant, that job should have fallen to me, but Albert usually managed to take the lead first.

Perhaps Lord Smarty Glasses had entrusted the job to him? Between being my guard and Yuri’s babysitter, he had to be getting stretched pretty thin.

My assignment as Yuri’s attendant might have only been a temporary one bestowed upon me when I selfishly asked to go to Zaidera, but I still felt bad that I was falling down on the job while on the clock.

“Typically, yes,” said Yuri. “But getting out to sea is such a rare opportunity for me. I was looking forward to this chance.”

“Like I said, that chance isn’t necessarily gone. Why look, there’s one now.”

Yuri had been pouting miserably, but he stepped away from the rail of the

ship at Albert's words.

Just then, there was a large shadow.

Yuri must have noticed its approach as well, because he instantly cast a spell—though his expression didn't change, nor did he seem especially enthusiastic. "Ice Lance."

A massive spear of ice shot out of his raised hand, but the shadow absorbed it into its body. The lance had knocked it off course, though, and it missed its target. There was a loud noise as it fell to the deck of the ship. The monster looked like a four-meter-long fish with an upper jaw shaped like a harpoon.

It looked awfully similar to a swordfish from my old world. You know, like it would be tasty if we sliced it up raw and ate it as a topping on sushi rice. Unfortunately, this was a monster, so with its dying breath, it vanished from the deck of the ship.

"Striking as always." It was hard to tell if Oscar's remark was impressed or annoyed.

Oscar was one of my company's employees. But why, you ask, was an ordinary person—albeit an employee of the Saint's company—also traveling with an official Salutanian delegation? He had a reason, of course: The palace had specifically requested that someone from the company join us.

We were going to Zaidera to heal a member of the previous delegation who had fallen ill, but it would have been a waste of travel expenses if that was all we did. So, since we were going, they had decided to send an intermediary who could seek out and procure useful things that were not readily available in Salutania. They had selected Oscar because my company did the most business with Zaidera, what with importing rice—the staple of Japan—miso, and other seasonings.

Although it might have also been out of consideration to me.

"He defeated it so easily, but I'm pretty sure that monster is known to be pretty strong, right?" May whispered to Oscar.

Normally, May worked as a chef's apprentice at the institute annex, but she was also here at the palace's request. Zaideran food had a pretty different

palate from Salutanian fare, so they sent someone versed in Salutanian cuisine to cook for the members of the delegation who would be uncomfortable with the local spread.

May herself was a very curious person, so she was excited to try Zaideran dishes and wanted to learn how to cook them too.

“It would be of middling rank on land, but any monster you run into on the sea will be of hardier stock than its land-locked brethren,” Oscar told her.

“It certainly didn’t seem any harder to defeat.”

“That’s Lord Drewes for you.”

“True.”

This conversation reminded me of what Yuri had told me on the subject—he’d said that monsters at sea were on average 20 percent harder to kill. But seeing it firsthand hadn’t made it easier to believe.

The problem was that the monsters at sea were *bigger* than on land, and the ship rocking under their assault made it harder to defeat them. The grand magus’s ability to dispatch a mid-ranked monster at sea so handily was just further proof of his particular oddities. As such, he should not be the basis of comparison for how well the average person could handle the same kind of monster.



“Oh? There was a monster?”

“Oh, Sister.”

I turned towards the quiet voice to see the other annex employee who had joined our delegation, Zara, as she walked toward us. She had also overheard May’s conversation.

May called her “Sister,” but they weren’t related by blood. According to May, they had been as close as family since their childhood, which was how she’d started calling Zara that.

The palace had also asked Zara to join our delegation. She was the annex manager’s secretary, but now she was acting as the grand magus’s secretary instead. Of course, that was only her ostensible job. Apparently, she was actually with us to take personal care of me.

I felt I could take care of myself, as evidenced by my life at the institute. They really didn’t need to assign someone to wait on me. I had declined the offer initially, but the official I’d been talking to had persisted, insisting that they had good reason.

What in the world did I need someone to take care of me for? Did they think I might need someone to help me put on a dress? I highly doubted there would be any opportunity for that, considering the purpose of the journey. In any case, since Zara and May were both here, I figured I might as well use this opportunity to become better friends with them.

“Yes, a pretty big one,” I said. “But Lord Drewes took care of it right away.”

“I would have been surprised by any other outcome,” said Zara.

“I know, right? Anyway, did you need something?”

“Yes, I thought the wind must be starting to take a chill, so I came to invite you for a hot cup of tea.”

“That’s a great idea! I would love some tea!”

I was pleased to receive such a wonderful invitation.

As the sun set, the wind on the deck did begin to grow cold. It hadn’t gone

down completely, but Zara was right that I was beginning to feel it. An invitation for a hot cup of tea was just about perfect.

Zara smiled at my enthusiastic acceptance. "Shall we ask the others to join us?"

"Yes, of course."

The invitation had been for me specifically, but she wanted to know if I wished to include the others too. I hardly ever got to see some of the people who were here on a normal basis, so this was the ideal opportunity to get to know them all better. Besides, we were going to be working together once we arrived in Zaidera. Perhaps Zara was thinking the same thing, or perhaps she had sensed what I was thinking; either way, I cheerfully gave my approval.

And so, we invited everyone to enjoy our lovely tea together.

When we received word that we were about to arrive in Zaidera, we all left our cabins and headed up to the deck.

The wind was somewhat refreshing, and the light reflected very prettily off the surface of the water. And, just as the sailor had informed us, the ship was approaching the port.

From a distance, the streets of Zaidera reminded me of ancient China. Perhaps it was because the buildings had decorations that resembled those found in Chinese architecture, from the shape of the windows to the pillars.

However, the roofs were shingled in lustrous black tiles, which reminded me of ancient Japanese houses. Made me a bit homesick.

In one corner, I spied a building with Western architecture, albeit one that differed from the style commonly found in Salutania. Maybe it belonged to merchants from another country? Or perhaps it was even Salutanian.

As I gazed out at the townscape, I noticed someone had come to stand next to me. I turned to find it was Albert.

"There's quite a number of unusual buildings," he murmured. I thought I sensed a hint of relief in his tone. Perhaps, even though the journey had been

much more comfortable than I had imagined, he was tired from being on the ship; he wasn't any more used to it than I was.

"Yes, it really makes you feel like you've arrived in a foreign country," I agreed as I returned my gaze to the sights. "We have some more traveling to do after we arrive at the port, right?"

"Indeed. We'll be traveling by carriage to the imperial capital."

He was referring to the capital city of Zaidera. The emperor lived there, so it was generally called the imperial capital. The settlement we were looking at now was just a port town, like Morgenhaven in Salutania.

The previous delegation was in the imperial capital, so we would have to travel by coach from here. The city was less than a day's journey away, so if we left in the morning, we could arrive by sunset.

It was currently just before noon—a bit late to be leaving for the capital—so we would be staying here overnight and leaving come sun-up.

We stepped off the ship and put our feet on dry land. While I was relieved to finally return to solid ground, my body felt like it was swaying even after getting off the ship. I supposed it was because we had been rocking for so long.

I wasn't the only one feeling this way.

"Whoa, it still feels like I'm moving." May said exactly what I was feeling.

"Oh my, you're right." Zara was also feeling it.

It seemed everyone was. But my hypothesis as to why we felt that way was immediately dismissed.

"You're feeling landsick. It'll go away before long," Oscar explained, seemingly just fine as he came after us off the ship.

"Do you think we'll feel better by tomorrow?"

"It might take two or three days. I hear there's a cure, though. I'll tell you later."

"My thanks."

I had always assumed that Oscar spent most of his time at my company in the

capital, so I hadn't imagined he would be used to voyages at sea. Maybe his last job had seen him sailing a lot?

"Are you all right?" Albert asked me with concern. He'd noticed me looking quietly at May and the others.

The way he peered closely at my face made my heart skip a beat. A heat bloomed in my cheeks and I prayed that my face didn't get any redder as I replied in a panic, "Oh, yes! I'm fine."

"Be sure to tell me right away if that changes."

"Thank you. I just feel a bit like I'm swaying too, but I'm fine."

"Good. Let's start making our way over to the inn, then."

"Okay."

Albert led us to where several carriages were waiting. They looked different from the ones I knew in Salutania. Just like the town itself, the carriages had an exotic feel. It seemed we were going to ride in them to our lodgings.

Yuri had already made his way toward them, stretching his arms as he did.

The knight commander and grand magus seem fine. Are they really okay, just like Oscar? Maybe there's some kind of trick to not feeling the swaying thing anymore. I'll have to ask later, I thought as I got into the carriage.

We were able to relax and enjoy ourselves at the inn we were taken to. I slept so soundly that I was brimming with energy in the morning, but compared to me—and everyone else, honestly—Yuri was full to bursting. He was practically bouncing off the walls out of sheer excitement.

And it was obvious why: We were having Chinese-style rice porridge for breakfast.

Yuri had never met a rice dish he couldn't go wild for, so it was no wonder he couldn't contain himself.

"Lady Sei!" He shouted my name as we sat down for breakfast, making me jump.

"Y-yes?" I stammered in response.

“Is this made with rice?”

In the porcelain bowls before us was the expected rice porridge. It was pretty obviously rice, based on how it looked, and the worker at the inn had also told us as much when he served the food. So, you know, the white grains comprising the majority of the dish *had* to be rice.

“I’m pretty sure it is.”

“I knew it!” Yuri’s eyes sparkled at the confirmation.

I’d heard that the people in this area typically started their day with a bowl of rice porridge. In Japan, some hotels had served rice porridge for breakfast as well—though, they were few and far between—so calling it breakfast seemed quite normal to me. It also made me think of home.

However, the others were seeing this dish for the first time.

“Have you had this stuff before?”

“Yes, we had it back in my homeland.”

“This is the first I’m hearing of it.”

“Is it? I made it once at the institute.”

“At the institute... Is this the thing that was just rice and water?”

“Yup, that’s the one.”

Yuri’s tone had taken on a reproachful note, but I had indeed made congee for him once—around the time when he first became obsessed with rice. However, the porridge I’d made back then had been Japanese-style, and since we rarely had the chance to eat rice, I’d just made it the one time, because Yuri asked. In my old life, I’d typically only eaten it boiled from a convenience store pouch when I was sick and didn’t have the willpower to cook anything else.

So, I had basically done my best to make it for him based on a vague recollection of what the recipe might be. However, Yuri had said the food didn’t have the effects he was hoping for, which was probably why he had forgotten it until now.

“So the one we’re having now was cooked differently?” Albert asked, curious

after listening to my conversation with the grand magus.

“I’m sure. I made it in the style we use in my homeland, and it didn’t have all these ingredients in it.”

“So, the recipe varies between places?”

“I’d say the way they make it here is pretty close to the cuisine of a neighboring country.”

I’d cooked it with only rice and water. By contrast, the rice porridge we were eating now reminded me more of the Chinese variety, just as other Zaidaran food often did.

In addition to the rice, it had chicken, spring onions, and other ingredients too. I assumed that the brown lumps were century eggs. There was also something that looked like a dark green egg yolk in there. I had seen something like it in a magazine once but had never tried it myself.

I wonder what it tastes like? My heart raced in anticipation of trying something new as I scooped up the century egg with a spoon and popped it in my mouth. The texture was soft, and the taste was reminiscent of a boiled egg yolk.

“It seems that this dish increases the amount of HP and MP that we naturally recover. And in large quantities at that! How delightful!” Yuri, on the other hand, had ignored actually eating the food to cast an Appraisal spell instead.

Rice dishes in particular had all kinds of magical effects, so Yuri had turned them into an independent study. This rice porridge was no exception.

Yuri grinned from ear to ear as he began regaling us with his research findings. He wondered if the effects of the rice porridge changed based on what you added, and I had a feeling he would be grilling me about it in no time. My hunch was right, because he begged me to tell him more about how rice porridge was made back in my old world later.

Albert’s smile was powerful, but Yuri’s was just as potent. I had a feeling he was going to do his damndest to squeeze every single little detail out of me.

After that rollicking breakfast, we decided it was time to leave for the imperial capital. We spent the next several hours being jostled in the carriage, though we did take some breaks. Just as I'd been told, we arrived at our destination come evening.

The carriage came to a final stop before the gates that led to the manor where the delegation was staying. The carriage door opened, and the grand magus stepped out first, followed by the knight commander. I followed after, allowing Albert to assist me in stepping down. Zara, May, and Oscar stepped out of a separate carriage and joined us.

The front door was just beyond the gate. Zaideran manors differed from those found in Salutania in that the front door was close enough to the gate to reach on foot.

Oh, I see. So that's why the carriage stopped there. I had become used to carriages delivering me directly to the front door, so I'd found it strange that we disembarked where we had. It made sense, given the short distance.

I was busily taking in the unusual sights when the manor door opened and a person emerged. Someone must have informed him that we were coming. His familiar red hair immediately caught my eye. I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen him; it must have been ages ago.

"Thank you for coming all this way." Prince Kyle, crown prince and leader of the delegation, came out to greet us. He wore a smile on his face, but there was a tension in him.

Is he nervous? No, he of all people has no idea what it means to feel nervous, I thought.

But at that moment, I realized he wasn't the only one acting strangely.

Everyone with me had a weird look—like they were completely flabbergasted or something. Even Yuri inclined his head in slight puzzlement.

I wasn't sure what Prince Kyle made of their behavior, but he seemed to grasp that something was off.

Yuri recovered himself and spoke first, acting as our representative. "Thank you kindly for receiving us in person."

“Why don’t you all come inside so we can discuss your business?”

Prince Kyle led us right in. I didn’t have much time to take in the interior before Albert, Yuri, and I were led to a room that appeared to be a parlor. Everyone else went to take care of the luggage and were led to their rooms.

Prince Kyle swiftly cleared the room after we went inside, so it was just the four of us alone.

The prince decided to get the ball rolling the second we’d sat down. “I was surprised to receive word of your arrival. Has something happened?”

I supposed that out of the three of us who had come from Salutania, I had the highest rank, so Prince Kyle spoke directly to me. He had never addressed me so politely, so I felt pretty uncomfortable.

Perhaps because he noticed my bewilderment, Albert stepped in to answer the prince. “We received an urgent message that a member of the delegation had taken ill.”

I had heard as much from the palace, but Prince Kyle looked at us with confusion. “Ill, you say?”

“Yes. Do you know anything about it?”

“No, not at all.” It seemed the prince had no knowledge of any such message being sent to Salutania, judging from the contemplative way he put a hand on his chin. “And you’re sure the message came from us?”

“Yes. Lord Goltz confirmed it himself, though he didn’t take the time to ascertain its veracity, since it was so urgent.”

Lord Goltz was the name of the prime minister. As you would expect of someone employed in such a powerful position, it was said that his investigative abilities were topnotch.

“The prime minister himself confirmed it?” Prince Kyle sank into silence for a moment, his expression turning grim. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to take some time to investigate this message myself.”

“But of course, Your Highness.”

Did that mean someone had sent the palace a letter pretending to be him or

something? That sounded like a huge problem.

“You said that the message claimed someone had fallen ill?”

“Indeed. We were the treatment team the palace dispatched.”

“I see that they spared no talent in that regard.” Prince Kyle looked over each of us, a crooked smile upon his face.

He's not wrong. We are the most powerful healers in Salutania, I thought.

Albert said, “Our experts would likely more than suffice in terms of any treatment needs, but just in case, we brought the panacea as well.”



“The panacea? Ah, *that* panacea.”

We mustn’t forget about the panacea.

It had always been highly unlikely that we would need to use it, since I had come along, but the king had told us to bring it just in case.

It appeared that Prince Kyle had been aware of its existence. His tone suggested he knew its origins were being kept secret. “I heard it was able to heal any illness.”

“Indeed. I have already confirmed as much with Appraisal magic,” Yuri informed the prince.

“Then why has Lady Sei come along as well?” the prince asked, a confused look on his face.

His hesitant tone was hurtful, as if it had cut my heart.

It was true that with the panacea, neither Yuri nor I had needed to come all this way. One could argue that Yuri was here as the panacea’s guard, but in that regard, my presence was wholly unnecessary.

Yet here I was, solely because I had wanted to go be a tourist. In other words, I had been selfish. I was fully aware of this fact, which was why Prince Kyle’s question made me feel so guilty. My shame made me hesitate; I couldn’t come up with a good explanation at first, and I felt awkward about telling the truth.

“Well, I...have an interest in Zaideran culture,” I mumbled, completely unable to conceal my motives.

“Ah, I understand now. You came in search of herbs and other such ingredients, then.” Prince Kyle’s response peeled the last layer off my defenses, like he was ripping off the remains of a hole-studded, paper-thin wafer.

Wow, His Highness knows his stuff about yours truly. It was tragically kind of inevitable that I tried to escape from the truth behind his quip.

Though Prince Kyle looked apologetic, he didn’t beat around the bush as he advised us, “I’m sorry to ask this now that you’ve come all this way, but please, you must return home at once,”

“Because of the letter?” I asked.

“Yes. Even if it was sent by one of our delegation, it is concerning that someone would summon you here without my knowing. They surely had some ulterior motive for bringing you here.”

Normally, if someone caught a cold, or sent a regular letter to Salutania, they wouldn’t have to inform the prince. However, it was pretty darn strange to leave Prince Kyle out of the loop of any matter that warranted summoning the grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly, let alone the Saint. Prince Kyle had to be right that they had a different goal.

“Then, what they must want is...” I trailed off. I didn’t say it outright, but if I had to guess, they wanted us...and the panacea.

Prince Kyle nodded.

If some kind of danger lay in wait here for us, I had a feeling I wouldn’t be able to take my time seeing the sights. That was a shame, after we’d come all this way.

“Then I think we should return to Salutania right away.”

“I am so sorry about all of this,” the prince said. “I will send a report to His Majesty as soon as I learn anything about the letter.”

“Very well. We shall inform the king upon our return.”

“Thank you. Oh, one last thing.”

I had thought that would be that, but Prince Kyle looked like he had just remembered something—and it wound up being the silver lining of a very dark cloud.

Even if we started the process to return to Salutania right this instant, it would take a few days to ready a ship. So, in the meantime, he offered to have Zaidaran plants and books on local cuisine delivered to the manor.

It was a shame that we wouldn’t be permitted to leave the premises, but I was grateful for the opportunity to glean firsthand information about Zaidera anyway, even if only a bit. And books would make for a good way to kill time while we were cooped up in the manor *and* on the ship.

I thanked Prince Kyle with a smile, accepting his generosity, at which he looked relieved.

And so our plans were brought to a halt, as Prince Kyle set about securing our swift passage home.

But as it turned out, leaving Zaidera wouldn't be so simple...

Act 4:

Closed Borders

THE DAY AFTER we arrived at the delegation manor, I woke up much later than usual, likely on account of travel exhaustion. I thus wound up having both breakfast and lunch at the same time. In other words, brunch.

The dining hall sported a big, round table, which was the style in Zaidera, at which everyone ate. It was a free and easy gathering that included not only Albert and Yuri, but Oscar, Zara, and May as well.

As we ate, Albert said something entirely unexpected: “We can’t leave the country?”

“So it seems. They informed us this morning.”

Ships were now restricted from entering and exiting the port that we had come in from.

Prince Kyle had explained that an official who had come with us had gone to initiate the proceedings for us to return, which was when he learned the borders were closed. He had rushed back to report the closure this morning.

We still didn’t know when the restriction had been put into place, or when it would be lifted, so the prince had sent his people to seek more information.

“Is that why Prince Kyle isn’t here with us?”

“Indeed. He’s in charge of gathering intelligence with members of his delegation.”

Which meant that we were working in tandem with his people to solve this problem. That was why Prince Kyle wasn’t present, even though he had said he would join us.

I couldn’t help feeling bad. It felt like I had personally caused everyone this trouble. If not for me, I doubted this would have become such a problem. But as sorry as I felt, the fact of the matter was that this inability to return home was a huge problem. So in the end, I was grateful that Prince Kyle was doing his best

to leverage his local connections to help us. That local network would surely get things solved faster.

“I hope we’re able to leave soon.”

We didn’t know why the restrictions had been placed, so we didn’t know how long it would take for them to be lifted. I was worried, but I couldn’t really do anything. I was told the books would be delivered that night, though, so I decided I would just do as directed and spend my time reading while we waited.

As I wondered what kind of books Prince Kyle had ordered for us, Yuri idly said, “Personally, I hope we’re able to solve the mystery of the letter first.”

He must have gotten up just before noon, like me—he still looked a bit sleepy.

“You do?”

“Why, yes. If we knew the sender’s objective, then I could *do* something.”

“Like what?” I couldn’t imagine what Yuri was getting at. His explanations during our classes were always easy to understand, but today he was being vague. Maybe it was because he wasn’t all the way awake yet.

Thankfully, when I asked, he broke it down simply for me.

Based on the contents of the letter, it was highly probable that the sender was after either the panacea, or someone who was adept in healing magic. It was also possible that they had their sights set on the maker of the panacea too, though he considered this unlikely.

If, however, we knew for sure that they were after the panacea, then we wouldn’t need to stay cooped up in the manor—we could actually go out and tour the city.

“Don’t you think they’d want us to stay put even if they were sure the problem was the panacea?” I asked. I doubted they’d just let us wander around when there were nefarious plots afoot.

“That’s what guards are for,” said Yuri nonchalantly. “It’s safe so long as we stay together.”

“Wait. I’m going too,” Albert said at once. Was he really okay with this, though? Wasn’t it his job to rein Yuri in?

“Ah, right, right. We agreed on a two-person team. My apologies,” Yuri conceded.

“But even if you’re sure you know what they’re after, we can’t guarantee they’ll give us permission to leave.”

Thank goodness he was still the voice of reason. Although my relief lasted only a moment. The grand magus had no intention of letting anything get in his way.

“If what they’re after is the panacea, then there’s no reason why I should not be allowed to proceed with my original plans. Lady Sei, I presume you wish to join me on a walk, don’t you?”

“Huh? Uh, well...” Of course I wanted to see the sights, but I felt awkward admitting as much.

Yuri was unbothered by my hesitation. He clapped his hands and smiled charmingly. “Heh heh heh. I’m so looking forward to our stroll through the city. There are so many things I’m hoping to find.”

Judging from his cheerful tone, his heart was already out in the streets. Had I fallen for some kind of trap? And what was this about “so many things”? I had assumed he was only after his favorite food, but it seemed something else was on his mind.

“Your interests extend beyond rice?” Oscar asked. It seemed he was wondering the same thing.

“Indeed!” Yuri nodded cheerfully, which brought a rare crooked smile to Oscar’s lips.

“At any rate, we still don’t know if we’re allowed to leave. We should wait here for now,” Albert interjected, attempting to pacify Yuri.

Yuri shrugged regretfully, finally seeming to have been reined in. “If we *must*.”

“Grand Magus Drewes is quite a ha—”

“May,” Zara interrupted. Her voice was soft as usual, but it had an edge of warning.

“Sorry.” May held her tongue, a meek look on her face.

After we finished eating, we didn't really have anything on the docket, so we just hung around, recovering our stamina.

In my room, I looked over a simple map of the city I'd been given by the members of the delegation. We might not have been able to venture out, but I enjoyed imagining what the city's various quarters must be like while studying the map.

I was thinking about where I would have visited if we could leave when we received a note from Prince Kyle. Albert took the message. In it, the prince had written that he had sought an audience with Prince Ten'yuu. The Zaideran prince was concerned about our delegation, as he had studied abroad in Salutania, which was how the two princes knew each other.

Prince Ten'yuu wasn't really part of our group, though he acted as a point of contact for the delegation and regularly exchanged letters with them. But the situation being what it was, Prince Kyle had gone to see him in person.

"It seems that the restriction was only just put into place. Prince Ten'yuu himself first learned of it from Prince Kyle."

"Which means that we still don't know anything."

Albert said that Prince Ten'yuu would look into this for us. Prince Kyle would be staying with the prince until they had a bit more clarity. Prince Kyle also noted that he didn't know if he would be back before dinner, so we should eat without him.

Our prince was considered an adult in Salutania, but he was still only in his late teens. The thought of someone so young having to work late into the night made me feel just dreadful.

"It seems we've caused quite the conundrum for him."

"I know telling you not to worry won't ease your mind, but it isn't your fault," Albert said, trying to make me feel better. He could tell I was starting to regret ever coming. "That reminds me, the books Prince Kyle ordered should arrive soon. I'll bring them here as soon as they do."

Perhaps because I looked so dejected, Albert tried to encourage me with news of those books. It seemed the delegation was collecting them for us while

they gathered intel.

I supposed that all my worry about the situation was making everyone worry about *me*. That wasn't my intention at all, so I put a smile on my face as I said, "Okay. Thank you."

In fact, the books turned up while we were chatting. I was incredibly grateful to the people who'd gone out of their way to pick them up for us.

There were encyclopedias on plants, herbs, and poisonous varieties as well. There was even one a tome on potions, which immediately lifted my spirits.

I didn't actually notice how relieved Albert looked to see me smiling again.

I returned to my room and was absorbed in the books we had received, and the next thing I knew, it was time for dinner.

Just as he warned, Prince Kyle hadn't returned, so yet again, it was just the six of us in the dining hall. We were served local cuisine cooked by the manor's chef.

I saw a number of foods again for the first time in a long while, but among them was one in particular about which Yuri was over the moon.

"What's *this*?!" Yuri cried out with joy.

"I believe the server said they're sticky rice dumplings," I told him, which was what I'd been told just a moment before.

Inside the bamboo steaming basket was a food wrapped in bamboo leaves. I had a feeling it must be zongzi, and it turned out that I knew my stuff.

When we untied the string and opened the leaves, we found steaming rice of a glossy light brown hue. The grand magus had no doubt shrieked because he had glimpsed the rice inside. In Japanese, we called these Chinese-style chimaki.

The dumpling included little bits of what looked like meat. I excitedly tasted one and was rewarded with the exact flavor I had imagined. The delicious notes brought a natural smile to my lips.

Unlike the rice we had eaten in Salutania, these dumplings had a doughy

texture. In all likelihood, the kind we were eating at home was the non-glutinous variety typically eaten in Japan, whereas the dumplings were using glutinous rice.

Yuri noticed that the texture was different too, and raised his plate to eye level to better inspect the dumpling. “The texture is quite different from what we ate back home,” he muttered to himself.

“That’s because it’s using a different kind of rice.”

Yuri whipped around to me. “What kind of rice is this, then?”

“Back in my homeland, we called it glutinous rice.”

“Glutinous, you say? Is that different from the kind used to make mochi?”

“Oh, no, it’s the mochi rice. But it can be used in cooking like this as well.”

“So the difference lies in the recipe too? I see. And since it has a distinct name...”

I had told Yuri about the different kinds of rice when he first fell into his obsession. That had been quite a trying time.

Although I was knowledgeable about plants, I mainly knew about herbs. He’d asked me all kinds of questions, and I’d only been able to answer a few. As for types of rice, at first I only remembered the Koshihikari, Sasa Nishiki, and Akita Komachi varieties. And then I recalled that there were also Tsuyahime, Hitomebore, and Yumepirika. Oh, and Yamada Nishiki too.

I knew there were others, but those were really the only ones I could remember. At the time, I had also told him about glutinous rice, but I had only mentioned that it was used to make mochi. While it hadn’t been much, the grand magus clearly remembered everything I had shared.

He truly was brilliant when it came to learning and memorizing everything about whatever caught his interest.

Someone else was interested in the sticky rice dumplings too: May, who had come to study Zaideran cuisine. She broke apart her dumpling to study its components.

“It looks like it also has meat, carrots, and I think this is shrimp? What’s this?”

My own inspection had revealed the carrots, pork, and bamboo shoots. The shrimp was so small that I hadn't noticed it was there. I was impressed she had recognized it.

"I assume those are bamboo shoots," I explained.

"What are those?" She gave me a puzzled look.

"Oh, the young sprouts of a plant called bamboo."

"Ooh. I've never heard of it before."

"I don't think it grows in Salutania."

"So it's an ingredient only found in Zaidera."

I was going to be a bit embarrassed if it wound up being a different kind of plant. *I guess I'll ask the server later. I'd feel bad if I led her down the wrong path.*

"Since it uses rice, does that mean it's cooked by boiling the ingredients in a pot like you would the rice?"

"Probably not boiling, I think. This basket is used for steaming."

"What do you mean by that?"

"They boil water and use the steam that rises from it to cook food in this basket."

"Huh. So they wrap the ingredients and the rice in this leafy thing and then steam the packet?"

"I think so? I'm sorry, I'm not so sure. I've eaten this kind of food before, but I've never made it myself."

All I really knew was that May was right about wrapping the dumpling up in the leaf before steaming. I had no idea if the rice was cooked with the other ingredients before the wrapping or if they were put in raw.

"That's all right. I apologize for the interrogation."

"No worries. I'd like to learn how it's made myself. I wonder if someone would be willing to teach us."

“Perhaps we should ask the cook?”

“Good idea!”

If only we knew, then we could make them in Salutania, so long as we had the ingredients. I wonder if we can learn some other recipes as well.

I continued eating as I chatted with May and Zara. By the time we were done with dinner, Prince Kyle had returned. It seemed he had made some progress.

When we received word that Prince Kyle was back, Albert, Yuri, and I went to his room. We stopped in front of the guards standing to either side of the door, who announced us before a chamberlain let us in.

Prince Kyle was waiting for us in a suite that looked like a living room. The room was appointed with Zaideran furniture, just like the dining hall.

Prince Kyle had already changed clothes and had a quick dinner. He stood from the chair he had been lounging in.

“It’s so late,” I said. “We’re glad you’re back.”

Prince Kyle looked surprised to hear me say this, but he immediately recovered himself to say, “Thank you. Please, have a seat.”

As we sat down, the chamberlain poured us each a cup of tea. Once finished, he took his leave. It was just the four of us left. It seemed everyone else had cleared the room in anticipation of our arrival.

We had been served the kind of herbal tea we were all accustomed to drinking. Maybe he hadn’t served us black tea because it was evening? I inhaled the familiar fragrance as Prince Kyle began to tell us what had happened.

Prince Ten’yuu’s investigation had led to a discovery: The borders had been closed due to some kind of incident. And it wasn’t just the one we’d entered from; the ports in the neighboring towns were closed as well. Furthermore, they might be closing even more ports come tomorrow.

“And we still don’t know what exactly this incident was?” Yuri asked.

“We don’t. Prince Ten’yuu is still looking into it, but he believes someone

higher up may have ordered those involved to keep quiet.”

It appeared Prince Kyle wasn’t trying to keep anything from us—he simply didn’t know. And since his fellow prince had as yet been unable to uncover any details, he suspected there were special orders to keep something under wraps.

“It must have been pretty terrible then, if they’re going to close more ports and still keep the details secret.”

“I agree. I don’t have definite proof, but word of mouth suggests there was a theft.”

“A theft, you say? Then they closed the borders as a precaution so that whatever was stolen can’t be smuggled out?” Albert surmised.

“Yes, and I believe they’re trying to limit the thief’s movement within the country as well,” Prince Kyle said.

“That would explain why they would extend the range.”

You could give all the gag orders you wanted, but there were always rumors. It seemed some people just couldn’t keep quiet, no matter what world you lived in. We weren’t sure what had been stolen or where it had been stolen from, but judging from the large-scale response, it was likely pretty valuable.

Does restricting movement within their borders make the investigation easier? If they have to cover a large area, then they’ll have to muster a ton of people.

“And we still don’t even know what’s been stolen?” I asked.

“I’m afraid not. We’re still trying to ascertain that.” Judging from his tone, multiple theories had been presented.

I must have looked like I was still curious about just what we were talking about here, so Prince Kyle told me that—based on rumors his people in the delegation had heard—it was possibly a famous jewel or some legendary weapon.

If some renowned artifact had been taken, I could understand why they would conduct such a large-scale operation, especially since the owners of such things were usually nobles. If the object had been stolen from a heavily guarded manor, the owner would lose their people’s respect if they failed to retrieve it.

“One rumor suggests it was a valuable medicine.”

“You mean like a potion?”

“Yes. One that could cure any illness...” Prince Kyle trailed off.

Huh. Why does that sound so familiar? I felt a twinge of déjà vu.

The subtle change in the prince’s expression suggested I wasn’t the only one. I glanced to my side to find Albert wearing the same look. He was totally thinking what I was thinking.

“One that can cure any illness? Almost sounds like the panacea,” Yuri said casually.

Yep. Same page.

Prince Kyle and Albert were right there with me, judging by their twin grimaces, as if they had eaten something bitter.

Prince Kyle cleared his throat. “At any rate, all we know is that these closures are reactions to another incident, but we don’t know anything further.”

He was right. Everything about this was unclear, from the object that had been taken to the theft itself. Prince Ten’yuu was going to keep looking into it, so we just had to wait for him to share more.

“By the way, has there been any progress on identifying who sent the letter?” Yuri asked when the conversation came to a pause. He meant the letter that had been sent to Salutania.

Prince Kyle’s expression remained unchanged as he gave an answer: They had done as much digging as they could, and there were two things they could say with confidence.

First, it was highly unlikely that anyone in his delegation had sent that letter. They couldn’t yet state this definitively because they hadn’t confirmed with everyone, but they had asked the person whose name was listed as the sender, and he claimed he was uninvolved.

Second, it was highly likely that the seal was genuine. However, they couldn’t yet say this for sure either, since the seal was missing. As for why it was missing, its owner—the sender of the letter—had lost it.

Seals in this world were similar to ID cards in the world I came from. This fellow had lost his, at which point it had been used to impersonate him on a letter sent by someone else. It went without saying that someone who lost something like that in my original world would be penalized. I assumed that the owner of the seal would be penalized too.

On top of that, when he realized he had lost the seal, he hadn't reported the loss but kept it to himself as he searched. However, he still hadn't found the missing seal.

"And he's searched everywhere he can think of, right?" I asked.

"Yes. After hearing his testimony, we had others search those places as well, but they found nothing either."

The fact that additional searchers had faced similar dead ends meant it was entirely possible that someone else had fully taken the seal to use on that letter.

"Perhaps they stole the seal expressly to forge that letter." Yuri said what I had been thinking.

It had to be.

Prince Kyle was of a similar mind. His expression was tense as he said, "At present, that seems highly probable."

This sounded like it was going to be a huge problem.

First, we couldn't leave because the borders were closed, and now, because of a letter, we couldn't leave the manor either. We didn't even know which problem was likely to be solved first, but it sounded like for the time being, we would be stuck inside.

Not to mention, a certain someone wouldn't be happy to sit around quietly.

I glanced at the grand magus, who seemed to be pondering the situation.

"I'd like to get to the bottom of the matter of the letter, at the very least," he said.

Prince Kyle turned to him with interest. "That would be ideal. Do you have any ideas?"

Yuri spoke slowly, as if to help him put his own thoughts into order: “First, I would like to pin down the sender’s likely motive.”

“What are you thinking?”

“Judging from the contents of the letter, either they were seeking someone capable of using healing magic or they wanted the panacea. Once we figure out which, we can determine our next action.”

“And I suppose it would be easier to protect their target once we’re sure what it is.”

This was what we had discussed over brunch. However, Prince Kyle was more focused on protection than Yuri had been.

“But we don’t even know the identity of the sender. How do you plan to find out what they’re after?” Prince Kyle asked.

“What if we split up the potential targets and keep an eye out for unusual changes in their separate vicinities?”

Yuri was more intent on taking the offensive than I’d thought. His suggestion was essentially for us to go out and investigate ourselves rather than wait around for information to come to us.

In all probability, he just wanted to get this problem taken care of so he could go out into the city. This suggestion frankly sounded like an excuse to venture out in itself.

“And even if we detect activity around both potential objectives, we might be able to determine which is the target based on the differences,” said Prince Kyle. “This is a solid idea, but I don’t think we have enough guards to cover them separately.”

“Never mind this concern with quantity. In times of few resources, you ought to focus on *quality*,” Yuri said with his right index finger raised. He went on to say that, in his opinion, we should leave the panacea in the manor while we allowed the users of healing magic out into the city.

He added that we should leave some of the guards we had brought with us stationed at the manor, to accompany those who were already posted there.

However, he said, we should post our most competent guards with the healer mages. This was essential, because it would communicate clearly which of our people could use healing magic.

Albert and Prince Kyle were both well aware that I counted among those mages, so they frowned and were about to object when Yuri said, “If they’re after a mage, then I am certainly their number one target.”

The other two shut their mouths in tandem.

Oh, right. We were keeping my identity a secret—one of the stipulations for my being allowed to go abroad at all. Therefore, no one in Zaidera knew that Salutania’s Saint was here. Officially, only the grand magus of the Royal Magi Assembly and the panacea had been dispatched in response to that letter. The rest of us were Yuri’s attendants and guards. Everyone from Salutania on deck knew who I was, but no one else had the slightest notion.

Additionally, the grand magus was famously Salutania’s most powerful mage. No one would imagine one of his attendants was also an adept of powerful healing magic.

Having guessed what Yuri was getting at, Albert admonished him. “Even if they’re not after you specifically, I cannot permit you to go out alone.”

“But of course. I intended to take my attendant and guard with me. That’s right. My very qualified guard.” It seemed that Yuri hadn’t forgotten that he was *also* supposed to be my guard, because his phrasing made it clear that he was planning to take both of us.

They continued going back and forth about this for some time, but in the end, Yuri won. And so, after hashing out the details, we put the grand magus’s plan to the test.

Act 5:

Investigating?

OUR GOAL WAS to see if we could discern the intent of the letter sender. Leaving the panacea behind in the manor, we ventured into the city.

Yuri was spearheading this operation, but I was coming along for the ride. So, they'd had to determine how to ensure my safety.

First, they figured out who my guards would be. In order to allow Yuri the freedom he needed, officially our only guard was Albert. But the grand magus's powers were nothing to sneeze at, and I learned that Zara, who was also tagging along, was well trained in self-defense. A few other people would be guarding us covertly, so we were a lot more thoroughly prepared than I had expected was even possible.

Next, we had to nail down our destination. The prince's delegation decided this: We were headed to a maker of talismans who the delegation had confirmed to be trusted. They were also probably taking Yuri's wishes into consideration. As one might expect, this shop sold Zaideran talismans.

Talismans were strips of paper on which designs had been drawn with a special ink. These papers could be used to start fires or conjure water, and anyone could use them. The more expensive ones could even increase physical and magical attacks. All you had to do to activate one was let your magic power flow into it.

This sounded an awful lot like the items we enchanted, but they weren't exactly the same. Unlike enchanted items, talismans were one-use only. Also, the talismans that boosted your powers only lasted for a fixed amount of time before the effect dissipated. In this way, they were similar to the boosts that could come from magic or a meal.

And of course, being a sucker for anything remotely arcane, Yuri was interested in looking into these talismans. Ever since he'd first heard about them from Prince Ten'yuu, when the prince was studying abroad in Salutania,

Yuri had had his heart set on seeing the real thing for himself.

So, knowing that he wanted to go to an expert in the field, I was keenly aware that his true goal was less to investigate the letter sender's aims than it was to learn about talismans.

Incidentally, I learned that Prince Ten'yuu and Yuri had met during Prince Ten'yuu's visit to observe the Royal Magi Assembly. While I knew that Prince Ten'yuu had toured all of the research institutes at the palace, I hadn't known about his visit to the assembly. It made sense, though, since the assembly was home to mages who researched magic and could be considered a place of research as well.

"So this is the place!" Yuri was grinning from ear to ear as he stepped out of the carriage we had ridden from the manor. He looked like he might burst into song and skip the rest of the way to the shop. Of course, being a noble who'd been schooled in etiquette, he didn't actually do that, but it was clearer than ever that the search was secondary in his mind. I chuckled wryly as I watched him.

When I glanced to my side, I saw that Zara was wearing a crooked smile as well. She noticed my gaze and turned her attention to me. We smiled at the same time, as if we had planned it beforehand.

"Welcome," the clerk greeted us in Zaideran as we filed into the shop. First Yuri, then me, then Albert, and Zara bringing up the rear.

Oscar and May weren't especially proficient combatants, so they were doing other things. Oscar had gone out in search of ingredients, and May was back at the manor learning Zaideran recipes from the cook.

We handed a paper to the shop clerk which had been given to us by the delegation. It was a letter of introduction.

Upon checking the sender, the clerk smiled, and it turned out he was fluent in Salutanian because he switched languages to say, "Can I help you find anything today?"

According to the person who'd told us to go here, this shop had not only been confirmed to be a safe point of contact, but it was the best place for us to ask

about talismans. It wasn't the largest shop in Zaidera, but they had a wide variety of talismans for sale, and the clerks were good with customers. Likely that was because they had someone who spoke Salutanian. Yuri had all kinds of questions, so this really was the perfect place for him.

"I heard you have a wide variety of talismans. Could you please show me absolutely everything you have for sale?" Yuri asked, cool as a cucumber.

The clerk politely brought us to a place to sit. We learned, when he introduced himself, that he was the owner of the shop.

Yuri took his place at the center of the table.

Yep. I was right. He had been *hugely* looking forward to coming here, despite his claims about investigations. Of course he was sitting dead center.

I sat so that the grand magus was on my left and Zara was on my right. Typically, the two of us should have been standing behind him, but because of my true social standing, I sat next to him. We had decided on this arrangement before we set out to the store.

And since he was our guard, Albert stood behind us, centered between Yuri and me.

A few minutes after we were shown to our seats, the shopkeeper and an assistant returned with a sea of talismans. There were so many that I was sure they really must have brought out every single kind of talisman they had for purchase, just as Yuri had requested.

I was taken aback, but the shopkeeper lined his wares in front of Yuri. The talismans were made of rectangular strips of white paper. The color was different, but they reminded me of the seals pasted on the faces of jiangshi, Chinese hopping vampires. The sizes varied too, but it looked like there was a standardized gradation. However, every drawn design was unique, and the ink came in a number of colors.

"I see that some use the same ink even though their design differs," Yuri said as he held up two seals.

"So they do. The kind in your left hand is for conjuring balls of water, while the one in your right is for conjuring water that rains down."

“Fascinating. Now that I look closer, I can see that the designs share some similarities as well,” Yuri murmured, more to himself than to the clerk. The wheels in his mind were clearly turning as he listened to the clerk’s explanations.

What about the investigation? I’m a little concerned about dropping it, but there’s no stopping the grand magus when he’s in this mode. The knight commander hasn’t said anything either, so I doubt we’re in any danger. I suppose no one would complain if I took a look too? I shifted my attention to the talismans.

I’d heard they used special ink to draw these, and it looked more like calligraphy ink than the kind used for pens. It also looked like there was a system to the increasingly complex details of the designs. I stared at one of the more ornate examples in the lineup; the assistant noticed my stare and handed the sample to me.

This talisman, he explained, was for increasing physical defense. I had heard that the support talismans were more expensive; perhaps part of the reason for that was the design, which looked rather difficult to draw.



“Do the talismans have to come in specific sizes?” I focused on speaking in Zaidaran, since I was worried that the clerk wasn’t as comfortable using Salutanian.

It sure was handy that I could speak any language I wished whenever I wanted. I was eternally grateful for this ability.

“Not really,” he replied in Zaidaran. “However, we make ours in sizes that are easy to use.”

Both the owner and his assistant were terribly kind. He didn’t seem to mind answering such a basic question at all.

Fortified by this, I went ahead and asked other questions too. The talismans were made of paper and ink, just as I had heard. The paper itself was just regular paper, but the ink was special.

Both the paper and ink were bought from a different workshop, but this shop employed artisans to draw on them. They used a writing brush to create these intricate designs, which required skill, as they had to be drawn on fixed sizes of paper. The designs also differed depending on their effect, so I imagined they might be even harder to memorize than potion recipes.

For mid-grade potions and above, you need skill levels in Pharmaceuticals. I wonder if there’s a similar skill for talismans?

This question just popped into my mind, but when I asked, the answer I received was, “I don’t know.”

In that case, maybe I could make a simple one myself. I tentatively asked if they had a book of talisman designs, and he said they did have a catalogue of the most basic kinds.

Among all the books that had been bought for us, we hadn’t received any about talismans. Maybe I could ask the delegation staff to purchase some when we returned to the manor.

As I was interrogating the clerk, Yuri finished his discussion with the shop owner. He had taken less time than I expected—probably because he wanted to head back to the manor and dive into serious talisman experimentation.

Case in point: Yuri bought practically every single kind of talisman. The shop owner looked quite pleased.

When I say this, you should understand that it was everything that the owner had brought out. I feared that hauling them all home would be difficult, to say the least. He'd even bought multiples for his research! And paper and ink too! And the ink came in *multiple varieties*, you know?

I had no idea how we would fit it all in the carriage, but the owner made a great suggestion: He would have Yuri's purchases delivered to the manor. Yuri had no objections, at least not after the owner assured him that they would be delivered today.

Grateful for the excellent customer service, we were all wonderfully satisfied as we left the shop.

After a brief break, I finally remembered our investigation. I asked about it after we stepped into the carriage and received a surprisingly serious answer.

"I sensed several people watching us, but I didn't sense any hostility from them," said Yuri. "Did you notice anything unusual while we were there, Knight Commander Hawke?"

"There were indeed several people watching us. I didn't notice anything suspicious beyond that, however."

It turned out that despite appearances, Yuri had been doing his job after all. Albert, of course, went without saying.

Zara had been paying attention to our surroundings too. "Those watching us were particularly interested in Lord Drewes, Lord Hawke, and myself. None of them stood out in any particular way. I didn't notice anyone focusing on Lady Sei."

Zara was right. Most people in Zaidera had black or brown hair, and their eyes were of similar hue. I was totally used to seeing people who looked like them, and they probably thought the same of me.

"Did you notice anything, Sei?" Albert asked me.

"No, nothing." It wasn't that I wasn't being vigilant, but I wasn't very sensitive

to the attention of others in general. I felt ashamed, though, since it felt like I was the only one who hadn't done my job.

Ultimately, though, we concluded that there had been nothing suspicious and were able to return to the manor without incident.

Once I was back in the room where I was staying, I sat at my desk to write down everything I had learned about talismans. I wanted to record it all before I forgot anything. As I was making my notes, I heard someone address me from outside the room.

Zara was with me, so she went to answer the door. When she came back, she informed me that dinner was ready.

Is it that time already? Only then did I realize how much time had passed.

I rubbed my shoulders as I stood up, and the two of us went to the dining hall together.

In the dining hall, we found not only Albert and Yuri, but Prince Kyle too.

Zara and I went our separate ways at the entrance, so I was the only one who entered. Zara, Oscar, and May were eating in a separate room.

Albert pulled out a chair for me to sit in, and once we were settled in our chairs, the food could be brought out. We were having Salutanian dishes tonight. Recently, we had eaten nothing but Zaideran cuisine, so I was pleased by the variety.

We talked about the talisman shop as we ate. Prince Kyle had been there before, so he was able to follow the conversation as Yuri exuberantly described our day out. We focused on talismans throughout the meal, leaving the heavier main topic of the day for our after-meal tea.

"So everything went fine on your end today, I see?"

"Yes. Nothing stood out except for the Zaideran guards assigned to watch us."

Albert took charge of making the report about our excursion. We had been watched from the second we stepped out of the manor, all the way until our return. In all likelihood, these watchers were the people Yuri and the others had

mentioned were assigned to keep an eye on us. One might assume it was suspicious to have people scrutinizing our every move, but based on Albert's report, it was all expected.

According to Prince Kyle, his delegation was constantly under surveillance as well, and had been since they arrived in Zaidera. Perhaps it was standard to keep a wary eye on foreigners.

While that might sound concerning, we had done the same to Prince Ten'yuu during his visit to Salutania.

Albert also mentioned what Zara had reported: "The watchmen were mainly focused on everyone *but* Lady Sei."

"They were? Why?"

"According to some of our intel, it's likely because she looks like she could be from Zaidera."

"Hmm. So they probably mistook her for a local?"

"I believe that's a possibility."

It was the most likely explanation, and the prince could imagine how this might be true.

"Did you notice any movement on your end?"

"Yes. I was told someone other than the regular surveillance team tried to investigate the manor."

What? Wasn't this cause for concern? Yet from the casual way Prince Kyle said it, it didn't seem like he considered it an emergency.

I must have been wearing a confused look, because Prince Kyle turned his attention to me to explain.

He had referred to it as "investigating," but really all they had done was ask a few questions. The person of interest had been dressed as someone from a company with whom the delegation had frequent dealings, and he had tried to ask some of the manor staff some questions. It went without saying that he had inquired about us. However, he hadn't asked about anything more specific or about the panacea. It was mostly small talk—comments on how there were

more of us now and asking what kind of people we were. This sort of thing was an everyday occurrence. They hadn't probed him for any specific information in turn.

Well, this was the kind of operation that rarely bore fruit from the labors of a single day. We agreed to continue keeping an eye out, and that was the end of our debriefing.

For the next several days, things continued without any change for the better. The borders remained closed, and our efforts to return home remained at a standstill.

Just as we had heard from the start, the scope of the lockdown broadened.

During this time, we also found out why they were closed. Prince Ten'yuu had continued his search, and he'd sent a message to Prince Kyle to inform him of what he had uncovered.

The cause was a theft, just as we had originally believed. The borders remained closed because they hadn't yet caught the thief.

Meanwhile, we weren't any closer to identifying who had sent the letter. The only sure thing was that we were still under constant observation.

Just what was the sender after? Right when the question was beginning to really gnaw at me again, the grand magus decided it was time to act.

"Shall we go out and try to gather more information?" he unexpectedly declared while we were having breakfast one morning.

I hadn't seen him for a few days now, since he had been cooped up in his room the whole time. He had been so absorbed in researching the talismans and ink that he just hadn't left even once.

What *was* it about Yuri that made him seem so charismatic? Was it because he gave off those faintly degenerate vibes? On closer inspection, I could see the faint circles under his eyes.

Oh yeah, didn't someone say they saw the light on in his room all through the night these past few days? He must not be getting much sleep.

“How so?” I asked.

“We’ll go out into the city just like last time, and we’ll see if anyone tries anything. Whoever we’re up against, they haven’t made any moves either.”

Yuri was right. We hadn’t discerned any additional information about the letter. We *had* figured out that because the members of the delegation hadn’t learned anything, despite their best efforts, it might have something to do with a powerful noble.

The fact that we rarely left the manor was possibly part of the problem.

If the culprit was trying to get information about us as well, then we hadn’t given them any chances to do so, which would leave us in a stalemate. Oscar had said as much the other day while we were chatting. Yuri might have reached the same conclusion, which was why he was suggesting we make a move.

Though I doubted that was his sole motivation.

“Do you want to go back to the talisman shop?” Oscar asked as he sliced a piece of bread. Clearly, he understood the grand magus well.

However, Yuri’s reply came as a surprise. “This time I was hoping we could go somewhere they make the ink.”

Oscar made a face as if Yuri had just suggested we poke a bear.

Nevertheless, the answer was somewhat unexpected. I had a feeling I knew what Yuri was after, but I asked him anyway. I thought he might make some excuse, but he was actually forthright: He had spent the past few days in his room analyzing his talismans, and he had discovered that the ingredients for the ink were also used as catalysts in enchantments.

“So, you mean that the ink is made of minerals?”

“Exactly. And something else as well.”

“Like what?”

“The main ingredient seems to be some kind of resin, but there’s also something else I couldn’t identify.”

“And that’s why you want to go see where they make the ink?”

“Yes! If we only go to an ink-making workshop, I ought to be able to uncover the remaining ingredient.”

“I suppose we might...” But I wasn’t so sure that they would be willing to share such things with an outsider. That seemed like the kind of thing they would want to keep a secret.

However, there was some merit to Yuri’s suggestion. We needed to figure out what the letter sender was after. Both Albert and Prince Kyle agreed with this. I also understood that continuing to just sit on our hands was a waste.

For my part, I was restless, not knowing what to expect or when the borders would be opened. Plus, while I didn’t feel Yuri’s agitation to nearly the same degree, I didn’t like idly sitting around either. So I empathized.

We discussed our opinions on the matter, and in the end, we decided to once more go along with Yuri’s plan—although, just like last time, the prince’s delegation made sure that our destination was secure before we went.

One week after Yuri made his initial proposal, we went to an ink-making workshop. The delegation was able to confirm the safety of the workshop within a week, thanks to enchanted items that Yuri supplied. He made them himself out of pure motivation to visit the facility, so their effectiveness was guaranteed.

Actually, he had made something similar when Prince Ten’yu visited Salutania, but these were enchanted with even stronger perception-blocking magic than that one had been.

At the time, I had only suggested he make something that made it hard to perceive the color of my hair or the features of my face. I hadn’t suggested anything as practical as dampening smells or the sound of footsteps.

When I heard what Yuri had made, I kind of regretted it; it felt like I had given the grand magus a terribly dangerous idea.

He had clearly used his eloquent persuasiveness to urge the delegation to

complete their investigation as efficiently as possible. Either way, they had carried out their mission most expediently.

It did seem like the person who came to tell us they had decided on our destination looked sootier than he had when he left, but that was probably just my imagination.

We traveled to the workshop by carriage, as usual. I cracked the window shade to peer outside. We'd set off on orderly avenues, but these had gradually transitioned into more chaotic, disorganized streets.

The workshop was in a commoner neighborhood, rather than the more posh surroundings of the manor and the talisman shop. In other words, this was the lower part of the city.

The streets near the manor and talisman shop were wide enough for carriages to pass through, but they grew narrower and narrower the closer we got to our destination. A member of the delegation had told us that the road in front of the workshop was only large enough for a single small carriage to pass through. We couldn't possibly go down the street in the carriages we were riding in, so we went as far as we could, then got out to walk the rest of the way.

I supposed you would say it looked like a traditional tradesman's house? The workshop was located inside a long and narrow two-floor building, which was surrounded by other buildings of similar structure.

The master of the workshop and his apprentices were waiting for us at the entrance, which told me that they had been informed of our imminent arrival.

"Hello. I take it that you are the Salutanians who I received word would be visiting today?" the master greeted us in Zaidaran. "Welcome."

Unlike at the talisman shop, no one here could speak Salutanian, so I wound up having to play interpreter. This was my first real job as Yuri's attendant.

The master was an older man with gray-streaked black hair and brown eyes. He was short but solidly built.

I greeted him and his employees on behalf of our party. While he made it sound like we were welcome, his demeanor made me feel otherwise. He gave

off the vibe that our being here was a bother.

Well, I didn't blame him. Our visit had come on short notice, and it was possible we wouldn't even buy anything.

The apprentices were all transfixed by Yuri's face. His natural gifts clearly worked even on people of distant lands. One of them was even blushing. It made me worry about that young man's future.

The workshop had been informed that we wanted to learn about the components of ink and to see where it was made. After the initial greetings, the master took us straight inside to show us all kinds of things.

"These are the ingredients," he explained in Zaidaran.

"He says that these are the ingredients," I interpreted.

"There certainly are a lot of them."

I had no experience in simultaneous interpretation, so it took a while for us to go back and forth. However, circumstances being what they were, the master didn't hurry me along or anything, for which I was very grateful.

The master pointed out a shelf lined with all kinds of porcelain jars. He opened them one by one to show us the contents, which proved to be a variety of colorful powders. They were ground up minerals.

I had heard of some of the minerals before. Yuri knew most of them as well, judging from how he nodded each time the master named one.

Next, the master presented us with resin and incense. The resin was made by extracting liquid from boiled animal hides, which was then hardened. It was frequently used as glue. They added the incense to mask its odor. I wondered if the resin was used to stick the mineral powders to the paper, but the master didn't offer an explanation beyond that, so it remained a mystery.

After showing us each of the ingredients, he launched into an explanation of how they made the ink. The process involved several steps, and his apprentices divvied up the work.

First, they melted the resin by warming its vessel in hot water. One of the apprentices put the resin inside a pot, then floated that pot inside a bigger one.

The next step was mixing the ingredients. They combined powdered minerals and water with the melted resin. Once mixed, they added the incense to improve the fragrance. At that point, the ink looked like it had the texture of a lump of mochi.

Step three was the most important part of the process: kneading the mochi-like lump. They had to do this for a whole hour, and they used their long years of experience to determine when it was ready. As such, the most experienced apprentice was in charge of this step. That made sense to me as I watched them work.

The final step was molding. The kneaded substance was subdivided, then placed into a wooden mold. They then waited for the ink to dry in the mold, and once the block was polished, it was done.

“This is the finished product,” the master said. He showed us a square object that fit into the palm of his hand. They called it “ink,” and it looked just like sumi, Japanese calligraphy ink, to me—although there were more colors than black, like red and blue.

“This is the finished product,” I interpreted.

“They say this is ink, but it is quite unlike what I expected.” Yuri stared at the block with a look of surprise.

“Excuse me, is this sumi ink?” I asked out of curiosity.

It turned out that I wasn’t wrong.

“Does it look like something else?” the master asked.

“No, it’s just that when we heard you made ink, this wasn’t what we expected.”

“Are you talking about the ink found in other countries? The liquid kind?”

The master knew what I was talking about, which meant we were using the word that Prince Ten’yuu had chosen to translate it as when explaining this ink to Yuri.

Which also meant that this ink was the kind you used when writing calligraphy—like when you wet an inkstone and rub the ink block against it. The master

gave me an odd look when I asked if that was how it was done here, but he told me I was correct.

I explained to everyone else, as they couldn't understand, and I received a variety of reactions, including some impressed looks.

Now that our tour was complete, it was time for questions. Yuri was in his element, and he had all kinds of queries for the master. The master had seemed unfriendly at first, but once he realized that Yuri's questions were all technical, he gradually opened up and became friendlier.

I feel like I've seen this exact thing happen before... The face of the master potion-maker of Klausner's Domain popped into my mind.

As I frantically did my best to interpret their exchanges, the next thing I knew, Yuri was rolling up his sleeves. I was so focused on interpreting that I hadn't really processed what I was actually saying.

Huh? What's going on? What's happening? Wait, did he just say that he wanted to try kneading the sumi ink?

Just as I registered the last thing I'd said, Yuri and the master were heading over to the station for the third step of the process: kneading the inky mochi lump.

I quickly followed after them. The master brought out rusty red lumps that were small enough to hold in one hand, then placed them on the tables in front of Yuri and me. Then he started kneading his own lump while explaining what to do.

After watching the master's movements, Yuri spread his mochi in his hand and started kneading his own.

"Channel your magic into the sumi ink as you knead," the master told us.

He hadn't mentioned the enchanting part initially. Yuri's wealth of knowledge must have softened the man's stony heart, because now we were getting a far more detailed explanation of the process.

"I see. So this is the enchanting step, then. Hmm... Do we channel pure fire magic into it, then?" Yuri was able to figure out this part with pure observation.

He just watched and imitated without any need for my interpretation.

“Whaddya know! You’ve got a knack for this,” the master praised him with a smile on his face.

According to him, hardly anyone had the knack for this step of the process the first time they tried it. However, enchantments were the grand magus’s forte. He was the most skilled enchanter in our kingdom.

“I think it should be about ready,” the master said.

“It’s done,” Yuri declared at the same time.

They beamed at one another.

The grand magus had indeed done a satisfactory job, judging by the master’s nod as he examined Yuri’s kneaded sumi ink.

“Could I take a closer look at yours?” Yuri asked as he scrutinized his own, so I interpreted for him.

A puzzled frown crossed the master’s face. “Sure, I don’t mind...”

Once I told Yuri he had permission, the grand magus cast a spell. “Appraise.”

The rest of us had anticipated that this was what Yuri was after, but the master was startled. When he saw Yuri cast a spell, he yelped, “What the—?!”

The master had never seen Appraisal magic before, so he was even more astonished after hearing my explanation of it. When I asked him why he was so shocked, I learned something rather shocking in itself.

Only a very few people could use Appraisal magic in Salutania, but they were even rarer in Zaidera. In fact, the only people who could use that kind of magic lived in the imperial palace.

Really?!

Albert was surprised to hear this as well. “I’ve heard that even Salutanian companies employ people who can cast that magic, though—albeit larger ones.”

“Perhaps it’s less that fewer people are capable of casting those kinds of spells and more that a number of them are hiding their ability so that they need

not be at the beck and call of the imperial palace,” Zara suggested.

She had a point.

“Ah, yes. That would make sense.”

Even in Salutania, it was apparently commonplace for companies to hide the fact that they had incredibly skilled alchemists in their employ.

Meanwhile, Yuri wasn’t the least bit surprised. He nodded as if he completely understood. He must have noticed something that we had missed.

In any case, the master was so excited by the fact that Yuri was capable of Appraisal magic that he asked the grand magus to cast it on all the ingredients in the workshop.

Aside from that, nothing else of particular note happened during our visit, and once the grand magus was fully satisfied, we took our leave.

The night after we had gone to the ink—or rather, sumi ink—workshop, we participated in a debriefing, just as we had after we went to the talisman shop.

What kind of debriefing? One to discuss whether the mysterious letter sender had made any moves, of course. Same as always.

Unfortunately, they hadn’t done anything we could see, as we had hoped they would. We had gone out in hopes of breaking the deadlock, but alas, we were back to square one.

The only thing that had changed was, yet again, the people monitoring us.

Why hadn’t they made a move yet? Was it because the sender was actually among one of the people stationed to watch us? Had they not done anything because they still lacked critical information? So basically, it wasn’t yet the time for them to make their move?

The questions kept piling up, and we had no way to get answers. The borders were still closed too, and we had no further information about the letter.

And now that Yuri, who was the one who had proposed our outing in the first place, had his new toys—the ingredients for sumi ink—he had once more

sequestered himself in his room, and no one had seen him since.

Which meant that I was also stuck in my room all day, as I had no good excuse to leave the manor.

After I'd spent several days plowing through books, Yuri summoned me. He needed my help for something. But what could he possibly need *me* for?

Zara was just as puzzled as I was as she accompanied me to the room Yuri called us to.

The first thing I noticed upon entering was the large number of packages—wooden crates and the like, filled with books, bundles of papers, and other such things.

Of particular note were the things spread over the big table in the center of the room. The right half of the table was covered in small vials of colorful powders, bottles filled with liquids, resin that had been soaked in water, a pitcher, and pots of various size.

What's with the box next to the pots? It's on a stand like you'd use for kettles and so forth... Is it supposed to be something like a cooking stove?

Everything else looked exactly like the things we had seen at the ink workshop.

"I'm sorry to summon you here," Yuri said as I was still taking in the sight of the chaos on the table.

"That's all right. I was just reading books anyway." As I set my sights on Yuri, he greeted me with a dazzling smile.

He looked far healthier than he had after he finally emerged from his room the last time he'd holed up. Of particular note was the absence of dark circles. He seemed a bit worn out, but no shadows marred his beautiful face.

"You said that you needed my help with something? What can I do for you today?"

"I would like you to be my assistant in an experiment."

"What are you up to?"

“I was thinking of making talismans.”

Talisman making, huh? I didn't mind helping out, but I wasn't sure what I could actually do. When I asked, Yuri said that he might need a large quantity of ink, so he wanted me to help him make it. On his end, he really wanted to be able to focus on the actual talisman part.

On hearing this, my gaze returned to the table. These were all the ingredients that went into making sumi ink. Having heard the explanation at the workshop, I was sure that he understood the difference between sumi ink and regular ink. So why had he kept referring to it as just “ink”? He wasn't confused, right?

“You want me to make ink? Not sumi ink?”

“That's right. Ink, please.”

When I pressed him to explain himself, he revealed the fruits of his research over the past few days: While the most important part of the sumi ink-making process was enchanting the lump while you kneaded it, the most important *ingredient* was the powdered minerals. The magic power infused into the minerals paired with the designs drawn on the talismans, and together they could invoke the same effects as enchanted catalysts. The resin was only for gluing the minerals to the paper.

With all that in mind, Yuri hypothesized that the sumi ink didn't need to start as a solid. In all likelihood, Zaidera dried and solidified it because that made it easier to store. In turn, they had to add water and grind the block on an inkstone.

So, the question: Was the solidification a necessary step of the process? Or could one use this substance right away? Yuri had tested his hypothesis by making liquid sumi ink. The result: He had skipped that step and nevertheless successfully created a talisman.

“So that's why you were referring to it as just ink.”

“Exactly. Because what we're making will be a liquid.”

Yuri had learned that the solid version was called sumi ink and the liquid version was just ink. We'd had a different word for this kind of ink back in the world I came from, but I figured that didn't really matter and simply nodded

along.

With that, he began teaching me how to make the ink. He had already settled on a process during his experiments.

I channeled my magic into the mixture of powdered minerals and melted resin—that was my sole job. It was incredibly simple to make, but there was a problem. It was hard to prepare in advance, which was why Yuri hadn't already made enormous quantities of the stuff. That was also why he'd called me up.

"Are you ready to begin? Start with these."

Off I went—I started making the ink. Yuri selected a number of small bottles, which contained powdered materials of the sort you used for enchanting with support-type magic.

Just like with catalysts, the kind of ink a person could make depended on the types of magic they could call upon. As I was relegated to Holy Magic, the only type of ink I could make was the kind used in talismans with support effects.

As Yuri explained, he poured a tiny bit of the powdered minerals into a small dish and spooned liquid out of another bottle. It seemed the liquid was a substance that melted resin; the resin needed to be prepared first because it didn't melt right away. Yuri told me that if it looked like I was running out, he had solidified resin as well, so I could melt more if I needed to.

Then I had to use my fingers to knead the ingredients together. I was supposed to channel my magic into the substance at this step, but it was tricky. To make this ink, I had to feed it purely Holy Magic or it would be inert.

Moreover, as I kneaded and channeled magic into the substance, I didn't get the familiar sensation that it was finished—unlike how I did when enchanting.

"Hm?"

"Is something the matter?"

"It feels like I'm not getting a response. Am I doing it right?"

"Theoretically, but you're not channeling Holy Magic."

I was channeling just as I usually did when I made potions, but I hadn't realized that wasn't *Holy* Magic. Yuri explained that I had to specifically

concentrate on the elemental part or it would be a dud, and that it was basically the same as regular enchanting.

Be that as it may, I hadn't actually ever concentrated on any kind of magic when I did enchantments. Perhaps I had just done it naturally because what I was usually doing was imagining the glow of the catalyst. Regardless, this was the first I'd heard that the magic I channeled into making potions was supposed to be different from what I used for enchanting.

As there was no response, we had to reason that I had failed to do it correctly, so we disposed of the ingredients I had just used so I could try again from the beginning. This time, I focused on channeling Holy Magic in hopes that it would work. When I did, I felt a faint warmth in my fingertips, though it lasted for only a brief second.

"Did it work this time?" I asked as I removed my fingertips to inspect the dish.

"Appraise." Yuri checked the results of the spell. "Yes, it did."

Meaning I had successfully made the ink.

"Do you think you'll be able to continue making a bit more for me?"

"Yup, you can leave it to me."

Yuri deposited the finished ink on the opposite side of the table. That side was covered in things like books, as well as the papers and brushes for making talismans.

Yuri plopped into a chair and opened another book. Meanwhile, I set to making more ink.

I watched Yuri as I continued making ink in silence. When I didn't need to be the ink production line, I spent my time reading the books he'd acquired.

All the books in his room were about talismans. I was reading the basics to start with, and it was all pretty fascinating. A good way to kill time.

Zara started helping me on the third round of ink making. After pouring the ingredients into the dish, it looked like I wouldn't have enough resin for another batch, so I left that job to her.

In the end, all I was doing was channeling magic while kneading the ingredients. Did this really count as helping out? I felt like Zara's job was way harder.

Also, while I successfully made more ink on the second round, I failed several times after that. According to Yuri, this was because I had accidentally enchanted the minerals with a spell instead of my power in itself.

I guess I shouldn't have been thinking about what kind of spells I've used in enchantments past.

There were two kinds of screw up: accidentally enchanting the composing materials, and accidentally channeling the wrong thing. In the former case, there was a kind of zap in my fingertips.

How many times was I stunned by the sensation of that zap? Well... My heart hurt a bit when I thought of all of the ingredients I had wasted with my mistakes.

As I made the ink, Yuri referred to his books while drawing talismans in silence. I looked over the talismans he'd left out to dry and saw that some were of the same design, while others varied. It looked like he was making different kinds. Perhaps he was just going in order as they were presented in the book?

Once in a while, I heard him utter the word for an Appraisal spell. I assumed he was checking each one as he drew them. I also assumed the experiment was going well, as I had just turned my attention to a book when Yuri said something disquieting.

"I had a feeling this would happen. The ink you make is *very* potent, Lady Sei."

The ink I make is what now? I turned my head so slowly in his direction that I practically creaked.

Yuri had a thoughtful hand to his chin as he considered the talisman he had just finished. When he noticed my gaze, he smiled at me. "There is a considerable difference between the effects produced by the talismans I made and what the book says they should be."

"You don't say?"

“Just to make sure, I tried making a talisman using the sumi ink I bought and the result was just as the book described.”

At the mention of sumi ink, I looked down at his hands to see an inkstone and a block of sumi ink. Since the liquid ink in the inkstone was the same color as the ink I was making, I could assume they were made of the same mineral.

When in the world had he made that? But more importantly—he had described a difference. Combined with his comment about the potency of my ink, he was probably referring to my good old friend: the 50 percent bonus curse.

I didn't think it would go as far as to affect even ink... How long have I suffered under the yoke of this thing? My cheek twitched as I stared into the distance.

As I busily did my best to disassociate, Yuri delivered the final knockout blow: The talismans Yuri made using my ink were all 1.5 times stronger than they should've been. Just as I suspected.

And so, with that, not too long after...he directed me to change the type of ink I was producing. The mineral he wanted me to use next was for much stronger support spells. That being the case, he was presumably going to try for stronger talismans as well.

This new ingredient involved using much more magic power than the last one. I supposed it was because the material itself was of a higher grade, but nevertheless, the demands were insignificant in the face of my maximum MP. I got to work with no problems whatsoever.

Meanwhile, the designs of the talismans the grand magus began to draw gradually grew more intricate. When I asked him about it, he confirmed my suspicion: These talismans were more powerful. As such, he also gradually reduced the number of times he cast his Appraisal magic.

How many minutes has it been since I last heard him speak? I looked up from the book I was reading and met Zara's gaze as she too looked up from her book. She had noticed as well. We nodded at one another before turning to look in Yuri's direction.

Writing brush in his hand, Yuri looked lost in thought.

Should I say something? But what if I just interrupt whatever he's thinking? After a moment of hesitation, I decided it was best to say something after all. I inhaled deeply—which was when Yuri began working again.

The way his brush moved so smoothly, without hesitation, made it seem like he hadn't been stuck at all. When he was done drawing, he heaved an enormous sigh, as if to say he had just accomplished something of great import. But after checking his work with an Appraisal spell, a perplexed smile crossed his lips.

That was not a look of satisfaction. Had he failed?

"Did it work?" I asked cautiously.

Yuri's expression didn't change as he answered, "Yes, it worked all right. However, it wasn't as potent as I was hoping."

What does that mean? Did he actually fail, then? Was it even less powerful than the book said it should be? These questions raced through my mind, but just as I was about to voice them, Yuri channeled his magic into the talisman he had just finished.

The talisman glowed for a moment before a familiar sensation passed through my body.

"Was that a talisman for increasing defense?" I asked.

"Indeed. It seems that it cast on you too."

It had felt just like when I cast that kind of spell myself. However, the sensation was much fainter. I doubted it was especially effective.

Wait a minute... I balked. "Did you just say it cast on me 'too'?"

Yuri nodded and explained that this was an area-of-effect talisman.

No wonder it hit me as well, I thought as Yuri asked if Zara had felt it too.

She answered affirmatively. Yuri nodded to himself and scribbled a note on a nearby piece of paper. He was using the same brush he had used to draw talismans. Was that safe? I was a bit worried but decided not to point it out. It was probably fine.

“I didn’t realize that talismans can cast area-of-effect spells.”

“So they can. I tested the limits based on how much water I could conjure as rain within a limited area, and it did appear that I could make talismans cover a certain range.”

I had assumed the area-of-effect talismans had always existed, but something was weird about Yuri’s phrasing. Surely he wasn’t trying to think up his own talisman designs, was he?

“So that design wasn’t written in any of the books?” I asked, having a feeling I wasn’t going to like his answer.

“Indeed, it wasn’t,” Yuri said nonchalantly. “I combined a number of patterns.”

Combining existing patterns to make something new meant he was creating brand-new designs, didn’t it? Although he didn’t make it sound like anything especially new.

Meanwhile, this whole time Zara had been listening with her mouth agape in open shock.

“Pardon me, but may I cast an Appraisal spell on you?” Yuri asked her.

“Huh? Sure, go ahead.”

“*Appraise*... It appears that the effect was spread equilaterally across all of us. However, it falls short of the effect we would expect from a single-target spell.”

Based on what Yuri was muttering, the area-of-effect talisman was weaker than its single-target cousin. Maybe this was why area-of-effect talismans for support spells didn’t already exist? In which case, surely, the design he’d come up with already existed and just wasn’t listed in the books.

Unfortunately, several days later I was to learn that this line of reasoning was only wishful thinking.

Behind the Scenes II

EARLY IN THE MORNING, not long after Sei and company arrived in Zaidera, a letter arrived at the manor where the Salutanian delegation were staying. A member of the delegation brought the letter to their ambassador, Crown Prince Kyle, while he was eating breakfast.

“I apologize for disturbing you in the middle of your meal.”

Realizing that this required his immediate attention, Kyle stopped eating to listen. “Has something happened?”

“We have received a letter from Taeyuangan. Grand Magus Drewes has just arrived from Salutania.”

“Pardon me, *Grand Magus Drewes*?”

Taeyuangan was the name of the harbor town where Sei and the others had docked, and it was the closest port to the imperial city. As it was open to visitors from abroad, Prince Kyle’s delegation had also reached the capital by that route. It was understandable that travelers from Salutania would go there first—but what Kyle couldn’t understand was why Yuri of all people had come.

Yuri was Salutania’s strongest mage and crucial to the protection of their kingdom. It was hard to imagine they would have let him just take a jaunt over the border, even if they weren’t currently at war.

Neither could he imagine the Saint herself ever leaving the country. *The Saint*, who hardly ever made public appearances. In times of emergency, she was even more important than the king himself. It was unthinkable that they would willingly let her go to Zaidera and deprive themselves of her protection.

Therefore, Kyle frowned at this news. Something troubled him about all of this. What could possibly compel Salutania to allow people who would never ordinarily be permitted to leave to do exactly that?

When he thought about it that way, it was easy to guess. The potential conclusion shook him to his core.

Kyle did his best to remain calm as he asked, “Did the grand magus bring anyone with him?”

“Yes—two personal assistants, and a knight as his guard. He brought a number of other retainers as well, including a civilian merchant.”

Although he didn’t mention the person Kyle most feared, the prince felt this only served to further support his theory.

If they’re trying to avoid as much risk as possible, then they would of course conceal her presence.

It was highly unnatural to suggest that Salutania’s most powerful mage required a guard, but if the person Kyle imagined was indeed with the grand magus, then Yuri’s sizable entourage made perfect sense.

As the delegation member studied the look of confidence on Kyle’s face, he began to realize who else might be accompanying Yuri. However, he couldn’t believe it either, and though he usually schooled himself into maintaining an expression of perfect equanimity, he accidentally let this show on his face.

Sure enough, Kyle’s hunch was right.

When Kyle heard that Yuri was soon to arrive, he went to greet the grand magus’s party at the manor door. There, standing behind Yuri, was Sei. Kyle straightened at the sight of her. Thanks to his royal upbringing, he somehow managed to keep his face still, but he couldn’t completely contain an air of anxiety.

“Thank you for coming all this way.” Kyle heard the slight tremble in his voice as he greeted Yuri, but thankfully, no one seemed to notice.

The reason for his nervousness was rooted in a moment of past rebellion. Once, in his stubborn belief that Aira—the other girl who had been summoned in the Saint Summoning Ritual—was the true Saint, Kyle had called Sei an impostor before a crowd.

If he had done this just after both ladies were summoned, the blowback wouldn’t have been so terrible. However, Sei had by then proven herself by healing many who had suffered injuries fighting monsters, successfully purified the black swamps where miasma gathered, and accomplished a number of

other feats as well. By that point, she was already widely regarded as the Saint in truth.

As a result, Kyle had been severely punished for showing such disrespect toward someone of equal status to his father, the king.

Why hadn't he listened to everyone else? Why had he firmly refused to believe that anyone but Aira could be the Saint? When Kyle thought about it now, he could only call it the rashness of youth.

However, despite reprimands, he had been unable to change his attitude. Only recently had he been able to look back on that time with a cool head.

The king had forbidden any contact between his first son and the Saint, so this was the first time Kyle and Sei had met face-to-face since the incident. He hadn't yet apologized, and so in this moment of sudden reunion, he was, of course, overcome with guilt. But because Sei was traveling incognito, he couldn't possibly apologize now.

Kyle instead focused on guiding their group into the manor, which was when he realized that Yuri had an odd look on his face. In fact, the rest of the delegation looked just as surprised, or like they were deep in thought.

Something unusual was clearly afoot.

Kyle wanted to uncover the truth, but they couldn't talk outside where others might see them. Having come to that decision, Kyle briefly exchanged greetings with Yuri, who was acting as the second delegation's leader, and urged them to come inside at once.

The prince led Yuri, Sei, and Albert into the parlor so they could discuss just what was going on.

By all rights, Oscar should have joined them too, since he was a member of Special Services—who were tasked with gathering Salutanian intelligence—but that would have been problematic, so Kyle would speak with him separately.

While Oscar was in truth a covert guard for Sei, in public, he acted as a merchant in her employ. It would have been strange for him to join a political discussion in this manner.

Kyle cleared the room so it was just the four of them. He was quick to jump to the topic of greatest import: Just why were they here? He lacked the mental fortitude to warmly receive and welcome them because he was compelled to address the person in the room with the highest position: Sei.

The first thing he asked was why they were visiting Zaidera.

Sei's expression, when he spoke to her, was indescribable.

Why was she making that face? Kyle knew she must have a terrible impression of him given his ongoing lack of apology, but did she think so poorly of him that she loathed even the sound of his voice?

Sei's attitude worried him, but he soon learned that she had good reason to look at him like that: Her delegation had come because of an urgent letter sent from *his* delegation—a letter about which Kyle had no knowledge. The more he heard about the situation, the more the seed of anxiety that had taken root in his heart began to sprout and grow. It sounded like someone had forged a letter in order to draw the panacea—or the Saint—to Zaidera.

Who in the world could have sent that letter? The information they currently possessed led to no immediate conclusions.

Nevertheless, it would be foolish to sit around doing nothing. Kyle decided to start with what he could control. His first priority was guaranteeing Sei's safety. He recommended that the Saint's party return to Salutania right away, though he regretted having to do it since she had been looking forward to sightseeing.

However, this plan was soon interrupted. As if in anticipation of what they would do, the ports surrounding the imperial capital were closed to foreign travel. The timing was such that Kyle imagined this was a tactic to detain the Saint and the panacea in Zaidera.

However, he soon adjusted his suspicions when his agents reported that they were unsure as to whether this was premeditated or pure coincidence. It was dangerous to act on assumptions. He knew this all too well, given his past mistakes.

So, Kyle gave the order for his people to investigate the reason for the border closure—and, separately, who had sent the letter.

Their investigation of the letter yielded immediate results, as they had a clue: the seal upon the letter itself.

Prominent members of the delegation found time amidst their hectic investigation into the border situation to gather in the room Kyle used as his office. They had come to share what progress they had made in regards to the letter.

In addition to Kyle, his aides, and investigators, Yuri, Albert, and Oscar, were also present. As, of course, was the owner of the seal.

This individual was a viscount, and he had clearly already learned what had happened to his seal, because he looked pale and was trembling.

“So, this is the owner of the seal?” Kyle asked.

“That is correct, Your Highness.”

When Kyle’s aide answered, the viscount trembled even harder.

“So, did he send that letter?”

“No, Your Highness. He has no recollection of doing so,” the aide continued; he had already asked the viscount these same questions.

“Then why did the sender use his seal?”

“According to him, the seal went missing not long before we believe that letter was sent.”

Seals were extremely important, as they were not only a means of self-identification but also a means of legally validating documents. If it became known that a bureaucrat had lost theirs, they would be openly condemned and disdained for their lack of managerial ability. It could even affect the ability of a palace official to rise in the ranks.

Because of this, the viscount had told no one that his seal was missing and continued searching every last nook and cranny it might have vanished into.

“And he still hasn’t found it?”

“No, Your Highness. He has been searching ever since its loss but has yet to locate it. A number of our people are searching for it as well.”

Now other members of the delegation were searching for the missing seal too. There was a chance that it had been pawned, so they had begun with a covert investigation to see if it had turned up at any stores. However, they still hadn't recovered it, partially because they had only just begun to look.

The seal used on the letter had likely been the one they were searching for. It was also highly likely that the person who had sent the letter was still in possession of it. This was the conclusion those gathered quietly reached after hearing that the viscount himself had found no traces of it anywhere during his initial searches.

"Was it just a coincidence that the seal went missing?" Oscar wondered out loud, a hand on his chin. Though Sei wasn't here, the Special Services agent had come to lend his prowess in intelligence gathering and analyzing situations.

Kyle heard his mumbling. "What do you mean?"

"It sounds to me like it might have been stolen for the express purpose of sending that letter—especially when you consider the location where we must assume he first lost track of it."

"Oh? You mean you assume the tavern is the point of interest?"

"Yes, exactly. In a place like that, where so many people are coming and going, strangers blend in with all the rest. It's the perfect scene for stealing a seal, if you ask me."

Some of the gathered nodded, as they had come to the same conclusion at some point.

Around the time that they speculated the viscount had lost his seal, he had been working inside the manor. He had only ever gone out to the tavern that Kyle had mentioned.

The viscount was a lifelong foodie, and even in Zaidera he enjoyed trying all manner of different restaurants. This tavern was known for delicious food on a budget, so it was a favorite of the viscount's. As an ordinary establishment, it was easy to gain entrance. The viscount had eaten there several times and had recently even become friendly with the proprietor.

Oscar didn't say so out loud, but it was known that the restaurant served

alcohol as well. The viscount didn't drink to the point of blacking out, but, having grown comfortable with the establishment, he had on occasion drunk enough to impair his judgment.

It was no great feat for a sober man to steal from a drunk one. If someone had been aiming to steal the viscount's seal, then the tavern would have been the best place to do it.

The truth was that on the day the viscount believed he lost the seal, he had drunk a bit too much, encouraged by a waitress. He had barely been standing by the time he returned to the manor. He realized his seal was missing the very next morning. This was another reason why the viscount had kept the incident to himself.

"If it's been stolen, then there's little chance that we'll actually recover it."

"You speak truly, Your Highness. We can continue our search, but if we take that possibility into account, perhaps it would be wise to look into whether any suspicious individuals have been in contact with the viscount."

Kyle nodded his agreement. If the seal had been stolen with specific intent, they could assume that the thief was still in possession of it, and their chances of finding it would be vanishingly small. Therefore, he agreed with his aide's proposal to focus on finding the person who had used the seal to send the letter.

As their discussion wrapped up, the viscount was promptly relieved of his post and informed that he would be returning to Salutania with Sei and her delegation. Until then, he was detained under house arrest within the manor.

This was the viscount's punishment for losing his seal and allowing it to be used on a forgery, but it was also for the viscount's safety, as well as to deprive the seal of value.

"That sums up all we know about the current state of the matter. There are far too many things that we don't yet know. You must continue your investigations."

At Kyle's command, the meeting came to a close.

"Yes, Your Highness," the people in the room responded as one, before filing

out of the office to carry out his orders.

The Saint's *Magic Power is* Omnipotent

**Situational
Audio Drama
SCRIPTS**

SCRIPT: Eito Efu **SUPERVISOR:** Yuka Tachibana

These are the scripts for the stories *Going to Pick Her Up for a Date* and *Surprise During the Picnic?! that were included on the audio drama CD that was released in October 2018, as well as the script for I Won't Flirt with Her While I Escort Her Home... Or Will I?* that was included in the limited edition of Volume 3 of the light novel. They may differ in parts compared to the actual recording.

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Drama 1:

Going to Pick Her Up for a Date

Walking outside.

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Phew... I woke up earlier than usual today, since I'm going out with her later.

AM: We're supposed to go out this afternoon. It's not quite time yet...but maybe I'll go pick her up now, seeing as I'm ready and all.

AM: No, wait, she'll probably panic if I show up without warning.

AM: But a part of me wants to see her looking all surprised... For some reason, I just love watching her expression constantly changing from one emotion to the next...

AM: All right. I'm guessing she's working at the institute right about now. I'll go see how she's doing.

After the sound of knocking, the *gchak* of the door opening.

ALBERT: "Sorry I'm here already. Mind if I come in?"

The clink of apparatuses hitting one another.

SFX of a hectic workroom.

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Oh? She seems pretty well occupied today. And she looks frantic, which is unusual for her when it comes to work...

ALBERT: "You seem busier than usual today."

A loud clash from the apparatuses.

SFX of Sei being shocked at his sudden visit.

ALBERT: "Oh, sorry, did I accidentally sneak up and startle you? No need to rush. I was running ahead of schedule, so I decided to come early. Feel free to keep working."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She sure has a lot of potions on her desk... Humph. Johan's doing, I'm sure. Asking her to take on more than her fair share just because she's good at it...

AM: Nevertheless, it always amazes me how she just does the work without any complaint... She's such an unusually dedicated worker.

AM: But her face is so pale, and she seems so bewildered... It looks like my being here is only upsetting her.

ALBERT: "There's no need to look so apologetic. I don't mind waiting, not at all."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Coming here early just made her feel like she needs to pay attention to me.

AM: I should talk about something else to distract her...

ALBERT: "Uhh... So, you made all these potions this morning? I heard you were capable, but this is remarkable."

"Hm? You don't usually make so many so quickly? You're going quicker today

on purpose?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Don’t tell me...she’s working harder than usual so she has time to go out with me?

AM: That’s so like her—always being kind and putting others first.

AM: A part of me wishes she would only be that kind to me, but I’m sure that would be impossible for her.

AM: She’s the sort of person who’s kind to everyone...

AM: Well... Okay, I have an idea.

ALBERT: “Is there any way I can lend a hand?”

“Really, I don’t mind. If there’s anything I can do to help you get done faster, then we’ll have more time to spend together, right?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Oh, now she’s blushing.

AM: It really is funny how often her expression changes.

AM: Heh. She’s so cute.

ALBERT: “Okay, then I’ll follow your instructions. What should I do first?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: It looks like she finally accepted that I don’t mind helping.

AM: Although I do feel a bit awkward. The other researchers keep looking at me...

ALBERT: “Hmm. So, you want me to pack the finished potions into boxes. And once I’m done packing a box, move it over there...”

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Now it's like she was never flustered at all.

AM: Also...I guess that tense look I saw from the side was just her working face.

AM: I just don't usually get to see it. I'm sure there must be other sides of her that I haven't seen yet too.

Working SFX: clinking containers, boiling liquids, *etc.*

ALBERT: "...Ah, so this is how you make potions so efficiently. Did you come up with this method yourself?"

"Ooh... I see. You figured it out through trial and error. You really put your all into your work. Johan must be proud of you as well.

"There's one last secret to it too? I'd love to hear it."

"...Motivation?"

A short silence.

ALBERT: "Ha ha ha. You really are funny!"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: I wasn't expecting her response, and I couldn't stop myself from laughing out loud.

AM: Oh? Looks like everyone else has gone quiet because I laughed. It's not like it's *that* rare for me to be amused...

AM: She doesn't seem to care, though. If anything, she's puzzled by their reactions.

ALBERT: “You’re so good at this too. You made twice as many potions as everyone else in the same amount of time.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: She’s shaking her head, but anyone who gets near her can see her value. If anything, it’s strange that she doesn’t recognize it herself.

AM: Even in this institute alone, she’s surely caught the eye of one, or two—no, three, four people...

ALBERT: “Don’t be so modest. All these are the fruits of your labor.”

“But really, how are you feeling, going at this pace?”

“It’s great seeing you work so hard and all, but I wouldn’t want you to wear yourself out.”

“Wait, what do you mean you’ve filled your quota?”

“You went over? That’s great to hear.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: To her, putting her all into something comes naturally; she just doesn’t realize how wonderful that is.

AM: Part of me wants everyone to see how great she is, but another part of me doesn’t want them to know. No, wait, right now I should focus more on praising her achievements.

ALBERT: “...You did a great job today.”

“I hear the bell tolling noon. How about we head out to get lunch—hm?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: The other researchers all look like they’re ready to take a break too, since it’s noon, but I feel like for some reason, they’re all watching us...

AM: One of them comes over to her.

AM: Huh? They want to try the sandwich she was eating yesterday?

AM: It's true that the food she makes is sublime. I still crave that soup she made the last time we went monster-slaying... Hm? Her face has a disconcerted look.

AM: Ah, she must be worried about our plans.

ALBERT: "It's all right. I understand how it feels to be addicted to your delicious cooking."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Phew... I'd like nothing more than to whisk her away right here and now, but that look of relief on her face has softened the urge.

AM: She's the kind of person who can't say no to someone in need. I guess that's how you would expect the Saint to act...

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: As I was distracted thinking about her, the next thing I knew, she was back with a plate of sandwiches she had whipped up.

AM: She's as good at cooking as she is at making potions.

ALBERT: "Huh? These are for me? Are you sure?"

"Thanks. I can't wait to try them."

"(munch, munch) These are amazing!"

"You made these for me because I helped with your work?"

"Even though you had a much harder job. But...thank you. They're truly wonderful."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: I would be the luckiest man in the world if I could eat your cooking every day.

AM: She looks so happy as she watches her coworkers enjoying her

sandwiches—which were all made to perfection. I want to see more of that expression...

ALBERT: “So, now that the other researchers seem satisfied, are you ready to head out?”

“You regret making me wait?”

“Don’t worry, I wasn’t the least bit bored. If anything, I’m glad I got to see you in work mode—I don’t usually get to.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: I feel like I got the better end of this deal... But I probably shouldn’t tell her that sort of thing just yet.

AM: I’m afraid she’ll go pale, then bright red on me again.

ALBERT: “Come, let’s go.”

“I’m bringing you somewhere special today. I’ve been hoping to take you there for some time.”

Horse whinny.

Albert’s horse is tied up in front of the research institute.

ALBERT: “Come on, let’s go... What’s the matter?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Sei looks a bit uneasy. Oh, she must not be used to riding on horseback yet. In that case...

ALBERT: “Here, take my hand.”

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: As usual, she hesitates. Her hand is so small and soft.

AM: That slight pink in her cheeks makes me somewhat flustered too.

AM: ...Whoops. I've stared at her a bit too long.

The sound of Sei climbing onto the horse.

Horse whinny.

ALBERT: "There we are. It's quite a ways, so I'm going to urge the horse into a quicker gait; we'll go a little faster than when I escort you home from the palace... But that's okay with you, right?"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She nodded, but she still seems faintly nervous.

AM: Her hands are cold, and she's holding on to my chest more tightly than usual. She must be trying not to make me fuss over her.

AM: I wish I knew a way to make her feel more relaxed.

ALBERT: "Don't worry, I've got you. Now, let's go... Hah!"

Sound of the horse galloping.

Scene change. Bird calls from here and there.

The horse slows to a trot.

The image of them trotting through a deep forest on horseback.

ALBERT: "We've gone pretty far... Are you tired?"

"Okay, good."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Ever since we got here, she's been curiously looking around nonstop.

AM: Oh, look at how her eyes sparkle... It's strange. Just being by her side while she has that delighted look on her face is so soothing to me...

ALBERT: "This forest is very pretty, you say? Yes. I'm glad you think so."

The horse neighs again.

ALBERT: "The woods in these parts have been relatively untouched by the miasma. The trees and plants are all so vivid and alive."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: And of course, so are you. So much so that you surpass even this peaceful forest.

AM: Ahh, seeing her smile from this close up...makes me want to show her even more impressive landscapes.

ALBERT: "Hm? What's the matter? ...Oh, you think that herb might be a good ingredient in your potions."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Now that I think about it, she's been eyeing that thicket over there. Heh heh. You can take Sei away from her research, but you can't take the researcher out of Sei.

ALBERT: "All right, we're almost at our destination, so let's dismount and walk for a bit."

"That way, you can pick herbs too."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Ahh, she looks so happy again...

AM: That carefree look always makes my heart race... Although I doubt she's noticed.

Drama 2:

Surprise During the Picnic?!

Horse neighs.

The sound of them dismounting.

ALBERT: “That herb there, then? ...Oh, don’t worry. I’ll get it for you.”

Rustling as Albert approaches the thicket, then the sound of the herb being cut.

ALBERT: “There we go... Let me know if you see any other samples you’d like.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Heh heh. She’s so enthusiastic. And she looks delighted.

AM: It’s making me smile too... But I might be starting to envy the herbs; they’re the reason she looks so happy.

Just then, the thicket rustles more violently.

ALBERT: “Huh?!”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: A monster?! There couldn’t be—it’s not possible!

AM: (panicked) Hah! Where is she?!

ALBERT: “Get behind me!”

Sound of feet hitting the ground. The image of Sei running to Albert’s side.

The *shing* of Albert drawing his sword.

The horse neighs.

Rustle rustle... The thicket's rustling gets louder...

ALBERT: "Stand back! I won't let it lay a single finger on you!"

Oink...! Something like a boar appears, making a cute sound.

ALBERT: "...Oh. Is that all it was?"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Phew. That scared me for a minute there, but it's just a young one.

AM: Ah! Her hands are clutched against her chest. I must have frightened her by making such a scene over nothing...

AM: Which reminds me, she must not be used to forests yet, to say nothing of monsters.

AM: Look how her small shoulders tremble... How can I help her feel more secure?

The rustle of cloth against cloth. Image of Albert hugging Sei tightly.

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: I gave in and hugged her... We're so close that I can hear her heartbeat.

AM: She stops trembling, but her heart beats as fast as an alarm bell. She must not be past the fear.

ALBERT: "...It's all right. Everything's okay now. You're safe. I know he looks intimidating, but these creatures are quite harmless."

“I’m sorry for scaring you like that.”

“Hm? You think he’s cute? What? You’re not scared?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Now that I look closer, her face is awfully red.

AM: She avoids meeting my gaze and speaks with an awkward tone. However, now that she’s looking at the beast, she has the same glimmer in her eye that she had when looking for herbs.

ALBERT: “It’s what you called an *uribou* back in your homeland? That’s what you call a *wild boar’s* piglet?”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: I only understand half of what she’s saying, but I’m just glad that she’s not scared.

AM: Although I’m a little sad that she jumped out of my arms in such a panic.

The wild boar oinks again.

ALBERT: “Heh heh. Look. He likes you. They like it when you scratch them here.”

Happy oinks from the wild boar.

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: She immediately reaches out to touch it.

AM: Yeesh... This may seem like one of those *uribou* she mentioned, but I still can’t believe she’s so curious—and brave—that she’ll just reach out to it like that without any hesitation.

ALBERT: "You're sorry for surprising me? Don't worry about it."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: To think that she's still concerned about my well-being...

AM: Part of me wants to hug her again, but I'm sure that would only serve to startle her, so I'll settle for holding her hand.

ALBERT: "Our destination is just ahead. Let's go."

He takes the horse's reins and starts moving.

The sound of rustling in the forest as they walk.

The wind gets a bit stronger.

ALBERT: "Surprised? We'll be on high ground once we emerge from the forest. We'll have a sweeping view of the capital. It's a beautiful lookout point."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Ahh, one second she's surprised, the next she looks so delighted... Her expression really can't stay still.

AM: Nevertheless, her smile is especially radiant now. I can feel her excitement in her grip on my hand as well.

ALBERT: "Oh, just so you know, it gets quite windy the closer we get to the cliff, so we need to be careful."

"Watch your step. Don't let go of my hand."

The whooshing of the wind.

ALBERT: "Yeah, the square shape over there is the palace. And down there is

the institute. And that dense cluster of small buildings is the city we visited before.”

“And far off in that direction is where I was born.”

“Huh? You’d like to see my hometown in the future? ...Yeah. I’ll be sure to show you, someday.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Truthfully...there’s nothing I want more than to invite you to go there with me.

ALBERT: “I’m glad you’re so pleased by the view. I’ve been wanting to share it with you for some time.”

“I want to teach you more about our country so that you’ll grow to love it even more.”

“...You don’t need to thank me. If anything, I should be thanking you. Thank you, for coming with me today.”

Wind whooshing again.

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Her black hair is so beautiful, dyed by the sunset. I want this moment to last forever...

ALBERT: “The wind is blowing rather hard. Are you cold? We should think about heading back soon so that we make it back before dark.”

“...Huh? Of course, we can do something more when we do. I have no intention of letting go of your hand today.”

Drama 3:

I Won't Flirt with Her While I Escort Her Home... Or Will I?

Sounds of the hustle and bustle of the city as they arrive.

ALBERT: "There's a restaurant I'm rather fond of. Would you like to go there tonight?"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She's nodding, but not as enthusiastically as before.

I wonder if she's tired after all the excitement and travel. I'm glad I picked a place where we can relax...

Creak of the door opening.

The chatter of people as they go inside.

It's a chic restaurant, so it's not as noisy as a tavern.

ALBERT: "Reservation for Hawke."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: The waiter looks at me strangely.

AM: Is this so unusual? I mean, I know it's my first time coming here with a woman...

AM: Sei looks around nervously too. Maybe she's not used to this kind of place.

ALBERT: "Don't worry, I got us a private room."

The sound of the door to the private room opening and closing.

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Finally, she's smiling again. I guess she feels more comfortable now that we're seated.

ALBERT: "The chef's recommended dishes are excellent. I hope they're to your liking as well."

"Would you like something to drink?"

"Sure, here's the wine list. They even offer seasonal fruit wines."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She likes drinking, huh? That's surprising. But I'm getting to see yet another side of Sei.

AM: I guess the more time we spend together, the more I'll learn about her...

ALBERT: "So, one glass of strawberry wine for her and one glass of grape wine for me."

"Let's toast to our day today. Cheers."

The clink of glasses.

The clatter of cutlery.

ALBERT: "Oh, I see. So, you had these prix fixe menus back in your homeland as well. How interesting."

"But you never got to go because they're so expensive?"

"Ha ha ha. So, this is your first time experiencing it, then. It's an honor to accompany you."

"What's that? You want to know what spices they used to season this meat?"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She's always so curious and eager to learn. She seems to truly enjoy every dish they bring out. I'm relieved to see it.

ALBERT: "The strawberry wine goes down as easily as juice? I see. I'm glad you like it so much."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: That big smile on her face, that slight pink in her cheeks as she nods—they warm my heart.

AM: Time really flies while we chat. I wish it would slow down... I can't believe I'm thinking that.

AM: I've never felt this way before...

ALBERT: "Here's the last course: our dessert."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: They've brought a tart made with heaps of strawberries. Her eyes shine at the sight of it.

AM: Heh heh. Looks like she's pleased with this too. Her hands are starting to tremble a little...

AM: Now that I think about it, that's her fourth cup of wine.

ALBERT: "...Excuse me for asking, but are you drunk?"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Oh dear. She kept asking for more, and now I've let her drink far too much...

AM: But this is so different from her normal diligent demeanor, what with her cheeks all red and that glassy look in her eye. It's adorable.

AM: ...I should probably warn her not to drink in front of others.

ALBERT: "That strawberry on top of your tart looks like it's going to fall."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She just stares at it in a daze... I guess I'll have to take matters into my own hands.

ALBERT: "Here."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: I stabbed the strawberry with my fork without thinking.

AM: She gapes at me in confusion, but she also kind of looks like a little bird waiting to be fed.

ALBERT: "Here, say 'ahh.'"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: I poke the strawberry toward her as a joke.

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE (SURPRISED): Huh...?

AM: She happily opens her mouth for me.

AM: Th-that's not fair.

AM: She's drunk. She's just drunk...

AM: Actually watching her eat off my fork and munch the strawberry is making me rather flustered.

AM: Ugh... I just can't keep up with her.

AM: She must never be allowed to drink with anyone else! I'm going to make that absolutely clear to Johan...

ALBERT: "Oh..."

"She's asleep."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Well, she was working from first thing in the morning, and then I made her trek all through the forest with me, and now she's had four glasses of wine. It's no surprise.

AM: The way her hair cascades onto her lightly flushed cheeks...

AM: Even her quiet snores...are so cute.

ALBERT: "You're so..."

"No. This is the kind of thing I should tell her when she's awake."

"...You did well today."

After a short pause, the clapping of hooves.

ALBERT: "Oh? Are you awake now?"

"D-don't flail like that!"

"You fell asleep, and I didn't want to wake you until we made it back to the institute."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Was she shocked to find herself suddenly on top of a horse?

ALBERT: "Hm? What is it now?!"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She suddenly grabs the reins and opens and closes her mouth.

ALBERT: "Huh? I shouldn't drink and ride?"

“...Ha ha ha. You don’t need to worry about that. I hardly drank anything.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: That’s the first thing on her mind after waking up in my arms? Now I’m worried about the future.

ALBERT: “I was enjoying your intoxicating smile instead.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Oops, now she’s gone bright red. And it seems that she’s finally noticed that I’m holding her. I try my best to be considerate, since I know she’s not used to these kinds of things, but I might have drunk more than I thought if I’m letting a comment like that slip.

ALBERT: “Here’s the institute. Dismount slowly now.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: Her face is so red that she clambers down from the horse and starts bowing in a panic.

AM: She looks on the verge of bolting inside.

ALBERT: “Wait.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: I grab her hand without thinking—it seemed like she was going to run away.

AM: But, uhhh, now what do I do?

ALBERT: “Thanks for coming today. I had a great time.”

ALBERT’S MONOLOGUE: She’s gone still—it’s as if, now that I have her hand,

she's given up on the idea of fleeing.

ALBERT: "Yeah? I'm glad you enjoyed it too."

"Oh, would it be all right if I asked you out again sometime?"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She nods shyly, a blush on her face.

AM: As she looks at me now, her gaze is so direct, so pure...so beautiful.

The sound of Albert kissing her forehead.

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: Oh, I did that without even realizing what I was doing.

ALBERT: "Ah!"

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: She waves, then runs away from me as fast as she can. It's not long before she's out of sight.

ALBERT: "Maybe I...went too far this time."

ALBERT'S MONOLOGUE: And yet I just can't stop smiling.

AM: This really was an incredible day.

AM: Even the stars above look like they're shining brighter than usual.

AM: I pray that she feels the same.

ALBERT: "Good night. Sweet dreams."

** This situation audio drama is a work of fiction. Wild animals are dangerous,*

*and should you encounter them, do not attempt to approach or pet them.
Drinking and riding a horse is also dangerous, so refrain from doing so.*

Afterword

HELLO, this is Yuka Tachibana.

Thank you so much for buying Volume 9 of *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent*.

Thanks to everyone's support, I somehow managed to deliver Volume 9. I am so deeply grateful to everyone for always supporting me. Thank you so much. For various reasons, I feel like this was the hardest to write yet. Maybe it's because I got really inspired with the last one and I wound up getting carried away with this one. I regret it. I'm bracing myself.

Thank you so much to my editor at KADOKAWA BOOKS, W, for giving me so much advice. It's thanks to them that I was able to somehow get this volume out. Thanks to everyone else involved as well.

So, did you enjoy reading this volume? There's going to be some spoilers from here on out, so please be sure to finish reading it before going any further.

The setting of the story changes from the Kingdom of Salutania to Zaidera, so I had to do all kinds of research. I started with food. I can't help but feel that the fact that Sei is such a foodie is just a reflection of my own tastes. Sorry about that. But the medicinal cooking dishes really are delicious.

As for the kind of rice dishes that show up, Chinese-style rice porridge and rice cakes wrapped in bamboo leaves (chimaki) were the ones that stood out most to me.

I had the Chinese-style rice porridge for the first time at a breakfast served at a hotel I stayed at in China. It was incredibly delicious, so much so that I had it for breakfast every day of my stay at that hotel. It had chicken and century eggs—it was also my first time having century eggs. I think it's thanks to that rice porridge that I can actually enjoy century eggs now, as I had avoided them before.

I remember when I was a kid, my mom would make Chinese-style chimaki on very rare occasions. It was made of glutinous rice and chicken, but I feel like

there were other ingredients in it too. Since we were making it at home, she steamed them in aluminum foil instead of bamboo leaves. The steam cooker was made of stainless steel too. She hardly ever went to the trouble, but they were delicious and one of my favorites. Thinking back on it now, they took a ton of time and effort to make, so that might be why she didn't bother that often. I doubt I could make them myself either (lol).

As for the buildings, I went to see a special exhibit at a museum where they recreated the Forbidden City in a virtual space. It let you really *feel* just how much power the emperors of the past used to wield. My vocabulary isn't the largest, so it's hard for me to describe, but I saw what I believe were delicate fittings of bamboo that had been gilded in gold leaf and were awfully shiny. The walls were covered with landscapes of rare birds and beautiful flowers, and the ceilings were painted with intricate patterns. Even though we were indoors, there was even a square gazebo. I'm pretty sure even the prop roof was plated in gold leaf.

I heard the palace was built to someone's tastes, but I just don't understand. All I can say is that the interior decorating was the pinnacle of art. I've heard that the real palace has finally been restored and is now open to the public, but because of the way things are now, I can't go. I wasn't able to visit before the publication of this volume, but as someone who loves to travel, I hope I'll make it someday.

Once again, Yasuyuki Syuri-sensei was the illustrator for this novel. Thank you yet again for the wonderful illustrations. Maybe it was because I loved the expression Sei made in the last volume so much, but I had Sei wear that look of rapture over food in the opening illustrations again. It's awesome, to say the least. Syuri-sensei never fails to impress. And let's not forget that illustration for the acrylic stand that came with the special edition of this volume!!! She drew it to commemorate Sei's engagement and it's just so perfect... Thank you so much for your consistently great work!

That brings me to this volume, which also had a special edition! It came with an acrylic stand of that Syuri-sensei illustration. I got ahead of myself when I mentioned it before, but in honor of Sei and the knight commander's engagement, she drew them in very different attire than usual. Needless to say,

Sei looks adorable, and the knight commander looks very princely. His main occupation may be a knight, but he got a side gig as a prince for the stand. Be sure to buy it if you're interested!

The manga version of the series is doing great, as always. It goes without saying that I'm grateful to everyone who supports it, but to everyone else involved as well, starting with Fujiyazuki-sensei. Thank you so much. As of Volume 8, which came out last December, they've reached the end of the Klausner's Domain arc. It's thanks to everyone's support that the manga has been able to continue for so long. Thankfully, it's not ending yet either. I hope you continue to enjoy the world of the Saint as drawn by Fuji-sensei.

Thanks to everyone's support, Volume 3 of the spin-off manga, *The Saint's Magic Power is Omnipotent: The Other Saint*, came out last September too. It seems there's a big readership for that comic as well. Again, I'm very grateful to all of the readers and everyone else involved, starting with Aoagu-sensei. Thank you so much for everything. The grand magus shows up for the greater part of Volume 3, and the part about when he was little is worthy of a special message. That's right. You get to see him as a kid. It's an important scene, but when [redacted] happened, it was so cute... If you'd like, please check out this manga too.

Both the manga and the spin-off are currently on sale with amazing reviews. You can read them on ComicWalker, pixiv Comic, Nico Nico Seiga, and other webcomic sites. Some of the chapters are available to read for free, so please check them out.

I wonder if by the time Volume 9 comes out, season two of the anime will start airing? For more details, be sure to check out the anime's official website and Twitter account. I also make sure to announce when information is released, so be sure to look for my reports on *Let's Be Novelists!* and Twitter.

Finally, thank you so much for reading all the way to this point. I hope we'll see each other again soon.



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Table of Contents

[Table of Contents](#)

[Color Inserts](#)

[Table of Contents Page](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Characters](#)

[Summaries](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Act 1: Betrothal](#)

[Act 2: Tidings from Abroad](#)

[Behind the Scenes I](#)

[Act 3: The Itinerary](#)

[Act 4: Closed Borders](#)

[Act 5: Investigating?](#)

[Behind the Scenes II](#)

[Situational Audio Drama](#)

[Drama 1: Going to Pick Her Up for a Date](#)

[Drama 2: Surprise During the Picnic?!](#)

[Drama 3: I Won't Flirt with Her While I Escort Her Home... Or Will I?](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Newsletter](#)