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Making Mágic

The Sweet Life of a
Witch Who Knows an
Infinite MP Loophole

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MAKING MAGIC

THE SWEET LIFE OF A WITCH WHO KNOWS AN INFINITE MP LOOPHOLE

– Maryoku Cheat na Majo ni Narimashita –

- VOLUME 5 -

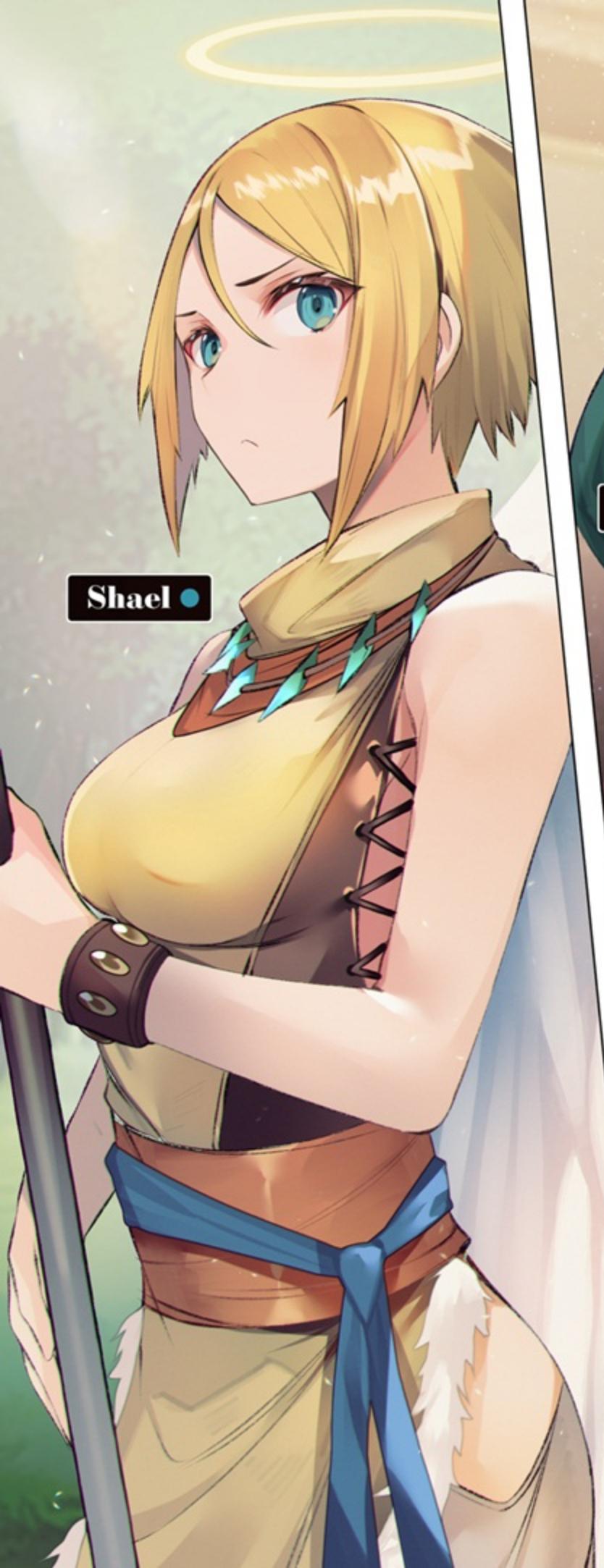
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[J-NOVEL CLUB]





**“Shhh!
Lady Witch is tired,
so she’s sleeping.”**



CHAPTER 0

THE DISCIPLE RETURNS DURING THE SEASON OF LOVE

On that day, Teto and I were checking on the mythical beasts that lived in the Witch of Creation's Forest when, all of a sudden, we felt some very strong mana surging into the forest.

"That's... Teleportation Magic," I observed.

There weren't that many people whom I had allowed to come here using Teleportation Magic, so I was intrigued.

"Is someone coming, Lady Witch?" Teto asked me.

"Hmm, that mana... It's her," I muttered.

As soon as the words left my mouth, the *Teleportation* spell was complete and I could feel incredibly strong mana coming from our mansion.

"Teto, can you head back home first? I'll join you when I'm done here. I won't be long."

"Roger!"

Teto headed back to the mansion while I finished my little examination of the mythical beasts. They were all doing great, and it seemed some of them were entering mating season.

"Mythical beasts regulate their population by themselves, but they almost all give birth at once," I mused to myself as I made my way back to the mansion. However, as I got closer, a chorus of meows started filling the air.

"Ah, Lady Witch, you're back!" Teto exclaimed when she spotted me.

"Hi, Master! It's been a while," the girl next to her greeted me. It was Yuicia, my

apprentice.

The two of them were surrounded by a multitude of cat-siths.

"I'm assuming you brought all of these cat-siths with you to find them mates," I said. "I actually just came back from tending to the critters; it looks like you picked just the right time."

Yuicia nodded. "I did. The younger ones started looking for mates all at once, so I brought them over," she said, gently petting the head of the cat-sith perched on her shoulder.

The Witch of Creation's Forest was very similar to the environment mythical beasts usually lived in, and dozens of them had made themselves at home here. And so, during mating season, other mythical beasts of the same types would come here looking for mates. Mythical beasts were imbued with mana and very intelligent, so they would only approach beasts of the opposite sex whose personalities and mana signatures they liked. And even then, it would only be as friends. After that, if both beasts were interested in each other, they would become mates and, in most cases, reproduce. Then, they would either remain in the Forest with their mate or move to another hospitable region to expand their lineage.

And this was exactly what had brought Yuicia here today: she was looking for mates for the descendants of the cat-sith she had taken along with her when she had left the Forest, many centuries ago. However, the cat-sith population in the forest had grown a lot since then, and since mythical beasts didn't need any outside help regulating their numbers, it was very unlikely any of the cat-sith Yuicia had brought would reproduce. They would still most likely find a partner, though.

The little cat-siths dashed towards the Forest to start their search, their little fairy wings fluttering as they leaped about.

"It's going to take a few days, if not weeks, for them to find their mates. I suppose you plan on going home in the meantime, right? Let's have some tea before you leave," I told Yuicia.

"I'll go get some yummy cookies!" Teto chimed in.

"Thank you, Master, Miss Teto."

We took Yuicia to the gazebo in the back garden of the mansion and sat down with some tea and cookies.

"You know you can come visit us more often, right?" I said. "You can use Teleportation Magic, yet you barely show your face here!"

Teto nodded. "Lady Witch is right! You should come more!"

Not only was Yuicia also a witch like me, but she had spent years studying Teleportation Magic. She could come visit us pretty much whenever she wanted, yet she would sometimes go years without showing her face here. The last time she came had also been when she was looking for mates for her cat-siths. She had stopped by, plonked the beasts in the forest, left for a few weeks, and come back to pick them up before immediately leaving again.

"If I come too often, I might end up relying on you too much, Master..."

I released a sigh, a mix of fondness and exasperation, as I took in Yuicia's embarrassed laughter.

"Well, you have a lot of responsibilities; it makes sense that you'd struggle to rely on others."

Back in the day, she used to travel with us, but now, she was the headmistress of one of the most prestigious—if not *the* most prestigious—magic schools on the continent. Unlike me, who could basically do whatever I wanted whenever I wanted, Yuicia must have been swamped with responsibilities.

"I understand you're busy, but it wouldn't hurt to drop by and say hi once in a while. If you don't, I might have to track you down and come to you myself next," I teased her.

"Good idea, Lady Witch!" Teto piped up. "You could give us a tour of where you live, Yuicia!"

Yuicia looked a little surprised for a split second, but her face soon broke into a grin.

"Of course, Master, Miss Teto. It'll give us some more time to catch up as well."

She drank the last of her tea and bid us goodbye, using Teleportation Magic to head home with her loyal companion, a cat-sith that followed her like her own shadow.

"How about this? When the cat-sith have all found their future mates, we'll bring the ones who want to go back to your place ourselves."

"I'm so excited to see where you live!" Teto said.

After the two of us saw Yuicia off, we stood there for a couple more minutes, still watching the spot where she had winked away. I couldn't wait to see her again.

This is the story of a young, good-for-nothing magician who decided to venture across the world to unlock her true potential. It is also the story of how I crossed paths with another witch for the first time in my very long life.

CHAPTER 1

MISSION: SEAFOOD!

After having taken care of Lariel's request, Teto and I bid farewell to the former mining town and embarked on our journey to the coast, eager to go enjoy some seafood.

"Lady Wiiitch, there are still lots of quests that haven't been taken care of here!" Teto remarked as she scanned the quest board at the guild we were visiting.

"Is that so? Well then, let's stay in town until we've completed them all."

You see, as we weren't in any rush, I had decided that we would stop at every adventurer's guild we passed on our way to clear all of the leftover quests that no one ever wanted to take on, such as running random errands for the townsfolk, exterminating the vermin, picking medicinal herbs, et cetera et cetera. Basically, they all fell into one of three categories: too annoying, too messy, or too much work for too little money. Technically, as A-rank adventurers, we could simply ignore them, but somehow, clearing the adventurer's guilds' leftover quests had become my life's work.

Using the rewards from the quests, we indulged in the delightful local specialties of every town we visited, while also exploring the rich tapestry of their culture and history through the adventurer's guilds' reference rooms and the towns' bookstores. When we were satisfied with our work, we bid farewell to the grateful guild employees, hopped on our flying carpet, and made our way to the next town to do it all over again, inching our way to the coast.

And at last, after many detours, we finally reached a port town. Our flying carpet must've aroused the guards' suspicions, though, as one of them rushed over to us as soon as we landed.

"Hey, you two! Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"We're adventurers. We've come here to sample some of this town's seafood."

"Yup! We wanna have some shrimp, and some crab, and some grilled fish... All that yummy stuff!" Teto chimed in.

"Y-You came all the way here to *eat seafood*?" the guard repeated, gawking at us. "Sh-Show me your guild cards!" He was still quite clearly suspicious of us.

I understood his skepticism. While I was technically forty-two years old—I had just recently celebrated my birthday while we were on the road—and had been an adventurer for thirty, I still looked like a barely pubescent girl, and Teto looked like a teenager. Our appearances didn't exactly scream "adventurers," so it was only natural for the guards to be dubious of our story. It wasn't the first time Teto and I had gotten held up by guards when visiting a new town, and it certainly wouldn't be the last. But it was all right—I knew that as soon as he saw our guild card and party name, he would let us through.

"Here you go," I said, showing him my guild card.

"Y-You're *A-rank*?! And members of the Carpet Riders?! That renowned adventuring party?!"

The guard's eyes flitted between our flying carpet and us; a look of realization flashed across his face. He straightened his posture before handing me back my guild card.

"It is an honor to have eminent adventurers like yourselves visit our town!"

"Hm? Do you know about Lady Witch and Teto?" Teto asked him, her head tilted to the side.

"Of course! Tales of the renowned Carpet Riders of Gald have reached our land as well. Not only that, but everyone in the kingdom knows that you dismantled that slaver ring some months back. We are beyond grateful for your service!" the guard said, bowing deeply to us, which made me feel a little embarrassed.

It seemed that tales of our feats had reached this city while we were on the road. The dwarves in the former mining town, on the other hand, hadn't had any idea of who Teto and I were when we arrived there. I should've figured that a small town would've been so out of the loop.

"Ah, you may go through this gate if you'd like," the guard said, gesturing towards a gate with no line in front of it.

But I shook my head. "No, that's fine. We're not in a hurry, so we're just going to line up like everyone else."

“Teto wants to wait with Lady Witch!”

A-rank adventurers had privileges very similar to nobles’ and were usually allowed to use the special, noble-exclusive gate when entering a town or a city. However, this was only so they could save precious time in case they were working on an emergency commission, and whenever there was no pressing need for them to get into town quickly, they were to wait in the regular line just like the other adventurers.

“O-Oh, um, I see,” the guard mumbled before going back to his post awkwardly after we refused his offer.

I forced a smile on my face as we bid him goodbye and went to stand in line, where we passed the time observing the people coming and going. Most folks were in a good mood, and all of them seemed pretty healthy. In the inland realms of the kingdom, up until a few months ago, the giant monster sitting on the local leyline node in an abandoned mine had left everyone struggling to grow their crops. But not only was this town far enough from the mine to not be affected, but it also had direct access to the ocean, so they could always rely on their fishing industry for food.

Finally, our turn came around. We made it into town without issue and headed straight to the adventurer’s guild. The guards must’ve informed them of our arrival before we had even passed through the gates, because a muscular, two-meter-plus-tall man was waiting for us in front of the guildhall.

“Welcome to our humble town, Carpet Riders. I am the guildmaster of the adventurer’s guild here; my name is Dogle,” he said.

His arms were covered with grayish-brown scales, and his tail nearly brushed the ground. His skin bore a deep, tanned complexion, and there were horns sprouting from his head. He was unmistakably a dragonman.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Dogle. I’m Chise of the Carpet Riders. And this is...”

“Teto! I’m a swordswoman!” Teto chirped, her hand shooting up in the air.

The dragonman guildmaster simply gave us a small nod before ushering us to the guild’s reception room to continue our conversation. A-rank adventurers were often sent on confidential quests, so he most likely didn’t want to ask us the reason for our visit in front of all of the guild’s staff and adventurers.

"Well then, can I ask you what brings you to our town? If you need help with anything, let me know. I'll do everything in my power to assist you."

Teto and I looked at each other in confusion.

"Did the guards not tell you? We're here to eat seafood," I said.

"Ah, I know! Can you tell us where to find the best fish?" Teto asked.

Dogle stared at us in incomprehension, his jaw on the floor.

"Surely you must have some sort of mission to accomplish in our kingdom! Why else would you have come all the way here?" he asked us.

"Well, it wasn't exactly a mission per se, but one of our friends asked us to do something for her in Lawbyle. But we've already done that, and now we plan on enjoying some well-deserved rest and fresh seafood."

"Teto and Lady Witch just wanna relax!"

Dogle let out a long, deep sigh at our nonchalance.

"Are you two for real?" he muttered. "Well, Gald doesn't have any access to the ocean, so I guess I can see where you're coming from." He let out another sigh and looked up at the ceiling as if our conversation had physically tired him.

"We'll be staying in town for a while, so we'll help the guild out by taking care of the unpopular quests from time to time. I'm actually pretty good at herb picking."

"Teto likes running errands for people! Especially for older ladies—they always give Teto a little freebie!"

"Picking herbs and running errands, huh? Most A-rank adventurers couldn't care less about those types of quests. You two are impressive, in your own unique way," the guildmaster said.

I smiled awkwardly while Teto puffed out her chest in pride at his comment. The higher ranked an adventurer was, the more quests became available to them, which meant that, after reaching a certain rank, most adventurers wouldn't bother with the herb-picking and errand-running quests anymore. And that was especially true for A-

rank adventurers, who, for the most part, considered these simple tasks to be below their abilities and thought that accepting them would somehow lower their worth as adventurers. This was also why A-rank adventurers were reputed to be arrogant and haughty. But in our case...

"We're not hurting for cash, and besides, there are barely any A-rank quests in the first place," I said.

"So Teto and Lady Witch clean up the quests no one likes and everybody's happy! It's like community service!"

"I see... All right, I understand. I'll make sure to inform you when those unpopular quests stack up, so you can lend us a hand whenever you're free."

Soon after, Dogle had to leave, and he told the receptionist to answer all of our remaining questions. We asked her if she had any inn or rental housing recommendations. While inns were more convenient for short-term stays, we planned on spending a long time in this town, basically until we got our fill of seafood. This meant that not only would we rake up quite a high bill, but it would be difficult for us to travel back and forth between this town and the wasteland, since we wouldn't have a proper place to set up our transfer gate. In the end, after weighing the pros and the cons, we decided to rent a house somewhere in town for the duration of our stay.

CHAPTER 2

PEACEFUL DAYS IN THE PORT TOWN

“We plan on spending the next few days doing some sightseeing around town, so we’ll only start clearing the quests after that. Let us know if anything urgent comes up and we’ll take care of it as fast as we can,” I told the receptionist.

“Lady Witch! Teto is so excited for tomorrow!”

We left the guild and got a good night’s rest, then set out the next morning to explore the town. It boasted a huge port, most likely one of the biggest in the entire kingdom. The coast was divided into three sections: a fishing harbor, an industrial zone housing salt-production facilities and a seafood-processing plant, and, lastly, a bustling trade port.

A bevy of small boats were lined up in the fishing port. The fishermen would set out to sea before the sun was even up to catch fish, while the town’s women transported water from the ocean to a large pool in the industrial zone, where it would stay until the sun and wind had evaporated most of the water. After that, the women would transport it to a large stove, where they would boil the remainder until they were left with just the salt, which they’d use to pickle and cook the day’s catch. A little farther away, the trade port was bustling with longshoremen loading and unloading goods from the ships that had arrived from the other ports in the kingdom, as well as from the southern and western parts of the continent, while merchants traded their wares with each other right on the docks. Part of the goods that had arrived at the port would then be loaded onto riverboats and transported to the towns upstream.

Finally, there was also a fancier stretch sporting a couple of posh resorts a little farther away from the port, where nobles and other wealthy folk could come to enjoy sea bathing.

“What a lively town, Lady Witch!”

“It is. Let’s go visit the trade port when it’s a little less busy.”

Teto and I were taking our morning stroll along the coastline and taking in the hubbub

of the port town. After a couple of hours, the fishermen returned from their morning catch and we made our way to the morning market. Freshly caught fish were lined up at every stall, and vendors skillfully cooked them right in front of the customers, who, for the most part, were laborers on their lunch breaks.

“Who wants some charcoal-grilled fish?!”

“Anyone interested in some seafood and tomato soup?! It’s perfect for warming up after a morning of fishing!”

“Come try our grilled clams! They’re cooked in our secret sauce blend, fresh and delicious!”

“We’ve got freshly made deep-fried fish! Best enjoyed with some southern sauce!”

“Don’t miss out on our delicious seafood paella made with special grains grown in the south of the continent!”

That “secret blend of seasonings” one of the vendors had talked about looked a lot like fish sauce. As we strolled through the market, I noticed that a lot of the vendors were selling fruit- and vegetable-based sauces, and I even spotted someone selling rice. It seemed that the food culture here was quite diverse.

“Some of these dishes seem very unlike anything we’ve ever seen before. I wonder if they’re vestiges from our precursors... Or maybe they were introduced to this world by other reincarnators,” I muttered to myself. I was trying to imagine what these hypothetical culinary trailblazers had been like when Teto tugged on the bottom of my robe, pulling me back to reality.

“Lady Wiiitch, everything looks so delicious!”

“It really does. We haven’t eaten breakfast this morning, so I’m feeling pretty hungry. Let’s go buy something to eat, shall we?”

The enticing aroma of freshly cooked food awakened our appetites, and, unable to wait any longer, we each placed our orders.

“Lady Witch, what did you get?”

“Grilled fish and some seafood paella.”

It made me really happy to see that some people in this world included rice in their cooking, even if it wasn't the same sort of rice I was used to from my previous life.

"What did you order, Teto?"

"Teto got tomato soup, deep-fried fish, and grilled clams! But the food you bought looks really good too, Lady Witch!"

"We can share if you'd like," I offered with a smile.

"Yes!"

We took our food to a nearby outdoor table and started eating our breakfast.

"This fish is fresh and grilled to perfection. The paella is great too; the sourness of the tomato and the umami of the seafood complement each other really well."

"The tomato soup tastes so comforting. Teto really likes it! And the deep-fried fish and grilled clams taste really good too, but Teto thinks they would be even better with your seasonings, Lady Witch!"

"Soy sauce and tonkatsu sauce, you mean? These two make *everything* better."

Japanese food researchers had probably spent hundreds of years developing these condiments, but I had managed to easily recreate them in this world with my magic. We used them with almost every single meal, and even the attendant dolls really liked them.

"Let's buy some ingredients at the market and cook them with some soy sauce and tonkatsu sauce later. Oh, and we should also buy squid and shrimp to make seafood curry rice."

"Oooh, Teto loves curry! I'm so excited!"

We shared the rest of our food with each other and, once we were done, headed back to the market to buy some fresh seafood to cook later, as well as other ingredients, most of which were from the surrounding villages or from completely different parts of the continent.

"Everything looks so tasty," I commented as we made our way through the crowd.

“What are you going to buy, Lady Witch?”

She seemed to be content simply following me around and waiting as I scrupulously inspected all of the fruits and vegetables being sold at the market.

“Fresh and delicious vegetables! Come get yours now!”

“Who wants some freshly caught fish? You won’t be disappointed!”

“These vegetables and fish are all in season,” I mused out loud. “Can I have four of each of these, please?” I asked the vendors.

The vendors were all really nice to us, most likely because of our appearances. Whenever I had a question to ask them about their wares, I would lift up my hood to get a better look at the goods; they probably thought I was an apprentice magician running errands. A lot of them even gave us some freebies and extra ingredients.

Being an eternal twelve-year-old has its perks, I guess.

“Lady Witch, Lady Witch, that fish looks really tasty!”

“Oh, is that mackerel? It’s not really the season yet, though. Ideally you’d grill it with some salt or cut it up and broil it in soy sauce. We could also coat it with starch and deep-fry it—ooh, or maybe even cook it in dried plum sauce.”

I let my imagination run wild, fantasizing about enjoying all of these dishes with some fluffy white rice, and ended up impulsively buying some mackerel.

After we were done shopping, we explored some more of the trade port before heading to the industrial area and, feeling pretty energetic still, decided to extend our journey to a chic restaurant in the fancier part of town where all of the resorts were. The food was as exquisite as you’d expect from a place meant to serve vacationing blue bloods and other folks with lots of money to sling around.

“Lady Witch”—*munch munch*—“this pasta dish is delicious!”

“Is that so? I’m glad you’re enjoying your meal,” I said.

I smiled at Teto, who was stuffing herself with spaghetti alle vongole in bianco, a pasta dish made with clams and white wine, as I took small bites of my perfectly cooked crab

gratin, the golden brown crust melting in my mouth.

"This gratin is delicious too."

"It looks so good, Lady Witch!"

I couldn't help but chuckle at the hungry look on Teto's face. "Hand me your plate. I'll give you some."

I had a relatively small appetite, so I didn't mind sharing my food with her.

Despite the typical class of the restaurant's clientele, regular citizens would occasionally come to dine there on special occasions. Thus, the restaurant's staff wasn't particularly strict about manners. The waiters and cooking staff had actually been smiling at us the entire time, clearly amused by how much Teto seemed to enjoy her food.

"It was delicious, thank you," I told the restaurant's staff as I paid the bill.

"I wanna come back and try the rest of the menu!" Teto added.

We exited the restaurant and resumed our exploration of the port town.

"Lady Witch, where should we go next?"

"Hmm... How about the ocean?"

The northern part of the town's coast was dedicated to the fishing industry and trading port, but it seemed that there were beaches suitable for sea bathing a little farther south.

"Do you want to try learning how to swim, Lady Witch?"

"Nope, I just want to look at the ocean."

No matter how hard I tried, every time I ventured into the water, I sank like a stone. I'd decided staying away from the ocean and simply admiring it from afar would be our best course of action. It wasn't quite swimming season yet, so the beach was pretty empty when we arrived there; we enjoyed a nice stroll on the beach, listening to the sound of the waves and picking up seashells.

"These are beautiful," I commented. "Let's gather some for Beretta and the others too."

"Roger!"

And so, after a nice day of sightseeing, Teto and I headed back to our rental home, where we took the transfer gate I had installed back to the wasteland. There, we helped Beretta and the other attendant dolls cook a nice meal with the ingredients we had bought at the market and savored it with them.

CHAPTER 3

THE HARDWORKING WITCH HELPS AT THE GUILD

After spending a few days wandering around the port town, Teto and I finally headed back to the adventurer's guild.

"Good morning, Miss Chise, Miss Teto. As per the guildmaster's instructions, I have compiled all of the unpopular quests that need to be taken care of," the receptionist said.

"Thanks. Well then, what should we start with?" I mused out loud.

"What about this one, Lady Witch?"

Just as we had told the guildmaster, we didn't plan on taking on any fancy quests. Mostly we just meant to focus on random little tasks no one wanted to take care of, which meant that our daily routine was a bit different from the typical adventurer's. You see, most of them scrambled to the guild as soon as it opened to fight for the best quests, but Teto and I spent our mornings leisurely walking around the port's market, chitchatting with the vendors and fishermen, enjoying some nice breakfast, and buying fresh ingredients to cook in the evening. Most of the adventurers had already left by the time we got to the guild, and we got to choose which routine task to do that day without having to deal with the crowd.

Some of the quests were pretty short and sweet, while others took us out of town. We first took on the smaller tasks. The best part with these was that we would usually be done by noon, leaving us free to enjoy our afternoons as we pleased. For the longer quests, we relied on our trusty flying carpet to travel between towns, so we wouldn't have to spend the night at an inn.

For about a month, we worked on quests four days a week and spent the rest of our time relaxing, either at the port town or at the wasteland with Beretta and the other dolls.

"Chise, could you guys take care of this quest too?"

Dogle would occasionally ask us to take on some extra tasks when we weren't particularly busy.

"Sorry, but we're done for today," I said.

We had spent the entire morning running errands, and I fully intended to enjoy my afternoon. I was currently sitting in a corner of the guildhall, reading a book I had bought in town. Due to its nature as a port town, this town's library boasted quite a collection of books I had never seen before. Teto, on the other hand, had headed to the guild's training grounds to have mock duels with the other adventurers.

"Oh, come on... You're not doing anything important, are you? And besides, don't you want money?" Dogle insisted.

I peeled away my eyes from my book for a split second, threw him an unimpressed look, and went back to reading.

"We already told you we're not too worried about money right now," I said.

Every time we left town to go on the longer missions, we would stop by the wasteland to get some of the medicinal herbs and potions we stocked there and sell them to the guild when we came back. Between that and the money we made from the quests, we had more than enough money to live comfortably for a while in the port town. On top of that, I had taken to exploring the ocean with Teto. I would wrap myself in several layers of protective barriers and dive all the way to the bottom of the ocean. There, I would find amber, pearls, and even ambergris, an ingredient often used in perfumes. I always looked forward to these adventures, as they felt a bit like going on a treasure hunt. I didn't plan on selling any of the stuff I found, but if I did, there was no doubt these would go for a small fortune.

"I've never seen such unmotivated A-ranks before," Dogle said with a sigh.

"It's not that we're not motivated. We just don't need to take on that many quests." I shrugged. We already had more than enough cash, and our reputation was well established. Having worked as adventurers for over thirty years, we liked guiding the newer adventurers and giving them advice more than taking on quests.

"Speaking of which, I couldn't help but notice how muscular the adventurers here are,"

I remarked.

I had decided to read a book today, but I did occasionally accompany Teto to the training grounds so I wouldn't get rusty, and every single time I was impressed by how physically strong the adventurers were.

"Ha ha ha! Of course they are! Who do you think trains them?" Dogle said, preening.

"They're a bit rough around the edges when it comes to fighting, though," I pointed out, and Dogle groaned in embarrassment.

A lot of the quests the guild received in this town had to do with protecting merchant ships or fending off monsters on board. Naturally, Dogle, who was still an active A-rank adventurer himself, was aware of this and always made sure to put an emphasis on physical strength when training the other adventurers. However, Dogle, being a dragonman, possessed remarkable physical prowess that far surpassed that of humans. His exceptional strength allowed him to effortlessly subjugate large groups of monsters with just a swing of his huge sword. Having never faced the need to rely on martial arts or proper combat techniques, he inadvertently overlooked teaching these skills to the guild's adventurers.

"Well, they'll definitely improve on that front if they keep training with Teto," I said.

Teto usually fought with a longsword, but after helping so many other adventurers train, she had become proficient in a lot of different fighting styles and could handle just about any weapon and teach its use just as competently.

"No, not like that! You need to do it like this! No, more like this!"

Even from my spot inside the guildhall, I could hear the instructions she was giving the adventurers. She wasn't very good at giving technical explanations and was mostly using her body to show them what to do, making them repeat the same movements until they grasped them. Despite her unconventional approach, it proved pretty efficient, and I had no doubt that the adventurers under her guidance would soon make tremendous progress.

"How about you?" Dogle asked me. "You're not going to help the others train?"

"Well, I guess I could teach simple spells to those with high magical potential, but..."

Most people in Gald were beastmen, who were known for their particularly poor mana pool and magical abilities. I would occasionally come across young adventurers with high magical potential and take them under my wing, first teaching them simple spells that would be useful in their day-to-day life and then gradually moving on to attack spells or potion making.

I had thought that I would have more opportunities to teach magic in Lawbyle, since its population was a lot more varied, but it seemed I was wrong: most magicians who were registered at the guild already had a magic instructor.

“Oh, those guys are disciples from the magic schools,” Dogle told me when I explained my issues to him. “In Lawbyle, most people who can use magic join one of these rather than seek individual mentors.”

“Magic schools?” I asked, stopping my reading to look at him.

“They’re... organizations that educate and train magicians.”

After the catastrophe that struck two thousand years ago, nearly all mana had vanished from the world. A lot of people couldn’t survive in this environment; only the ones whose bodies didn’t rely entirely on mana made it. The number of mages in the world took a steep dive.

In the wake of that, many countries, hoping to retain what little remained of a decisive military resource, ennobled their mages en masse, from which arose the title “magus.” To ensure that their heritage wouldn’t die with them, these magi took in disciples to receive their knowledge, all while trying to advance their own magical abilities. Throughout these two thousand years, they nurtured many talented individuals, gradually increasing their peerage. The insular legacies of magic passed from magus to disciple would form the principal “schools of magic.”

“A lot of people claim that being a disciple in a magic school is the safest path to becoming a court magician,” Dogle added.

I hummed. “I wonder what kind of magic they teach.”

These magic schools had persisted in their practice for centuries. I wondered if I might be able to learn new things by visiting them.

“They all have their own characteristics and specializations. I’ve heard it’s the same in

every country, but that trend is especially strong here."

A select few disciples would secure themselves a spot among the court magicians, while the others would either work for nobles or merchants, become adventurers, or give private magic lessons all around the kingdom.

"Well, some of those magi have gotten so powerful they've become absolutely insufferable."

"Is that so?"

"Yup. Argh, just thinking about it makes me want to punch something! I'm gonna head to the training grounds and ask Teto if she wants to practice with me for a bit," Dogle said, standing up in one swift motion and heading to the training grounds.

I was about to ask him if he *really* had nothing more important to do as the guildmaster, but I decided not to say anything. After all, this was probably his way of relaxing, and Teto seemed excited to duel him, so I just watched them in silence.

Teto didn't let herself get deterred by the dragonman's size and fought him head-on, Dogle parrying her attacks with his large sword. But after several minutes of fighting...

"Argh! I can't believe I lost!" Dogle exclaimed. "I'm one of the strongest people in this country, if not *the* strongest!"

Thanks to his physique, he hadn't sustained any major injuries; he simply lowered his sword in defeat.

"Thank you for training with me!" Teto said. "It was really fun!"

"Let's do it again, yeah? And I'd like to fight Chise too, next. You're A-rank too. It'll be fun," Dogle said, throwing me a glance from the training grounds.

But I shook my head. "I don't want to; mock duels are exhausting."

Dogle's shoulders dropped in disappointment.

"Anyway, it's time for us to go. Thanks for training with Teto, everyone. *Heal! Clean!*"

I went around the training grounds and used magic to heal the adventurers' wounds

and get the dirt and blood out of their clothes. They thanked me, and we bid them goodbye before heading to our rental house. Most of the adventurers who were out doing quests were about to head to the guild's drinking hall to relax, and I wanted to get home before it got too noisy.

CHAPTER 4

SUBJUGATING THE MARINE MONSTER

Teto and I spent leisurely days in the port town, clearing the guild's unpopular quests and supplying them with medicinal herbs and potions. However, at some point, the guild's staff started to look like they really wanted us to take on some more difficult quests. About three months had passed when, one early summer day, Dogle came to us, looking a lot meeker than usual.

"Chise, Teto... We need your help with a certain quest," he said.

"That's new. Usually, you ask us if we can 'take care' of the quests, not that you 'need our help,'" I noted. "What is it?"

Normally, I'd just flat-out refuse any quests he wanted to throw at us, but, judging by his expression, it seemed that things were pretty serious.

"A kraken has appeared in our waters."

"A kraken? You mean one of these giant squid monsters?" I asked.

Krakens were B+-rank monsters—giant cephalopods who snared hapless landlubbers in their tentacles and dragged them into the ocean. Their immense strength allowed them to effortlessly crush midsize boats and hinder the navigation of even the largest ships.

"Yeah. Until it's gone, the merchant ships and fishermen can't leave port."

"That's not good!" Teto piped up. "But why did a kraken appear here all of a sudden?"

Strong monsters loved places with abundant mana. Once a monster found a hospitable place, they would make it their territory, and it was very rare for them to ever leave. I could think of two possible explanations: either it had just recently evolved into a kraken, or there was an excess of mana in the water that made it spawn here.

"There's not really any way for us to know what's going on in the depths, so I have no

idea," Dogle said. "The only thing we know is that it decided to make these waters its territory."

"Fine, we'll help," I said. "Although I have a little question. Since that monster's attacking merchant ships, shouldn't it be the job of the feudal lord to deal with it rather than the adventurer's guild?"

Dogle's expression turned glum. "He's the one who asked us to deal with the kraken. While he does have warships to fend off pirates and sea monsters, you need magicians to deal with krakens. And, well, the lord deemed that his magicians were too useless—ahem, that they didn't have the necessary tools to deal with that monster."

"Did you just call them useless or are my ears deceiving me?" I asked, glaring at him.

He tried to backpedal, but I had clearly heard it. Not having any other choice, he told me what he meant by "useless." The current feudal lord had a contract with one of the magic schools, but it seemed that their mages weren't skilled enough to deal with a monster of this rank.

"Well, basically the lord's been pals with that specific magic school for a long time; he keeps hiring them, even if their mages aren't great."

"I'm not too surprised. Since they don't have any competition, they probably don't put as much effort into their teaching," I said.

"They can deal with pirates and monsters ranked C and below just fine, but anything above that's a bit challenging to them, according to the lord himself. Hence my approaching you on his behalf."

If we refused or couldn't defeat the kraken, the lord would have no choice but to ask the government to send a few court magicians to help. However, should it come to that, it might cast doubt on the lord's ability to govern this territory... Not that this was any of our concern, though.

"When should we head out?" I asked Dogle.

"We want this to be dealt with as soon as possible, so the lord's warships will leave in two days to fight the kraken. I'll be coming along too."

"Oh, Teto has something super important to ask before we go!" Teto said, turning to

Dogle with a serious look on her face. “Is kraken yummy?”

Dogle was taken aback for a few seconds, but he finally answered, “I’ve heard it’s considered a delicacy.”

Dogle didn’t seem particularly amused, but I couldn’t help but chuckle at Teto’s question. It was exactly what I expected out of her.

Two days went by, and it was finally time for us to go fight the kraken. We hopped onto the lord’s warship with Dogle and headed towards the monster’s last known whereabouts.

“Why did the lord hire adventurers when he has us?! He underestimates our school!”

“You’re right! Who in their right mind would hire that random magician from who-knows-where?!”

Two mages were talking very loudly on the deck under the disapproving gazes of the ship’s crew. Annoyed by their attitude, the captain of the ship scolded the mages, who went back to their post with sullen expressions.

“Hey, are they...”

“Yup. These two are from that damn school,” Dogle answered with a disapproving sniff, scowling at the two mages.

A quick glance told me they were around the level of C-rank adventurers; they weren’t incompetent per se, but they would definitely struggle against the kraken.

“Oooh, Lady Witch! The ship is so fast!” Teto exclaimed, her eyes gleaming with excitement as she stood near the bow of the ship, enjoying the wind on her face. Like any other sailing vessel, it relied on the natural wind to advance, but the mages kept a steady stream of wind magic flowing into the sails, speeding us ahead.

“Guess you need a ship with this much get-up-and-go when pursuing pirates, huh?” I mused out loud.

If the mages split their attention between keeping the ship at speed *and* fighting the kraken, they might not have enough mana left to allocate to the return trip after we defeated it—or, in the worst-case scenario, if we had to run away from it. And if that

happened, the monster might just be able to sink the ship along with everyone on board. Naturally, the feudal lord had thought about this eventuality, and this was why he had hired Teto and me—as well as Dogle—to deal with the defeat-the-kraken part.

We sailed for a little while until, finally, we arrived at the spot where the kraken had last been seen.

“Time to take down that kraken! Everyone, throw the bait into the sea!” the captain yelled.

The soldiers all grabbed the monster carcasses we had taken along and threw them into the water. They hadn’t drained the monsters’ blood, nor had they taken the magic stones out of their bodies, in the hopes that the kraken would be drawn in by the scent. The only downside of that method was that it might attract other sea monsters as well.

“Teto, I’ll protect the ship from above, okay? *Fly!*”

“Okay! Teto will do her best to keep everyone safe!”

I soared into the sky as Teto waved me goodbye and everyone else on the ship gawked at me. The mages seemed particularly shocked.

“F-Flight magic?!”

“No way! Even in our school, only a handful of people can use it!”

I also heard a soldier mutter, “Are you sure it’s a good idea to send this little girl alone to fend off the monsters?”

“Don’t worry!” Teto piped up. “Lady Witch is super strong!”

The soldiers still looked unconvinced, so Dogle chimed in, “The Carpet Riders aren’t A-rank just for show. Also, I wouldn’t call her a ‘little girl’ if I were you; she’s probably older than you!”

Dogle was well respected in the region due to his many achievements and his role as guildmaster, so his words held a lot more authority than Teto’s. The soldiers didn’t doubt him; they seemed even more shocked than earlier.

“H-Hmph! So what if she can use flight magic?” one of the mages said, his voice

wavering. "She won't be able to attack like that!"

Once again, an expression of worry appeared on the soldiers' faces.

"Well, time to prove to these guys they have nothing to worry about. *Sound Bomb!* *Thunder Bolt!*"

I loosed two spells at the ocean's surface. The first one was an acoustic bomb that I amplified with Wind Magic—after wrapping it in a barrier, of course—to disorient the monsters. Then, I used a good ol' *Thunder Bolt* to finish them off.

"Wh-What was that?!"

The sound bomb exploded beneath the surface, creating a giant column of water that stunned all of the creatures that had gathered around the bait, making them faint and bursting their air bladders. A few of them managed to survive the blast but were electrocuted instantly by my trusty *Thunder Bolt*.

"A-Amazing... So that's the true power of the Carpet Riders..."

I quickly conjured up a wind to disperse the steam and observed my handiwork.

"A pretty good catch, if I dare say so myself. This shouldn't have damaged the monsters' bodies too much," I noted to myself.

While it was difficult to fight sea monsters in the water due to their terrain advantage, it wasn't like they were invincible. Just like any other monster, they had their weaknesses, and I simply used those to defeat them—all while making sure I wouldn't damage their bodies too much so we could retrieve the materials later.

"Yup, that was pretty smart of me." I gave myself a mental pat on the back.
"*Psychokinesis!*"

I hauled up all of the monsters' remains; as I was directing them to the ship, I suddenly felt strong mana approaching from under the water.

"Everyone! A really strong monster is coming. Be careful!" I warned the others, using *Whisper* so that my voice would reach them.

Right as the words left my mouth, countless tentacles appeared from under the water

as if piercing through the surface.

CHAPTER 5

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE KRAKEN

The tentacles shot up, seizing some of the monster bodies I had lifted up with *Psychokinesis* and pulling them into the ocean. Then its head emerged.

“Aaah! It’s there! The kraken!”

“Don’t move from your post, everyone! Soldiers, get your crossbows!”

“Throw all of our harpoons at it!”

The soldiers and the crew of the ship knew the kraken was coming, yet not a single one of them showed signs of panic at the sight of the giant monster. They instantly readied their weapons and were steeling themselves to do what damage they could when, all of a sudden, the monster’s tentacles reached for the ship.

“Haaa!” With a battle cry, Teto used Body Hardening to protect herself and started slashing at the tentacles with her mana-infused sword, scattering tentacle chunks all over the deck.

“I’m gonna show you what I’m made of! Dragonchange!” Dogle grabbed the large sword he was carrying on his back as the shape of his head changed and the scales covering his arms extended to the rest of his body. His sword began to cut through the monster’s tentacles like butter.

“Guess that guy’s not A-rank for show either,” I mused to myself. “Usually, people retire when they become guildmaster, but dragonmen have a pretty long life span, so I guess he still has a few years of adventuring left in him— Oof!”

I was so impressed by Dogle and Teto’s performance that I almost didn’t notice the kraken’s tentacles shooting up to grab more of the monsters’ bodies that I’d left hanging in midair. I decided to fly out of the creature’s reach. I had gone out of my way to leave my haul intact today, and I wasn’t about to surrender it to an overfed squid with an inferiority complex!

“We’re going to prove to the lord that we’re as good as that adventurer! *Wind Bullet!*”

“Don’t fall behind, guys! *Wind Cutter!*”

The mages joined the fight, raising their staves and throwing wind spells at the kraken. They might’ve been effective against C-rank monsters, but they had little to no effect on the kraken. The monster’s body absorbed the wind bullets, and the wind blades barely scratched it.

“Don’t let it run away! Let’s finish it now!” the captain roared.

Several of the soldiers’ arrows and harpoons had already pierced through the monster’s body; blue blood seeped from its wounds.

“He’s right; let’s deal the finishing blow. *Thunder Bolt!*”

I swung my staff and poured about 10,000 MP into my spell, unleashing a powerful bolt of lightning right above the kraken’s head. Electricity coursed through the monster’s body, effectively killing it on the spot, steam billowing off the water’s surface.

“Looks like I might have half roasted that kraken,” I said before using Mana Perception to confirm the kill. I dropped the remaining monster bodies I had still been carrying with *Psychokinesis* onto the deck before returning to the ship myself.

“Welcome back, Lady Witch!”

“I’m back, Teto. What do you think? Pretty good catch, huh?”

The soldiers started carrying the monsters’ remains away so we would have more room to walk on the deck before thrusting harpoons lashed to the ship with chains into the monster’s body to drag it all the way back to town.

“That’s one of the lord’s warships!”

“Look! They’re dragging a monster behind it!”

“It’s the kraken! They defeated it!”

“Look, Dogle’s on board too!”

“Was he the one who killed the monster?”

We could hear the excited cheers of the crowd as the ship returned to the port. A huge crowd was there, most of the town’s residents preparing the port to welcome us.

“Lady Witch, will we be able to eat the monster stones and yummy fishies you defeated?”

“Sadly, no. Our contract states that all the monsters we kill during the expedition are the feudal lord’s property.”

Teto and I watched as the fishermen, the adventurers who had stayed in town, and the guild’s staff dismantled the monsters’ bodies.

It must’ve cost the lord quite a hefty sum to hire the guild to defeat that kraken, not to mention the money he’d lost due to the merchant ships not being able to leave the port. He had probably added that clause to our contract to slightly make up for his losses.

“Good work out there, you two,” Dogle said. “Our job’s done here. Do you have plans for the rest of the day?”

“We’re going to head home for now, and we’ll come to the guild to collect our payment in two to three days. Why are you asking? Is there something special about today?” I asked, tilting my head in confusion.

A mischievous grin formed on Dogle’s face. “We caught a large number of sea creatures, but most of them are prone to spoiling, and transporting them might be difficult. So the lord came up with the idea to organize a festival to celebrate us defeating that kraken instead of letting them go to waste.”

“Oooh! Lady Witch, we can eat the fishies! Let’s go, let’s go!” Teto urged me, her eyes sparkling.

I nodded. “Sure. I’ve heard some of those sea monsters are actually quite delicious, so I’m curious.”

“That’s the spirit! I’ve heard they’re also going to bring out some nice booze, so let’s have a blast tonight!”

I could tell that Teto was really excited, and I shot her a cautionary smile, as if to remind her to not drink too much. We decided to wait at the guild until the townsfolk were done getting the food ready. Teto and Dogle started drinking right away while I sipped on some juice—I didn't much care for alcohol—all while reading one of the books I had bought the other day.

"Aaah! That's some good booze you got there, Teto!" Dogle said. "Where did you get it from?"

"Lady Witch got it for me!"

I had taken out a bottle of brandy I had made with my Creation Magic, since it was Teto's favorite drink. I had also used my magic to create ice cubes for them to enjoy their drink on the rocks.

"You're not having any, Chise? I'm pretty sure you're old enough to drink, aren't you?" Dogle asked me, his cheeks slightly red from the alcohol.

I lifted my gaze from my book. "I can't handle my alcohol very well. And besides, I don't like the way it dulls my thinking, and I don't particularly care for the taste either."

My body was that of an eternal twelve-year-old, so it had a hard time processing alcohol. It wasn't as if I couldn't have any, but I would need to use my magic to strengthen my liver function, and it just didn't feel worth the hassle.

Dogle hummed at my answer. "By the way, you seem to always have a book in your hands, don't you? What're you reading?" he asked me next.

"I pretty much read anything that looks interesting. This one is, let's see... *Tales of the Kingdom of Lawbyle*. And the story I'm reading now is called 'The Hero Dogreen.'"

The book was a compilation of folktales and legends from the Kingdom of Lawbyle; each of these stories seemed like it would be pretty popular among children. The story I was currently reading was about a young dragonman who finds a beautiful dragonwoman washed up on the shore. He rescues her, and the pair eventually fall in love and have a child together. Said child then grows up to become incredibly strong and defeats the evil monsters that threaten the people, earning the title of hero. It reminded me of a mix of two popular Japanese folktales, Kaguya-hime and Momotaro, and I felt slightly nostalgic while reading it.

“‘The Hero Dogreen,’ huh? Damn, that brings me back. Speaking of which, did you know I’m one of his descendants?” Dogle told me. I threw him an unimpressed glance. “Damn, if looks could kill... Seriously, though, I don’t know if it’s true or not, but that’s what my family always says.”

He then proceeded to fish out the pendant he was wearing around his neck from under his shirt. It was some sort of scale. It seemed pretty worn-out, had lost most of its color, and was even chipped in some parts, but I somehow couldn’t take my eyes away from it.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“A pendant that’s been in my family for ages. No one knows exactly where it comes from, but legend says it belonged to Dogreen’s mother, who dropped it from the sky. Supposedly, it’s the scale of a dragon.”

“Huh, is that so?”

I threw a glance at the book, wondering if what he told me could be true. After all, it would only be natural that some parts of those folktales and legends would get lost as they passed from one generation to the next. Maybe the same thing had happened to Dogle’s story.

“Thanks for telling me. It was interesting.”

“Don’t tell me you believe that story?” he asked me, raising an eyebrow. “Even I don’t believe it. But well, my folks always told me that I had to become strong and help people, just like Dogreen,” he said with a soft chuckle before taking another sip of his drink.

I opened my book to a different page.

“Well, there are many stories that start with something being dropped from the sky in this book, so I thought it wasn’t that far-fetched.”

Usually, you’d expect the folktales of a country bordering the ocean to start with something related to the sea, but the sky theme seemed to be pretty consistent across the stories in this book, so I didn’t find Dogle’s story odd.

“Lady Witch, you seem to be having a lot of fun right now!” Teto piped up. “And when

Lady Witch is happy, Teto is happy too!"

"Ah, I see your point. Well, I don't know if these stories are true, but there is supposedly a floating island somewhere hereabouts. It's apparently been there since way before the kingdom was born, and I've heard it drifts close to the royal capital about once every ten years or so," Dogle said.

"I see. Maybe some of the people who saw that island came up with these stories... Or maybe there really are people living on that island. Who knows," I said, before muttering to myself that I should go to the capital one day in the hopes of seeing it for myself.

After that, we headed to the feast, and, once we had had our fill of fresh sea creatures and Teto had gotten pretty tipsy, we headed back to our rental house.

CHAPTER 6

FLYING JADE

It would still be a few days before the adventurer's guild was done calculating our reward for defeating the kraken, so Teto and I had decided to head back to the wasteland in the meantime. I was currently standing in a room in our mansion, staring at a certain something and letting out the occasional sigh.

"What should I do with all of this?" I mumbled to myself.

"Lady Witch, have you not made up your mind yet?" Teto asked me.

Since earlier, I had been preoccupied with the cavorite crystals and magic metals Lariel had given us for defeating the giant monster in the abandoned mine. They were cool and all, but I genuinely had no idea what to do with them, and selling them wouldn't do either; the cavorite was way too dangerous.

"What about using them to make a new staff?" Teto suggested.

"A new staff? Hm... That's not a bad idea, actually."

A mage's staff channeled its user's mana to adjust the magic's directivity, making it easier to control. The catalyst one used when creating the staff had an influence on what type of magic the user could wield, as different catalysts enhanced the potency of different magics, thereby reducing the mana required for casting spells.

The oak staff I'd been using for over thirty years now was actually pretty mediocre. While it did grant me better control over my magic and made my spells stronger, it was still pretty basic. After all, I had made it right after getting reincarnated in this world. If this were a video game, it would be the kind of weapon you got right at the beginning, with, let's say, two points in physical attacks and one point in magical attacks.

"But it still has some advantages, though... The biggest one being that it lets me use any kind of magic."

As I previously mentioned, different catalysts enhanced different magic types' power. However, this also meant that if you used a type of magic that was not compatible with your catalyst, its effects would be much weaker. For this reason, most mages chose a catalyst based on the magic they were the strongest at and stuck to spells within that category.

"But I have so much mana that voluntarily limiting the types of magic I can use seems a bit silly to me," I mused out loud.

To put it simply, the staff I had right now didn't have any perks, but it didn't have any downsides either.

"You could make a staff for flying! Right now, you're using both your staff and your broom, but maybe you could combine them into one!" Teto suggested.

"Ooh, a staff for flying, huh?"

If I used a cavorite crystal—which had a high affinity with Wind Magic—as the catalyst, not only would it make me fly faster, but it would also reduce the amount of mana I'd have to use to stay in the air.

"What material should I use to make the staff?"

"You could use a World Tree branch!" Teto said.

"Oh, that's true."

We had planted the World Trees back when we had barely begun working on the regeneration of the wasteland due to the large quantity of mana they produced. They had grown into some real giants since then. Every time a storm blew through, they'd shed a few branches, and I had asked Beretta and the others to pick those up and store them just in case.

"World Tree branches would work great," I mused. "I need to pin down what else I'll need."

"Teto's going to get the tree branches!"

The two of us left the room, Teto going to the storage room while I made my way to our personal library. There, I took out the staff-making manual I had once bought and

started reading through the instructions.

"Lady Wiiitch, I have the branches!" Teto announced as she stepped into the room.

"Thank you, Teto. I've quickly read through the staff-making manual; I think I'm ready to do this."

I gathered everything I would need to make my new staff: the World Tree branches, a cavorite crystal, and some mythril ore.

"All righty, first... *Extraction!*"

I used the same spell Beretta had used back in the mine to extract the mythril from the ore. It was a spell commonly used in Earth Magic and in alchemy, and it allowed me to refine the mythril ore into pure mythril ingots. After that, I adjusted the ingots' shapes and moved on to the cavorite crystal.

"*Charge!*" I chanted, putting my hand on the crystal. "It really floats... Impressive."

"Oooh, it's so pretty!" Teto chirped.

The fully charged cavorite crystal emitted a soft green glow. The mana created an antigravity effect, lifting the crystal clear of the table just slightly. I wondered if, on top of having an affinity with Wind Magic, it could also enhance Gravity Magic.

"Let's make it look even better."

I used my magic to scrape away the unnecessary parts. The cool thing with cavorite crystals was that they got harder the more mana was poured into them, which made it easy to separate the pure crystal from the dross.

To finish it off, I made some polishing wax with my Creation Magic, which I then rubbed all over the crystal, giving it a beautiful, shiny finish.

"Whoa, it looks just like a precious gem!" Teto marveled.

"I could cut it to really bring out the shine, but I think I'd rather keep it like this. All right, time to finish making the head."

I poured a ton of mana into the mythril ingots to basically mold them like clay into a

socket for the crystal.

“Okay, that part’s done. Time to move on to the shaft.”

I held up a few of the World Tree branches Teto had brought me and compared their sizes and thickness. When I found one I was satisfied with, I cast a couple spells to smoothen it out into my ideal shaft. After that, all I had to do was polish it with some wax, let it dry, and, finally, assemble my staff. I threw on a couple of flight enchantments and it was ready.

“Here it is: my new staff.”

I had made it with an especially long branch, so it ended up almost as big as my broom.

“Should I go try it?”

“Yeah!”

As Teto and I exited the mansion, we stumbled across Beretta.

“Is that a new magic staff, Master?” she asked me.

“Yeah, I just made it. Look,” I said, showing it to her. “I’m about to go test it. Would you like to come?”

“Yes, please.”

I used Teleportation Magic to take the three of us to a deserted spot in the wasteland.

“All righty, no matter how strong my spells are, I shouldn’t break anything here.”

“Good luck, Lady Witch! I’ve already made an obstacle for you to train with!” said Teto, using her magic to raise a dirt barrier.

“And I will stand back and observe your new weapon, Master.”

I brandished my staff and let my mana course through it.

“Amazing...” I breathed in astonishment.

The staff I had been using up until now was a very basic weapon, so I never felt anything in particular when using it, but the second I poured some mana into this new one, a surge of power resonated through me as it amplified my mana and the staff emitted a gentle green glow.

“Wind Cutter!”

The wind blades that came out of my staff were about the same size as the ones I was used to from the old staff. However, the mana concentration of the blades was so incredibly high that they cut through the dirt barrier Teto had created like it was butter.

“There’s no way I’d be able to use that spell against another human... Teto, make a big rock please.”

“Roger!”

She condensed a heap of dirt into a single, rock-solid ball. This time, I decided to go for wind bullets. All thirty blasts of compressed air struck the boulder with impressive force, carving deep into its surface and penetrating about halfway through.

“This staff’s power is no joke. Let’s try another type of magic now...”

I had Beretta measure the staff’s performance, and it turned out that it amplified Wind Magic’s power tenfold, and Gravity Magic and unpected magic threefold. As for the other types of magic, they didn’t seem to be affected by the staff in the slightest; they didn’t get a boost, but they hadn’t taken a hit either.

“What an impressive power. Maybe *too* impressive...”

The Lightning Magic spell I often used, *Thunder Bolt*, possessed Wind Magic components. If I used it with my new staff, it would have ten times as much power as it normally did, which could cause uncontrollable results if I wasn’t careful.

“Guess I have to put a stopper on it, huh?”

I made a cap out of mythril, which I then fitted onto the pommel of my staff. Then, I cast a restrictive enchantment onto the cap so as to limit the staff’s firepower to a level similar to my original oak staff. I also noticed that when the staff was glowing, it turned stronger and tougher, making it suitable for physical combat as well.

"All righty, time to try flying with this bad boy."

"Lady Witch, can I try it too after?" Teto asked.

"Please be careful, Master."

I straddled my staff, kicked the ground, and started levitating, the staff leaving a trail of green sparkles behind me.

"This staff is really great; it's much easier to control than my broom."

With the broom, there was always a slight delay whenever I tried to accelerate, decelerate, or turn, making it feel a bit clunky. But my new staff moved as if it were reading my mind, responding instantly to every little thought I had. Not only that, but the cavorite crystal constantly emitted a repulsive force, which worked almost like a barrier against the wind, allowing me to fly as fast as I wanted with no resistance whatsoever. Even during sharp turns, the staff seemed to counter the force of the wind, keeping me steady and in control.

"I can't seem to find where the speed tops out."

I was supplying the staff with the exact same amount of mana I always put into my broom, yet the staff was much, much faster. Every drop of mana I poured into it was amplified tenfold and turned into speed. I wondered just how fast it could go if I filled it with mana to the brim. That thought was both exhilarating and terrifying.

"I'm going to need to add a stopper for the speed too... And I definitely have to find some sort of magical tool to prevent accidents when I'm flying so fast."

I headed back to Teto and Beretta on the ground and immediately made the adjustments to my staff.

"Okay, this should do."

I attached a mythril ring to the handle of my staff and applied a bunch of restrictive enchantments to it: speed limit, reduced descent velocity, and a protective barrier, plus some other minor adjustments.

"All done!"

“Lady Witch, can I ride the staff with you now?”

“Sure. What about you, Beretta? Wanna go for a ride?”

Only two people could fit on the staff at once, but I figured I was good for another couple of rounds.

She shook her head. “I am all right, Master. I will brew some tea while waiting for you and Lady Teto to be done.”

“Are you sure? Well, we’re off, then!”

Beretta took out a table and a mana-powered burner from our magic bag, set them up, and started brewing some tea. Meanwhile, I told Teto to come behind me on the staff and, after making sure she was comfortable, the two of us took off. We spent about thirty minutes flying around in the sky. I got a bit carried away and didn’t decelerate at all on the way down, realizing a bit too late that the wind pressure might stir up some dust, which would ruin the tea. But, fortunately, the cavorite crystal’s repulsive force allowed us to land smoothly without causing any damage to the tea or Beretta.

“We’re back!” I announced.

“Hi again, Beretta!” Teto chirped.

“Welcome back, Master, Lady Teto. The tea is ready”

Teto and I sat down and sipped on the freshly brewed tea, gazing at the grasslands and the forest in the distance. When we were flying earlier, I couldn’t help but be impressed by just how much greener this place was.

“Congratulations on your new staff, Master; it is truly remarkable. By the way, if you don’t mind my asking, what name do you plan to give it?” Beretta asked me.

“A name, huh?”

I stayed silent for a while, trying to come up with a suitable name for my new staff. Up until now, I’d just been referring to it as my “flying staff” and my “cavorite staff,” but that definitely wasn’t cool enough. I took a good look at it, and the beautiful green color of the cavorite crystal gave me an idea.

“What about ‘Flying Jade’?” I said.

I had gotten inspired by the beautiful trail of jade green sparkles that the staff left behind when I was flying on it.

“It’s a really nice name!” Teto said.

“I agree; it is beautiful.”

“Then Flying Jade it is. It’s a bit of a shame I can’t use it to the maximum of its abilities, though; it’s just too powerful, you know?” I said, giving my new staff a gentle stroke.

Teto and I spent a couple more days relaxing in the wasteland before heading back to the port town.

CHAPTER 7

SETTING OFF TO THE CAPITAL OF LAWBYLE

After collecting our reward for subjugating the kraken, Teto and I resumed our slow-paced life in the coastal town, taking care of the unpopular quests at the guild and occasionally going to visit Beretta and the others in the wasteland. But one day, as we headed to the guild to take on some new quests, Dogle summoned us.

“Sorry for calling you in all of a sudden,” he said.

“It’s fine. Did something happen?” I inquired.

“Is there another monster you want us to beat up?” Teto asked next.

I was a little anxious. Guildmasters didn’t usually summon A-rank parties for no reason—something big must’ve happened. Or so I thought.

“Ever since you two came to our town, the number of uncleared quests has decreased drastically,” Dogle said, a small smile on his face.

“I’m glad to hear that.”

“Teto and Lady Witch are having lots of fun clearing the quests!”

A-rank quests were incredibly rare. We got one about once a month if we were lucky. This meant that we had no choice but to take on lower-ranked quests. Since Teto and I had more than enough money, we left the good quests to the other adventurers and only took on the unpopular quests that offered average or below rewards.

Whenever a quest’s reward was too far below market value, the guild would launch an investigation to determine the reason behind it. It was frustrating when clients with enough money lowballed the rewards, as it could lead to a decrease in the market value of quest rewards. This put adventurers and the guild in a tough spot, making it hard for some folks to make ends meet.

To avoid such issues, the guild carefully checked each request beforehand, and if the

pay was not fair, they rejected it. However, there were times when clients genuinely needed help but couldn't offer much, or the quest could turn into something bigger later if not handled promptly. In such cases, the guild accepted the quests despite the reward being below average. Most adventurers understandably refused to take on these quests, and so Teto and I had made it our mission to tackle them whenever we visited a new town.

"You've taken care of most of the quests that could potentially become threats to us later on, and you've even rid us of the kraken. We're very grateful for everything you've done," Dogle said and started lowering his head.

I hurriedly stopped him. "Please, there's no need to bow to us."

"Teto and Lady Witch only did what they could to help!"

Dogle raised his head, seeming a little embarrassed but smiling nonetheless.

The longer a quest stayed on standby without getting cleared, the stronger the threat grew, which meant the client had no choice but to make the reward more enticing. Unfortunately, by the time it got interesting enough that some adventurers might be willing to take it on, the situation had often escalated to the point where significant damage had already been done. And so, to prevent that, Teto and I went from town to town, clearing the unpopular quests before they became too much of a threat. Us killing the Mother at the mining town was a prime example of that.

"You two truly are noble souls," Dogle said. "I never used to think about these things back when I was a regular adventurer, but becoming guildmaster made me realize just how important clearing those quests is," Dogle said with a sigh.

I couldn't help but find the sight of a man who looked as young as him reminiscing about the past a little funny. To be fair, by dragonman standards he probably *was* pretty old, but still.

"We accept your gratitude. Is that all you wanted to tell us?" I asked.

"No. I actually have a suggestion for you two. You've taken care of almost every single one of our leftover quests, so it would be a waste for you to stay here, don't you agree? That's why I think you should transfer to the royal capital's guild."

"The royal capital?" Teto and I repeated in perfect sync.

"Didn't you say you'd like to visit the capital one day? That could be a good opportunity," Dogle said.

I had indeed said in the past that I meant to check it out and maybe catch a glimpse of the floating island. Still, I hadn't thought Dogle would take that little comment so seriously. But his suggestion made sense: we had done our job here, and it might be time for us to move to another town.

"Hm... I quite like the idea, actually," I said.

And besides, we'd probably get to see even more exotic goods in the capital than in this port town. That was a pretty exciting thought.

"We actually just got a request to escort a merchant ship to the capital. As you've shown us with the kraken, you two don't have any issues with sea battles, so I was wondering if you could take it on if you're going to the capital anyway."

"Sure, we'll do it."

After that, we bid goodbye to Dogle and started preparing for the move. First, we cleaned and tidied up our rental home and moved all of our things out. Then, we paid one last visit to the fishers' market to say goodbye to the fishermen and the vendors we had become friends with and stock up on supplies.

"May you have the protection of Lady Luriel, goddess of the seas."

"And may you be blessed with favorable winds under the grace of Lady Leric, goddess of the skies."

The old fishermen gave us some freebies and sent us their blessings.

I wonder what kind of face they'd make if they knew I was Liriell's apostle, I thought as I left the market.

After a few more days, we retrieved our transfer gate from our rental home, handed the keys back to the landlord, and made our way to the port where the merchant ship we were in charge of protecting was docked.

"Good morning. Are you Mr. Ward, the merchant?" I asked the tanned middle-aged man on the docks.

He turned around. “Yup, that’s me. And you are...” he trailed off, looking slightly confused.

“We’re here to guard your ship on the way to the capital, as per Mr. Dogle’s request,” I explained.

“Here are our guild cards!” Teto chimed in, showing her card to the merchant as I did the same.

The man’s eyes shot wide open in surprise, and he looked us up and down.

“Oh, so it’s you, the adventurers who defeated that kraken! Mr. Dogle told me that you’d be a couple of old salts, all appearances aside.”

It often took us a really long time to get people to believe us, but, fortunately, it seemed that Dogle had shown a little prudence.

“We’ve actually never escorted a merchant ship before, so it’s going to be a bit of a learning experience for us,” I said.

“We’ll do our best!”

“Don’t hesitate to ask our exclusive adventurers for advice. They’ll help you.”

Mr. Ward—who seemed rather humble for a merchant—led us onto the ship and told us what was expected of us. Basically, we adventurers and the crew members would take turns monitoring the sea and ward off any monster that approached the ship. He went on to tell us that the trip was expected to last about two weeks. At this time of year, the winds blew southwards, which was perfect for us since the capital was located south of here.

“You can spend your time however you’d like while waiting for your shift. Feel free to get some rest, eat something, or even fish if that’s what you’re into,” Mr. Ward informed us.

“Okay, thanks. I’m sure we’ll have a better idea of what we’re supposed to do when it’s our turn,” I said.

We headed to the deck and watched the sailors load the cargo onto the ship. Most of it consisted of essentials like food, water, and fuel for cooking, but there were also a few

more profitable goods. I assumed Mr. Ward must've put the actually expensive stuff in his magic bag.

"All right, everyone, we're setting sail!" the captain announced; a few minutes later, the ship left the port.

The ship's crew rowed for the first few meters to propel the ship, but, soon after, they raised the sails and the wind guided the ship smoothly out onto the open sea.

Teto and I stood on the back deck, gazing at the port town and reminiscing about the peaceful days we had spent there.

"It was really fun, huh?" I mused.

"We should come back one day!" Teto suggested.

I thought fondly about the bustling harbor and the cheerful laughter of the people. Although I had the ability to use Teleportation Magic and visit the harbor whenever I wanted, there was something special about making it a onetime experience.

My heart warm with fond memories of the harbor town, I took off my pointy hat and felt the sea breeze caress my hair.

I was very much looking forward to reaching our next destination.

CHAPTER 8

THE MERCHANT SHIP ESCORT MISSION AND THE ORACLE FROM THE GODDESS OF THE SEA

Teto and I were sitting on the deck.

“Lady Wiiitch, we’re not catching anything!” Teto pouted.

“Think about it, Teto: the more we wait, the better we’ll feel about the catch, right?” I smiled at her. “Just relax while waiting for the fish to bite.”

Teto and I were gazing at the ocean, me with my fishing rod in hand and Teto sitting behind me, her arms wrapped around my midsection and her chin resting on top of my head.

“Have you fished up tonight’s dinner, girlies?” the leader of the escort team asked us.

“Nope, no luck so far,” I said, pointing at the empty bucket beside me with a wry smile.

“Aw, that’s too bad. How’re you getting used to life on the sea, by the way?”

“We’re doing okay. I had a hard time adjusting to the food, though, so I really appreciate you letting us cook our own,” I replied with a smile.

Most of the meals on the ship consisted of things that were quick and easy enough to prepare that the rocking of the ship wouldn’t affect their preparation. As such, we were mostly served simple dishes like porridge, dried fish and meat, and pickled vegetables. As you can probably imagine, these meals weren’t exactly haute cuisine; on the second day, I asked the crew if we could prepare our own food from then on.

“The food you two make always looks really delicious,” the man said. “What about you, Teto? How’re you doing?”

“Teto’s a bit disappointed she can’t sleep with Lady Witch,” she said, her cheeks puffed out.

There obviously wasn't enough space on the ship to fit a bed for every single crew member, so we had to sleep on hammocks, which Teto was really unhappy about since it meant she couldn't cling to me during the night.

Overall, I was having a pretty good time on the ship. It had taken me a little while to get used to the hammocks, but I'd warmed up to them a lot. I particularly enjoyed letting myself get rocked as I read a book. Other than that, I spent most of my time fishing or chatting with the other adventurers and crew members.

But then...

"There's a bunch of monsters at ten o'clock," I noted.

Even while I was fishing, I was constantly using Mana Perception to survey the ship's perimeter, and, sure enough, a group of monsters was bearing down on us.

"How did you manage to spot them faster than the guys keeping guard?!" The escort team's leader gawked at me. "I'm going to get the others and tell them to get ready!"

"No need. I'll just go deal with it myself. Besides, I'm thinking they'll make for a nice dinner. Teto, protect the ship while I'm gone."

"Be careful, Lady Witch!"

I opened my magic bag, took out Flying Jade, straddled it, and took off. I made my way to the group of monsters and unleashed a spell directly at the sea.

"Sorry, but you're going to be our dinner for tonight. *Sound Bomb!*"

A powerful column of water surged upwards. Most of the monsters lost consciousness and rose to the surface, while the ones who somehow made it unscathed quickly scattered away. I repeated the process two or three more times until I couldn't feel the presence of any more monsters nearby.

"Looks like that's all of them. All I have to do now is take them back to the ship." A little *Psychokinesis* made hauling the whole load a breeze.

"I'm back, Teto. Pretty good catch, right?"

"Welcome back, Lady Witch! Let's share the fishies with the others too!"

Teto and the other adventurers started processing my catch. They took advantage of the fact that they were still unconscious to remove the monsters' heads and fins before gutting them and extracting their magic stones. Even some of the crew members came to help us, excited at the idea of being able to enjoy some fresh fish for dinner.

"Lady Witch, how should we prepare the fishies?"

"Hmm... We bought some sauce at the port before leaving, so I'm thinking we could shallow-fry them maybe?"

I seasoned the fish, coated them with flour, dipped them in egg, and, lastly, rolled them in some breadcrumbs, which I had just made using a grater.

"What's the next step, Lady Witch?"

"We just have to fry 'em up."

I heated up a frying pan with some Fire Magic, put a little bit of oil in it, and threw in the meat. I obviously couldn't deep-fry it, as the ship was constantly swaying, but as long as the sea was calm, shallow-frying was no issue. When the frying fish were all golden brown and crispy on one side, I flipped them, and when both sides looked good, I took them off the heat. Voilà—beautiful, tender, crispy fried fish.

"Teto's gonna give it a taste test!"

"Sure. I've got some lemon juice and sauce here, so don't hesitate to doctor it up as you like."

I kept our lunch prep rolling under the hungry gazes of the ship's crew and the other adventurers, their mouths watering.

"I'll teach you how to make it so you can do it yourselves, okay?"

My offer was met with a chorus of excited hurrahs. True to my promise, I showed them how to prepare the fish and offered a few pieces for them to try.

The ship journeyed on smoothly, and we spent our time chitchatting with the other adventurers and the crew. I regularly offered to cast *Clean* on them too, since there was no water for us to wash ourselves with on the ship, and I even taught a couple of crewmates a pretty nifty basic conjuration so they could produce their own drinkable

water.

Whenever there was some leftover porridge—which happened a lot, since it tasted pretty bad—I would add some sugar and spices to it, mix in some dried fruit or rolled oats I had stored in my magic bag, and turn it into oatmeal cookies. The others loved them.

And so, one night about halfway through our journey, I fell asleep only to find myself in a familiar black space.

“A dream oracle, huh? Has Liriel come to visit us? Or maybe it’s Lariel?”

“Lady Witch, Teto is sooo excited to see the goddesses again!” Teto chirped.

I looked around and noticed that neither Liriel nor Lariel was there. Instead, a woman I had never seen before appeared before our eyes. Just like the other two goddesses, wings sprouted from her back, and a halo hung above her beautiful, wavy blue hair. She exuded charm and grace. But the thing that stood out the most to me was the sheer size of her breasts, which were much, *much* bigger than Liriel and Lariel’s.

“So you’re my big sister’s new apostle, hmm? Nice to meet you. I am Luriel, the goddess of the seas.”

“I’m Chise. It’s a pleasure making your acquaintance.”

“And Teto is Teto! Nice to meet you!”

Luriel smiled softly at us. Unlike Lariel, who was loud and boisterous, and Liriel, who was always overserious, she seemed calm and gentle.

“I’ve always wanted to meet you. La and Liri are always boasting about your many achievements and all the efforts you’re willing to go through to rehabilitate the Wasteland of Nothingness.”

“We’re just trying to create a place we can call home,” I said.

“Yeah! And we even have Beretta and the others now, so we’re having even more fun!”

“Is that so? That’s good to hear,” Luriel said, casting us another gentle smile. “It’s impressive how much you can do with such a small body,” she told me.

"Um... May I know why you've started patting me on the head?"

"Hm... Because you're cute?" Luriel said, tilting her head to the side and bringing a finger to her cheek.

She was, quite frankly, adorable, but Teto was having none of it.

"Don't take Lady Witch away from me!" she exclaimed, wrapping her arms around me.



This elicited a chuckle from Luriel. “I won’t, I won’t. Ah, but I have to say, you’re very cute when you’re jealous, Teto.”

Teto and I both started sputtering when Luriel wrapped the two of us in her arms. Her embrace felt even more comforting than Liriel’s.

“Hee hee, sorry about that. You two have finally come near my territory, so I can’t help but feel a little giddy inside.”

“I-Is that so?” I said.

While she had looked calm and composed at first glance, it seemed that Luriel had a bit of a mischievous side to her.

The wasteland didn’t have any bodies of water at the start of things, and the ones that had formed in the last few years hadn’t entered Luriel’s territory yet, so she must’ve been really happy to finally get to meet us.

“Leri, who’s in charge of the skies, also really wants to come see you, but she can’t use the wind—well, the mana flow to be exact—to say hi because of the barrier, and our youngest, Lo, looks over the underworld, but to be honest with you, she’s always sleeping! Ah, but I’m sure she’s very grateful that you cleansed the souls of the people who had been stuck in the underground shelters since the catastrophe. Oh, and did you know that...”

I was having such a hard time following Luriel’s rambling that I felt like I was about to pass out, but I did my best to nod and show that I was listening. When she was done speaking, Luriel finally let go of us.

“Anyway, why did you want to see us, Luriel? Do you have a mission for us, like Lariel did?”

We had spent more than enough time exchanging pleasantries, and I really wanted to know why she had come to visit. But Luriel just gave me this surprised look and started chuckling.

“I just wanted to talk to you. But since you’re always doing things for my sister, I’m going to let you in on a little secret.” She raised a finger, and Teto and I instantly straightened up, curious as to what she was going to say. “The ship you’re on will be caught in a storm tomorrow afternoon, so be careful, okay?”

"A storm?"

"Yes. Well, I'm sure you two will manage just fine out there, but I thought I'd let you know."

Luriel bid us farewell, and I felt her presence slowly fade away. When Teto and I woke up, we slipped out of our cabin and went to look at the morning sun rising beyond the horizon. The skies were clear, yet Luriel's words echoed in my mind; I braced myself for what I knew lay ahead.

CHAPTER 9

THREAT OF A STORM

“How’s the weather today?” I asked one of the navigation officers.

The sky was clear, so he shot me a curious look before answering with a smile, “It’s nice and sunny, and the wind is blowing southwards. Seems like it’s shaping up to be a peaceful day.”

“Is that so? Do you think it’s possible for the weather to suddenly get worse later and become stormy?” I asked next.

The man chuckled awkwardly. “Well, that does happen, yeah. If there’s a storm, all we can do is stow the sails and wait it out. Why are you asking? Did someone tell you scary storm stories last night or something?”

“Yeah, something like that. Thank you for telling me.”

I headed back to Teto’s side.

“Lady Witch, what should we do?”

“Well, there’s nothing we *can* do per se.”

We weren’t gods, after all; we couldn’t change the weather. I could use my magic to try to negate the storm, but I was afraid it would reappear again later and damage another ship.

All we could do was, as the navigation officer said, wait for the storm to pass.

“Turns out goddesses aren’t quite as all-powerful as most folks think, huh?”

Judging by Luriel’s dream oracle, it seemed that goddesses didn’t have the ability to directly manipulate the weather. Sure, on occasion, they could harness the mana generated by their territories to pull off miracles, conjure storms, or mete out divine punishments. But, for the most part, they simply watched over the continent and

didn't intervene in natural phenomena. These weren't created by the gods, after all, but by the laws of physics—well, that was my theory, at least. And of course, the giant barrier the goddesses had erected around the wasteland was an exception even among exceptions.

"The world sure is an interesting place," I mused, a smile tugging at my lips.

"Lady Wiiitch, don't say cryptic things like that!" Teto pouted, repeatedly poking me in the cheek.

Teto and I gazed at the clear blue sky, worried about the coming storm. And sure enough, as the afternoon approached, clouds began to gather and multiply in the sky. They grew thicker and darker, blotting out even the faintest hint of blue.

"A storm's coming! Fold the sails!"

"We won't be able to make it to the nearest port; we're going to have to weather it out!"

Massive waves surged forth, crashing against the ship's hull, causing it to sway and rock. Strong winds swept down from the sky, and heavy rain pounded against the ship's sides.

Standing on the deck, I gripped my new staff with one hand, using the other to press my hat firmly against my head, battling the wind's attempts to snatch it away.

"It's a lot worse than I thought... Ah!"

All of a sudden, the ship jolted violently, nearly knocking me off-balance. Thankfully, Teto was here to support me.

"Are you okay, Lady Witch?" she asked, worried.

"Thanks, Teto. All right... First, I have to do something to protect us from the wind and rain. *Avoidance!*"

I threw up a large spherical barrier around the ship.

"That's..."

"It's supposed to be used to deflect arrows," I said, "but for now, it'll shield us from the

rain and wind!"

If I had used a stronger spell like *Barrier*, it would've completely blocked off every single wave, which could've flipped the whole ship. So I settled on *Avoidance* instead to shield us from the wind and rain and, hopefully, lighten the crew's load a bit.

"All we have to do now is take care of the shaking! Steer us into the waves!" the captain ordered the crew.

Meanwhile, the adventurers joined us on the deck, weapons at the ready.

"Monsters inbound! Everyone, protect the girlie so she doesn't drop the barrier!"

Some sea monsters took advantage of the churn to jump aboard and try to attack us. While the barrier I had put up was great for blocking the wind and rain, it was useless against anything large, and soon, there were monsters all over the deck, trying to bite the crewmates or drag them into the ocean. Considering the storm's severity, if someone were to fall overboard, they'd be a complete lost cause. And so, to avoid any casualties, the adventurers frantically swung their weapons at the monsters, throwing them back into the sea and fighting to keep their footing.

"Aw, what a waste! We could eat those monsters!" Teto pouted. "Teto is going to help them, okay, Lady Witch?"

"Sure. Be careful not to fall overboard."

I was using most of my mana to keep the barrier up, but when I had a moment to spare, I'd pitch a couple of wind blades at the monsters who hadn't yet mounted the deck. Teto had waded into the fray, her black blade scything through the horde; she stored their cooling carcasses in the magic bag on her hip between blows.

The battle wore on like this for around two hours. Then, out of the blue, my attention was drawn to a sizable black shape in the sky.

"What's that thing?" I asked no one in particular.

Even through the thick clouds, I could see some sort of green light emanating from the black mass's underbelly. Then, all of a sudden, rocks began plummeting from the sky, bombarding the ship.

“The damn sky’s falling!”

“Shit! Lady Luriel, please protect us!”

Curses and prayers filled the air as the adventurers voiced their frustrations and the crewmates sought divine protection.

I, on the other hand, didn’t hesitate, pointing my staff at the black mass. “Good thing I’ve got just the tool for the job. *Collapse Bullet!*”

These “bullets” were essentially compact, destructive orbs, a modification of my usual *Gravity* spell. Instead of downwards pressure, these projectiles exerted an inwards force upon contact. I conjured ten of them and loosed them into the air to intercept the falling rocks before they could strike the masts. Every single bullet cost me over 20,000 MP—twice what I’d blown on the *Thunder Bolt* spell I’d used to defeat the kraken. But it was worth it; the second a rock came in contact with a bullet, the orb decompressed, turning into a five-meter-wide sphere that engulfed everything it touched and reduced it to an infinitesimal point mass.

“That’s crazy...” the crewmates marveled, staring at the black spheres as they blossomed one after another in the sky. Soon, the sky was clear of rubble.

I breathed out a long sigh of relief. “Okay, we should be safe for a bit. How do you get a rockslide over open ocean, though?”

It wasn’t as if there was a mountain or anything of the sort nearby, so *how?*

“They fell from the floating island,” the leader of the escort team told me.

“The floating island? The one from the legend?” I asked, my eyes shooting wide open in surprise.

I had actually just read a book of old legends and folktales from Lawbyle; a lot of these stories included floating islands. And now that I thought about it, the green glow I saw behind the clouds looked exactly like the cavorite crystal I had used to make my new staff.

“That island’s traced a circuit along the Lawbylean coast for hundreds of years,” the man explained. “We usually try to avoid passing right under it, but I guess the storm covered it up.”

I glanced upwards. We could barely distinguish the mass behind the thick clouds.

I really hope I'll get to see it again on a clearer day, I thought. But right then, my Mana Perception picked up on one last detail.

"Something with a mana signature just fell from the island. It seems quite small too..." I observed.

A silhouette much, much smaller than the rocks, but with a potent aura, was plummeting towards the water's surface, buffeted by the gales. My curiosity got the best of me, and I straddled my staff.

"There's something I want to check out; I'll be right back. *Fly!*"

"Be safe out there, Lady Witch!" Teto waved me goodbye.

The escort team's leader, on the other hand, hurriedly tried to stop me. "Girlie, careful! The storm hasn't passed yet! Then again... I guess you can probably just give yourself a barrier, huh?"

The repulsive force generated by the cavorite crystal in my staff nullified the effect of the wind, and I rushed as fast as I could towards the tiny silhouette. It was seconds from hitting the water, and a school of sea monsters had gathered where it would fall, already frenzied by the impression of its mana. But right as they were about to jump out of the water to gulp down the little thing...

"Caught you! Whew, that was close."

When I saw what was about to happen to the poor dear, I sped up and practically snatched it right out of the beasts' jaws. Cradling the small creature against my chest, I ascended, trying to put as much distance as possible between us and the monsters. The little thing was squirming in my arms, and it let out a pitiful little meow, looking up at me.

"A kitten? It must've fallen from the floating island, huh?"

The kitten was completely soaked from the rain, but its black fur was soft. Just like the rockfall, it must've come from the floating island. I considered chasing the island to return the kitten to its home, but the wind current was so strong, I wasn't sure I would manage. And besides, I had to go back to the ship; I was in the middle of an escort

mission.

“Guess you’re coming with me,” I said to the kitten, tucking it into my robe as I flew back to the ship.



CHAPTER 10

THE CAT-SITH

“Welcome back, Lady Witch. What was it that fell from the floating island?” Teto asked me when I landed.

“A kitten,” I said.

“A kitten?” she repeated, confused, peering at the cat that I was still holding against my chest.

I didn’t have time to reply to her, as the escort team’s leader came to scold me. “Good grief, you two might be A-rank adventurers, but you gave me a heart attack when you jumped out of the ship in the middle of a storm!”

“I’m sorry.”

“Considering everything you’ve done earlier, I don’t want to be too harsh on you, but please refrain from doing things unrelated to the mission.”

Everything I’d done ever since the storm started, from putting up a barrier to protect us against the wind and rain to literally obliterating the rocks that fell from the flying island, was clearly beyond the capabilities of a regular adventurer. However, while the worst of the storm had passed, I had still deserted my post instead of helping the others protect the ship. The escort team leader’s reprimand was justified.

“Anyway, what did you find out there?” the man asked me.

“I managed to save this little guy at the last minute,” I said, showing him the kitten. “It’s all wet, so I’d like to go dry it and give it a once-over to make sure it’s fine. Could I please leave my post for a bit? I’ll keep the barrier up.”

“A kitten, huh? Listen, I understand your feelings, but we need all the help we can get right now...”

He probably deemed that, if I had the strength to keep the barrier up, I could still fight

against the monsters and help protect the ship against the storm. However...

"I really can't?" I asked.

"Please? Teto will work extra hard to cover for Lady Witch!" Teto pleaded.

The kitten chose this exact moment to meow pitifully, as if to help us convince the escort mission's leader.

"Argh, how am I supposed to say no to that?! I know you're not a real child, but with your appearance and that little kitten looking so weak, I really feel like the bad guy here!" the man grumbled, torn between following his heart or his rationality.

The other adventurers and the crewmates were staring at us, waiting to see what decision the escort mission's leader would make. Then, the merchant who had hired us approached us, a smile on his face. He had been hiding inside the ship so as not to get in our way while we were dealing with the storm, but he had come out when the wind started calming down.

"I say you should let them go get some rest," he told the other man. "It's all thanks to them that the ship and my precious goods didn't sink in that storm, and, thanks to that barrier, nothing got too damaged because of the rain."

The escort mission's leader let out a long sigh. "Can't go against the client's wishes. Fine. You two, go take a good rest!"

"Thanks."

"Thank you!" Teto chirped.

We headed back to our cabin, where I filled a big basin with water, heated it up with magic, and gently placed the kitten in the tub to warm it up. We made sure it was squeaky clean before drying it with a towel and wrapping it in a warm blanket.

"What food should we give it?" I asked, cradling the little kitten in my arms. "Judging by its size, it must've just gotten weaned off its mother's milk. I was thinking of feeding it boiled fish and chicken, but will it even eat it?"

The kitten was mouthing and licking at my finger, and I wondered if it was hungry.

"Lady Witch, Lady Witch! It's absorbing your mana! I think it's like Teto," Teto pointed out.

I took another look at the kitten and noticed it already seemed much livelier than before, probably from the mana it had absorbed. Tiny wings had also sprouted from its back: not bird wings, but translucent, sparkly fairylike wings that were composed purely of mana. This aroused my curiosity, and I quickly used an appraisal spell on the kitten to try to understand what it actually was.

"It's a cat-sith, a mythical beast. It's twelve years old, apparently," I said.

I was baffled. Who could have imagined that the tiny kitten I had rescued was, in fact, a mythical beast? Mythical beasts—also known as sacred beasts—were very intelligent creatures that could wield magic. They weren't mana life-forms, unlike, say, spirits and fairies, but they still fed on mana and, for that reason, tended to live in places with high mana concentrations. During their early stages of life, mythical beasts absorbed the ambient mana around them to survive. But when they grew up, they would become able to produce their own, making them almost entirely self-sufficient.

The little cat-sith I had saved was quite obviously still young, and we'd need to make sure it'd always have access to enough mana to feed on.

"I'm coming in. Sorry about that, I just wanted to check on the kitten— Ah. It seems I was right. *It is* a mythical beast."

The merchant—our client—entered the room, and a smile appeared on his face when he saw the little kitten's sparkling wings. They were so shiny that, even if we had wanted to, we wouldn't have been able to hide them.

"Did you already know?" I asked, surprised.

"I had an inkling it might be. There are many legends and folktales in Lawbyle about mythical beasts, you see. Have you heard of them?"

"I did. I actually read a book compiling some of Lawbyle's most popular folktales not too long ago."

The merchant nodded and proceeded to tell me one of them. It was one of the many folktales surrounding the floating island, and it had been passed down from generation to generation long before Lawbyle's founding. As the story went, there was

once a vast peninsula where Lawbyle's capital now stood. Back then, the entire continent was a desolate wasteland, and a dragon decided to call that peninsula its home. It wasn't alone in seeking refuge there. Many mythical creatures gathered in the desolation, hoping for the dragon's protection. Eventually, the dragon's domain became known as a sanctuary of sorts.

However, greedy folk pushed their way into that peninsula, coveting the sacred beasts and laying waste to the land. Furious, the master of the island attacked the intruders, who retaliated by sending their army to subjugate the dragon and seize the peninsula. In a last-ditch effort, the dragon used its powers to make their home fly. This had all happened well over a thousand years ago. Since then, the floating island has traveled along Lawbyle's eastern coastline; it's said that once every decade or so, lucky observers catch a glimpse of the island drifting above Lawbyle's capital.

"That's pretty much it," the man concluded when he was done.

"I did read that story," I said with a nod. "Although some of the details in the book were a little different."

The little kitten in my arms had started dozing off after getting its fill of mana, and all three of us couldn't help but smile at the adorable display.

"This little guy must've been blown off of his home, huh?"

"That's what I fear happened, yes," the merchant said.

So it had been an accident. I really hoped I could take the kitten back at some point.

"Thank you for telling us that story."

"Ah, don't mention it. It's a very popular tale; you would've heard of it even without me telling you about it. However, I do have a little request, if I may."

Teto and I tilted our heads to the side in curiosity.

"Could you please let me hold the cat-sith?" the merchant asked, his eyes sparkling.

"I mean... Sure?"

I handed the kitten bundled in the blanket to the merchant, who very gently took it in

his arms as if it were some sort of precious treasure. A smile broke across the man's face as he softly scratched the little kitten's chin. It squirmed in contentment in its sleep.

The man chuckled. "Thank you so much. It was a really nice experience," he said giddily.

"Are you sure that's all you wanted?" I asked.

"Yes. In business, we often say that cats bring good fortune, you see. And this is no ordinary cat; it's a cat-sith. That's got to be at least twice the luck! And besides, you don't come across cute animals very often when you're at sea," the man said, looking a little shy.

I thought it was quite cute.

Animals were occasionally brought on ships, but those were mostly livestock. For instance, there were chickens and goats on the ship, but it was only so we had a steady source of eggs and milk. And in the eventuality that we ran out of food, we'd have no choice but to eat the chicken and goats, so most seafarers made sure not to get too attached to the animals. The only other animals that one could find on a ship were the rats that had sneaked in to eat the provisions, and those weren't particularly lovable.

"Anyway, I'm heading back to the deck. Ah, I have one last piece of advice for you, if I may: you shouldn't tell anyone about this little one's true identity. Mythical beasts are extremely rare, after all; some people would do anything to get their hands on a cat-sith, and your reputation won't stop them."

"Thanks for the advice."

"Thank you!" Teto chirped.

We waved goodbye to the merchant and dropped our gazes back to the kitten.

"He's right: people will definitely come after this little guy if they learn about its true nature," I mused out loud.

"What should we do, Lady Witch? Are we going to keep the little kitty forever?"

I shook my head. "Mythical beasts are very smart creatures. It'll end up missing its

home, so I definitely want to bring it back to its clowder when we have the occasion. But in the meantime, I fully intend on having it stay with us."

"So we're not keeping the kitty? What a shame," Teto said dejectedly, reaching out a hand to pet the kitten.

"Well, as I said, cat-siths are pretty intelligent; once we take it back, we can ask if it'd rather stay with us. What do you think of that?" I said, and Teto's expression instantly lit up.

"Oooh! Teto's going to do her best so the kitty wants to stay with us forever!"

I couldn't help but chuckle at how quickly her expression changed, before my attention returned to the kitten again.

"For now, let's focus on keeping this little one safe. First things first: we definitely need to hide his wings with some illusion magic. I also want a barrier to activate in case of emergency and something to tell us its location at any given time. Let's see... *Creation!*"

A tiny red collar with a bell appeared in my hand. I cast two enchantments on the collar part: one to hide the cat's real nature on its status and the other to hide its wings. Then, I added an emergency barrier enchantment and a location-tracking function to the bell. I secured the collar around the kitten's neck, the bell jingling quietly.

"It's so cute!" Teto piped up.

"It really is. Phew, this whole storm situation really took a toll on me. Let's go have some dinner."

I spread a towel at the bottom of a basket and delicately put the kitten in it. I decided to leave it in our cabin while Teto and I headed to the canteen to prepare our dinner. I made enough food that the other adventurers and the crewmates would have something to eat as well. Whenever someone else came in to grab a quick bite on their break, they would throw us a quizzical look, wondering why we weren't resting in our cabin. But they all seemed grateful to be able to enjoy their meal without having to cook for themselves.

The kitten woke up a little later, and it started wandering around the ship, exploring its new environment and eliciting fond smiles from all of the crewmates and adventurers.

CHAPTER 11

SEMIRETIRED AT THE ROYAL CAPITAL

Soon the storm passed, and the ship resumed its way towards the royal capital. The cat-sith had taken a liking to roaming around the ship, to the joy of the crew. Presently it was approaching a couple of crewmates who were fishing, its tail swinging left to right and the bell on its collar jingling softly.

“Meow!”

“Aw, you want this?” one of the crewmates asked the kitten, holding out a tiny fish he had just caught that was unsuitable for humans. “Here ya go!”

He threw the fish in the direction of the kitten, who leaped in the air to catch it in its mouth. It then set the fish down on the floor, held it in place with its forepaws, and started eating it with gusto.

“Hey, no fair! I had a bigger fish for it,” another crewmate said, holding it out.

The kitten glanced at him but soon went back to eating the smaller fish, a disinterested look on its face. When it was done, it happily ran back to Teto and me.

“Did he give you a fish, Kuro? That’s nice, isn’t it?” I cooed.

I bent down and picked up the newly named kitten, but it slipped from my arms and went to sit on my shoulder instead.

“Meow!”

“You’ve become quite the fan favorite among the crew, huh?” I said.

“It really has. Looks like the whole crew fell in love with its little personality—or, dare I say, its *purrsonality*?” the escort mission’s leader said, a playful gleam in his eyes as he looked at the little kitten on my shoulder.

Kuro had managed to charm every single member of the crew due to its bottomless

curiosity and constant roaming around on the ship, not to mention just how adorable it was when it begged for something. It even helped around the ship by catching the rats that ate our provisions, always went to the bathroom in the makeshift litter box the crew had made for it without ever making a mess, and managed to learn a few tricks, to everyone's delight. It was only natural that everyone on the ship would fall in love with it. Ever since it had fallen from the sky and joined us, everyone seemed to be in a much better mood. But these happy days soon came to an end.

"Everyone! I can see the royal capital!" the crewmate in the crow's nest informed us.

I couldn't help letting out a sigh of relief now that the end of our mission was in sight. "Finally back on land. What I wouldn't give for a bath right now."

"Teto wants to have a bath with Lady Witch, and then we can sleep together!"

While the *Clean* spell had proved useful during our travels, there was truly nothing that could compare to the bliss of a warm, comforting bath. Lost in thoughts of the relaxing soak that awaited me, I watched as the ship glided into the arc-shaped harbor. Before I knew it, we had arrived at our destination.

"Thank you for escorting us all the way here," the merchant said. "Here's the writ of completion for the mission. All you have to do is bring it to the guild. I made sure to increase the reward to thank you for everything you did to protect the ship during the storm."

"Thank you very much. Well, I guess this is where we part ways," I said with a bow.

"It was super-duper fun! Bye-bye!" Teto waved him goodbye.

"Meow!"

The merchant saw us off, seemingly reluctant to part with us.

The other adventurers had signed an exclusive contract with the merchant and would stay at the port to help unload the cargo and protect the ship, but since Teto and I had only been hired to escort the ship to the capital, we had already completed our job. And so, the two of us plus Kuro made our way to the royal capital's adventurer's guild.

"So this is the royal capital, huh?" I marveled at the palace standing tall atop a hill. Roads fanned out from that central point, and I noticed that most of the buildings were

made out of stone; wooden structures would fare poorly in the sea breeze.

"There it is," I said when we arrived at the adventurer's guild.

From what I'd been told, there were two guild buildings in the royal capital: one near the harbor—which was the one we had found—and one inside the city.

"Now where's the counter...?" I mumbled when we were inside, looking for the reward counter. When I spotted it, we made our way over, and I tried to get the receptionist's attention with a polite "Excuse me."

"Yes? What brings you here, cuties? This is the place where adventurers come to tell us when they're done with their mission," the receptionist lady said, shooting us a warm smile.

I might look twelve, but I'm most definitely older than her... I thought, forcing a smile onto my face as I handed her my guild card without a word. Teto did the same beside me.

"Let's see, what do you have here? Are you running errands for your dads— Huh? Oh! I-I'm so sorry! I didn't realize you were the Carpet Riders!"

"It's all right; we're used to it."

Kuro must've started feeling a little bit bored with its spot on my shoulder; it started pressing its paw into my cheek. Teto hurriedly chided the kitten and picked it up so it wouldn't bother me while I talked to the receptionist.

"Could we please get our payment for this quest?" I asked, handing the lady the document the merchant had given us. "Oh, and we plan on staying in town for a little while, so could you please let us know about a place where we can rent a house?"

"O-Of course!"

While it happened all the time, I couldn't help but feel slightly embarrassed at having been mistaken for a child *again*.

I occupied myself by petting Kuro while waiting for the lady to come back with our reward.

"Excuse me, the Grand Master is calling for you. He's waiting for you in the reception office," she informed me when she was back.

"All right," I said, barely holding back a sigh.

The Grand Master oversaw all of the adventurer's guild branches in a given country. In Ischea, the guildmaster of the royal capital's branch of the guild also held the Grand Master title, and I remembered catching a glimpse of the man during the A-rank exam. And despite spending most of my time in the wasteland or in the small town of Vil, I had also met Gald's Grand Master a couple of times during A-rank missions: once when we oversaw the A-rank exam, and the second time while working as security at the international adventurer's guild conference.

And I was now about to meet Lawbyle's Grand Master.

"Grand Master! I have brought the Carpet Riders!" the receptionist announced when she opened the door to the reception office.

"Thanks," the Grand Master—a man wearing well-tailored, good-quality clothes—said. "Bring us some tea, will you?" He then turned towards us. "So you two are the famous Carpet Riders. I've been expecting you; Dogle told me through the guild's communication tool that you were coming."

"I'm Chise the witch. It's an honor to meet you."

"And Teto is a swordswoman! Nice to meet you! Ah, and this is Kuro!" Teto said, making little Kuro wave its front paws.

"Meow!"

An amused smile formed on the Grand Master's lips. "Nice to meet you. I'm the Grand Master of the adventurer's guild here in Lawbyle, Zelitch Bentony."

"Only nobles include their last names when introducing themselves," I pointed out. "Are you a noble?"

"A duke," he said. "Well, I used to be a prince, but I renounced my royal status a long time ago," the middle-aged Grand Master told me with a smile.

I stayed silent for a few seconds, pondering his words.

The adventurer's guild claimed to be a neutral entity, but since it had branches in every single country, it was difficult for it to stay truly neutral. And since having a guild in a territory meant armed groups entering and exiting said territory at will, countries and feudal lords required the guild to undergo regular audits. Not only that, but the guild counted many wealthy nobles among their clients, so they had to be careful about how they treated them if they didn't want to lose their patronage.

A significant number of high-ranked staff members in the royal capital were nobles, especially those who were fifth-born or lower in their families. However, this trend had sparked concerns about certain branches of the guild becoming overly entwined with governing bodies. To address this issue, the guild had devised a series of countermeasures. These included allowing guildmasters to dismiss staff members under specific circumstances and adopting a rotation system for appointing the Grand Master role, alternating between individuals from noble and adventurer backgrounds. This allowed the guild to stay as neutral of an entity as possible.

"We've met before; do you remember?" Mr. Zelitch said, pulling me out of my thoughts.
"Well, we didn't exactly talk, but I saw you from afar."

Teto and I must've looked confused, which elicited a chuckle from the man.

"I was Lawbyle's representative during the international guild conference in Gald. I remember being surprised by how young—almost juvenile—the two of you looked!"

I couldn't help the wry smile that formed on my face; our looks hadn't changed in the slightest since then.

I racked my brain to try and figure out when that conference had happened, only to realize it had been well over ten years since then. At that time, Teto and I had worked as security during the conference, but we hadn't participated, so I had no memory of any of the attendees.

Mr. Zelitch's expression then shifted into a more serious one, and he turned his gaze back towards us.

"I've been meaning to thank you for tracking down that slaver ring and putting an end to the abduction cases. I'm so incredibly grateful for what you've done."

I blinked in surprise, not having expected him to bring up that case.

"You don't need to thank us. Besides, we've received a nice reward for it," I said, thinking back to the last few slavers that Teto and I had arrested back in the former mining town.

"We interrogated the higher-up you two apprehended, and he gave us all of the information we needed to completely shut down the organization. It was such a relief; these types of groups are incredibly hard to deal with," Mr. Zelitch said with a dry smile. "Anyway, might I know what brings you to the royal capital? What kind of quests are you interested in pursuing here?"

I told him that we planned on mostly focusing on clearing the unpopular quests, just like we'd been doing in the port town.

"We plan on staying here for the time being and taking on the occasional quest," I said.

"Teto and Lady Witch are waiting for the floating island to fly by! And we have to take care of Kuro, so we can't work for too long or it'll be lonely!"

That was exactly our plan: taking on easy quests and relaxing while waiting for the floating island to come near the capital. And when the time came, we'd fly over to said island and return Kuro.

"And, since we have a pet now, we've been thinking of renting a home rather than staying at an inn. We'd prefer not to bother the other customers," I said.

"I know of a few inns that accept mages' familiars, if you're interested. However, if you plan to stay long-term, renting a house might be a better idea. I'll take a look at the guild's properties and come back to you. And I'll make sure to compile all of our most urgent leftover quests for you to take on when you'd like."

It was quite obvious Dogle had already told the man all about us, as he hadn't seemed surprised by our plans. The rest of the discussion went by smoothly, and Zelitch reassured us once again that he would only assign us quests that aligned with our preferences.

We swung by the reward counter one last time on our way out to collect our pay for the merchant ship escort mission, then headed to an inn the Grand Master had recommended to stay the night, since we had yet to find a proper home. We settled on an inn by the coast and enjoyed some nice sautéed fish with seafood soup. We chitchatted a little bit with the owners, a couple of animal lovers who told us that they

had started up the inn specifically for adventurers and magic users with familiars, and they even gave Kuro some yummy fish.

That night, we finally got to sleep in a proper bed for the first time in weeks.

The next day, we went to tour a few houses owned by the guild and found the perfect home.

“This house will be ten silver coins a month,” the guild’s real estate agent told us.

“That’s fine. Here’s this month’s rent.”

It was a two-story stone house located in the suburbs of the capital, and I liked it so much I signed the lease agreement on the spot.

As these houses were exclusively for adventurers to rent, it was relatively spacious and even had a backyard. There was no bathroom, but I was allowed to change the house as I saw fit, so I fully intended on conjuring up a nice spacious one.

“What really sealed the deal for me was this view,” I said, looking out of the window.

From the window onto the backyard, we had a beautiful view of the ocean. I could easily use my magic to alter whatever I didn’t like in the house, so having a beautiful view was pretty much my only requirement, and this house really did deliver on that front.

We undoubtedly were going to stay in this house with Kuro for quite a long time, and I was looking forward to seeing what it’d look like once I was done remodeling it.

CHAPTER 12

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ATTENDANT DOLLS AND THE CHANGES IN THE WASTELAND OF NOTHINGNESS

Once the guild's real estate agent was gone, Teto and I used our magic to start remodeling the house. I really wanted to be able to take baths here, and I wanted it to look *nice*—not just a random bathtub outside.

“*Creation: bathtub!*” I chanted.

I completely demolished one of the rooms and added some plumbing before conjuring a cute claw-foot bathtub. I had made it a little bigger than a regular tub, but it would still be a little cramped if Teto and I went in together—not that I minded.

“We've put down our furniture, set up the transfer gate, and even got done building the bathroom. Let's head back to the wasteland for now,” I suggested.

“Roger!” Teto chirped before turning towards Kuro. “Kuro, you're coming with us too!”

The little kitten meowed, tilting its head in confusion before running up my robe and settling on my shoulder. We headed to the room where I'd set up our transfer gate and teleported to the wasteland.

It had been two weeks since our last visit. When we arrived, an attendant doll was waiting in front of the gate to greet us.

“Welcome home, Master, Lady Teto.”

“We're back.”

“Heya!”

“Meow!”

Kuro jumped to the ground and looked up at the attendant doll with curiosity.

"Oh, and you brought a little cat too," she said, crouching down to pet little Kuro. Her expression remained unchanged, but she seemed happy. I could almost see flower petals dancing in the wind behind her to complete the picture.

"Welcome home, Master, Lady Teto. Is that a cat-sith?" Beretta asked as she came to greet us.

"Hi, Beretta." I smiled at her. "Can you tell? I used magic to hide its wings and status, though..."

I brushed my fingers against Kuro's collar, temporarily cutting off the enchantments and revealing its little fairylike wings.

"I can. Two thousand years ago, cat-siths lived alongside humans, after all," Beretta explained.

The world had changed so much since then that there were barely any mythical beasts around, even though they used to be quite common.

Beretta turned back towards the attendant doll who was petting the cat; a beautiful smile broke across her face.

"Attendant doll Ai, I see you have just evolved into a mechanoid. Congratulations."

"Is that so?" the attendant doll inquired.

As a fellow mechanoid, Beretta must've sensed the switch in Ai's status. I quickly used an appraisal spell on Ai to see it for myself, and, yup, there it was; the word "Mechanoid" was written next to her name.

"You are the first of the attendant dolls Master created to have reached the mechanoid status," Beretta said. "However, this does not absolve you from your responsibilities. Keep working hard to serve our masters to the best of your ability."

"Yes, Miss Beretta," said Ai, standing up and heading back to her duties. I could tell she would've liked to spend more time with Kuro, though.

"Isn't it great, Beretta? You're not the only mechanoid anymore," I said.

"Yeah! You should be more excited!" Teto chirped.

Beretta let out a sigh, her gaze following Ai. “She neglected her duties in favor of petting Master Kuro. It seems that I will have to reeducate her.”

Despite her words, I could tell Beretta was happy about Ai evolving into a mechanoid.

Kuro meowed, staring at Beretta with curiosity. Teto gently picked it up from behind.

“Why did Ai turn into a mechanoid though?” she asked. “She hasn’t merged with a spirit like us.”

She had a point; both Beretta and Teto had turned into demons after welcoming spirits into their bodies. However, nothing of the sort had happened to Ai.

“The attendant dolls you’ve created have been operating for several years, Master. For all this time, they have striven to mimic human behavior, amassing a wealth of life experiences. I believe it is possible that the sprouts of souls have germinated in their bodies, propelling them towards evolution,” Beretta conjectured.

“But what happened to Ai? Why did she evolve all of a sudden?” I wondered out loud.

In Japan, it was a common belief that certain objects and tools could gain souls with the passage of time or after a specific trigger event. But what had Ai’s trigger been?

“Based on my personal experience, I believe one needs to feel a strong desire towards something to develop a full-blown soul, as desire is integral to human nature. I have noticed that Ai has always been very interested in animals and nature.” Beretta marked a pause, and all three of us—Teto, Kuro, and I—awaited her next words impatiently. “I surmise Ai’s evolution must be related to Master Kuro. Seeing a cat-sith for the first time must have triggered some strong feelings in her, leading to the latent soul inside her body blooming, which, in turn, made her reach the mechanoid stage.”

“So basically... Ai became a cat lover,” I summarized.

“Yes. I believe she must’ve just experienced ‘love at first sight,’” Beretta replied, nodding.

“Isn’t it nice, Kuro? Ai likes you!” Teto cooed to the kitten she was cradling against her chest.

Kuro simply let out a tiny, confused “Meow?”

I completely get Ai's feelings: Kuro is precious.

Beretta then proceeded to tell us about the changes that had happened in the wasteland over the past couple of weeks.

"Thanks to the leyline management device you created and the trees we have been planting, the mana concentration of the air has reached a base level of thirty-four percent, and the leylines have regenerated to about five percent of their original level."

"I see. I really hope one day there'll be enough mana on the continent that you and the others can go anywhere without having to worry about recharging," I sighed.

"Thank you very much for your concern, Master. I am greatly obliged. With the current mana concentration of the wasteland, it might be possible for certain creatures to survive here, so we have been carrying out the 'green path strategy' you have suggested."

The "green path strategy" involved expanding the forest all the way to the edge of the wasteland to encourage creatures that could pass through the barrier to join the local population.

"Our current goal is to attract birds of prey like owls and hawks," Beretta explained to me.

"I see. I'll use my Creation Magic to make saplings that we can plant to expand the forest."

"That would be very helpful, thank you. If it is not too much of a bother, could you please set up a few transfer gates between here and the barrier? We lose a lot of time going back and forth."

"Let me go check the progress you've made and I'll get right to that."

We left the mansion, and I took out my staff, straddling it while cradling Kuro against my chest. Teto mounted behind me, and we soared into the sky.

"The forest has gotten so big," I noted, impressed.

About one-tenth of the wasteland was covered in trees, and the forest's perimeter had transformed into grassy meadows. I also noticed that small hills and gentle

depressions had started forming here and there, giving rise to natural springs that spread all the way to the edge of the barrier. One in particular spread all the way to the edge of the barrier and seemed to be connected to the river on the other side. I wondered if these changes were due to the regeneration of the leylines.

“It really has! I wanna go see that big tree over there!” Teto chirped.

“Sure thing. But first, let me set up those transfer gates.”

There was already a transfer gate set up at the edge of the wasteland, in the house where we used to live with Selene when she was small. From what Beretta had told me, the attendant dolls occasionally went to the house to clean it up despite it not being in use at the moment. I built three more houses with my Creation Magic, installing them in strategic spots between the heart of the wasteland and the edge of the barrier. There, I set up new transfer gates to facilitate travel.

With that done, we flew over to one of the first World Trees we had planted and landed on one of its thick branches.

“This place sure has changed a lot, huh?” I commented, admiring the green landscape.

“It has!”

Kuro let out a happy meow, jumping down onto the branch and absorbing the World Tree’s mana with its entire body. It seemed to really like this spot, which wasn’t that surprising considering the mana concentration of the air was the most dense near the World Trees. For the time being, Kuro was dependent on the ambient mana, but once it finished growing up, it’d be able to produce its own.

Thanks to our World Trees, the mana concentration of the wasteland had drastically improved, and the land was slowly but surely returning to its former glory.

“Lady Witch?”

“What is it, Teto?” I said, taking a seat on the branch, my hair fluttering behind me.

I took a deep breath. Back when I got reincarnated, the air had been so dry it had almost felt like sandpaper against my lungs, not to mention the strong wind that stung my skin. But now the air had regained some moisture, and the pitiless gusts had turned into a pleasant breeze.

“Did you manage to turn the wasteland into a place you can call home?”

“I did—a long time ago, actually.”

No matter where I was in the world, I always felt compelled to come back here. Besides, I’d feel bad if I left Beretta alone for too long—although, now that Ai had gained a soul, she probably wouldn’t be as lonely anymore, and it was only a matter of time before the other attendant dolls evolved. The wasteland would soon become a much livelier place.

“All righty, let’s go have some lunch, shall we?”

“Yeees! I’m excited to see what the attendant dolls made with all the fish we got!”

The three of us made our way back to the mansion, where we enjoyed the meal Beretta and the others had prepared.

For the following week, we occupied ourselves by touring our medicinal herb garden and reading books on the terrace, taking it nice and slow in our little bubble cut off from the rest of the world. And when our batteries were fully recharged, we headed back to the capital of Lawyle.

But right as we were about to leave...

“Miss Beretta, I request permission to accompany Master and Lady Teto on their journey to assist them in providing care for the kitte—I mean, for Master Kuro,” Ai asked Beretta, her face as expressionless as always.

“Rejected. I cannot in good conscience allow you to leave the wasteland in the midst of a global mana drought. Even *my* duties as head maid preclude me from accompanying Master. Please understand,” Beretta said.

Ai wanted to come with us to spend more time with Kuro, but Beretta felt like it’d be unfair for Ai to be the only one traveling with us. The pair of them were staring each other down, their hands interlocked, each trying to convince the other to change her mind. Unfortunately for Ai, Beretta won in terms of mana capacity and life experience, so the poor attendant doll didn’t stand a chance.



"Have a safe trip, Master. We look forward to your next visit," Beretta said, waving us goodbye.

"See you soon," I replied.

"We'll bring you more souvenirs next time!" Teto chirped.

"Meow!"

Teto, Kuro, and I stepped into the transfer gate, emerging in our new house in the capital of Lawbyle, where we resumed our slow-paced days.

CHAPTER 13

THE ROYAL CAPITAL'S TREASURE TROVE

“Teto, breakfast’s ready!”

“Okaaay!”

It had been a few days since we had returned from the wasteland, and today was shaping out to be pretty relaxing.

“Meow!”

I had prepared us a seafood breakfast using fresh fish and shellfish—ingredients we couldn’t get inland—all while gazing at the ocean outside the window.

“The floating island still hasn’t come,” Teto observed.

“We’ve only been here for a few days. Who knows how long it’ll be before it comes near the capital? For all we know, it could be next month, next year, or maybe even in ten years.”

We weren’t in a hurry to leave, so I didn’t mind waiting, even for a few years.

“What should we do today, Lady Witch?”

“Hmm, let’s see... I’m thinking we could go to a Church of the Five Goddesses and offer them some prayers and a couple of gifts.”

Luriel had warned us of the storm, after all; she deserved our thanks.

“Okay!”

“Let’s go, then. Kuro, you’re coming along too.”

The kitten meowed and came to rub its little body against my legs. I had given it some canned pet food for breakfast, and it had fed on my mana too, so its coat was extra

shiny and smooth today.

When we were all ready, the three of us started making our way to the center of the capital.

“The sun is really bright today,” I remarked.

“Lady Witch, be careful not to get sunburned!”

On days off like today, I traded my regular robe-and-witch-hat outfit in for the white sundress and straw hat Beretta and the others had prepared for me. I had stored my usual attire along with my staff in the magic bag that was hanging at my hip so I’d be able to change quickly if the need arose.

“I got too used to my robe keeping me at a nice neutral temperature. It kinda sneaked up on me how hot it really is out here,” I remarked, feeling the early summer sun and sticky sea breeze on my skin. It contrasted drastically with the wasteland’s climate. It wasn’t that bad... but I was still looking forward to coming home and taking a nice bath.

“This weather makes me want to eat something cold,” Teto said.

“We can do that. What would you think of making some cold soup for dinner tonight?” I offered.

“Cold soup? That sounds delicious!” Teto exclaimed, her eyes sparkling at the idea.

Being able to use Ice Magic really was great; I could make cold soup no matter how hot it was outside.

The two of us happily chitchatted as we made our way to the church, Kuro trotting atop the wall bordering the path. We had to stop and ask someone passing by for directions, but it didn’t take us long to get there once we knew what we were doing.

The people of the capital mostly worshipped Luriel—the goddess of the seas—and Leriel—the goddess of the skies. Stone statues of the two of them stood on the church grounds, while the other three goddesses had simply been sculpted in relief.

“Good morning. Can we come pray?” I asked a sister who was sweeping the floor near the entrance.

“Yes, of course.”

We made our way to the sanctuary, and I offered some prayers to the goddesses. Teto followed my example and started praying too, but she couldn’t help occasionally glancing at me to make sure she was doing it right. Every time I felt her gaze on me, I had a hard time restraining my laughter. Kuro hadn’t come with us and was watching us through the window, perched on a stone wall, almost as if it knew it would seem a little out of place in a church.

Thanks to your protection, we managed to survive the storm, and we even saved a little cat-sith. Thank you very much.

As I was praying, I suddenly heard Luriel speak inside my head.

“Chise, you can always count on me if you need help, okay? And I’m looking forward to you bringing the *pwecious wittle baaaby* back to its home!”

A smile played on my lips. The goddesses sure were easygoing, huh? Also, judging by her words, it seemed that the floating island was part of Luriel’s territory.

As we left, I once again went to the sister from earlier.

“Thanks to the goddess’s protection, we safely made it here. It is nothing short of a miracle. Please use these for the church and the orphanage,” I said, handing her a small pouch in which I had put three small gold.

“Oh, thank you so much!” the sister exclaimed with a bow. But her expression turned into one of confusion when she took the pouch. She must’ve felt confused as to why it was so light and why there were so few coins when I had told her she could use them for the church and the orphanage. I hoped she wouldn’t be too shocked by the amount of money in there when she opened it with the priest later.

We regrouped with Kuro. This time, though, the little kitten was walking ahead of us.

“Lady Witch, it looks like Kuro wants to go on a walk,” Teto said.

“Hee hee, you’re right. Let’s accompany it on its walk then, shall we?”

“Meow!”

Kuro made a few stops as we puttered around town, first taking us to a fish dealer, where it meowed and purred until the shop owner gave it some fish. Teto and I decided to buy some fish to eat later while we were at it.

Then, we encountered a stray cat. It immediately started fussing over Kuro, who looked like a little kitten. As the two of them were meowing at each other, Teto looked at me in confusion. “Lady Witch, what are they talking about?”

“Sorry, Teto; I don’t speak cat, much as I hate to admit it.”

I had been granted the ability to understand and read any language in this world when I got reincarnated, but—as expected—animal speech wasn’t part of the package. Some mythical beasts developed the ability to use human speech when they grew up, though; I was looking forward to seeing if Kuro would learn it or not.

For the next few hours, we just leisurely followed Kuro around town. We first walked through the market; then Kuro took us to a back alley where we passed a suspicious-looking general store before strolling through the residential district, the amusement district, and the commercial district, where burly men were carrying heavy-looking crates everywhere.

“The town we stayed in before also had a port, but it seems like the capital’s is much larger, huh? They also seem to have access to a wider array of goods.”

There were a lot more people in the capital’s commercial district than there had been in the other town’s, and some of the goods we saw there were unlike anything we’d seen before. It was a very busy place, so we figured it’d be too dangerous to let Kuro roam around; Teto picked up the kitten so it wouldn’t run off or cause trouble.

“Lady Witch, look! They’re selling really cute tableware here!”

“Tableware, huh? Oh, it *is* cute. We could buy it for ourselves and also gift a set to Beretta and the others.”

The shop Teto had spotted was selling an array of beautifully decorated ceramic plates and tea sets, as well as delicate glasswork. I made my way over and started looking through the wares.

“Oh, this is really nice,” I said when I spotted a set that I liked.

"Lady Witch? Are these plates made of glass?" Teto asked me.

"They are. Glass tableware is really nice in the summer—it makes you feel refreshed just looking at it."

From what I'd been told, the sand in the southern part of the Lawbylean capital was extremely high-quality. Not only that, but the artisans had developed tons of techniques and cutting methods to refine the sand into the most beautiful glass; the tableware crafted from it wasn't just regular tableware—it was high art.

"Excuse me, which workshop is this glass set from?" I asked the shopkeeper.

"This is Atelier Kikuri's most recent work," he told me.

"Atelier Kikuri, huh? I'd like a set, please."

Since glass was fragile, it was apparently considered a luxury here, and I ended up paying five small gold for the set. I put it in my magic bag so it wouldn't break on the way home and left the store very pleased with myself.

"Lady Witch, you look so happy! Was it really that good of a purchase?" Teto asked me.

"My intuition tells me the workshop that made this set is going to become very, *very* popular," I replied.

I wasn't sure if the artisan who made this set had done it consciously or not, but there were traces of mana in it, which would make it more durable than regular glass tableware.

"And since it's not as fragile, we can use it every day without being worried about it breaking. Plus, it's really cute. And in a hundred years—no, in five hundred years, its value will have increased drastically."

Not only would this set—and the other items made by that workshop—last for a very long time, but they would definitely be considered works of art in the future, just like antique stuff in my previous life. Unlike a lot of people, I didn't see the point of collecting jewelry and gemstones. Sure, they could sell for a lot of money, but they were much, much more useful as catalysts to create magic items. Practical things like tableware, alcohol, or books, on the other hand, would only gain in value with time, so I'd made a point to collect them. Who knows? Maybe I'd be the owner of a huge

treasure in the future.

"Oh, what a nice tea set. I'd love to have Beretta serve us tea in this. The handles look very comfortable to hold too. And, look, that set is *gorgeous*; it'd make for some really nice decor."

I went from store to store, looking at all the different tableware and tea sets they sold to find things to add to my ever-growing future antiques collection.

"I'm going to buy these. Ah, but first... Can you tell me what that thing in the back is?" I asked the shopkeeper, pointing at a canvas.

From what I could tell, it seemed to be an oil painting of the royal capital's marketplace depicting people buying and selling fish. In one corner of the picture, you could see a storekeeper running after a stray cat who was holding a fish in its mouth—probably stolen from the shopkeeper—while the other vendors and passersby looked on in curiosity. It really looked like the artist had managed to capture a vibrant cross section of the common folks' daily lives in one single painting.

"That painting?" the shopkeeper said, throwing a glance at the back of his store. "My nephew asked me to display it at my store. He's an artist, you see. But the subject isn't great, so no one wants to buy it. If I can't move it before long, I'll probably sell it to another artist who could use the canvas."

Canvas fabric was quite expensive in this world, so, sometimes, artists painted over other paintings to save on costs.

Popular painting subjects in this era were apparently portraits of nobles or their wives, garden landscapes, religious imagery, and fantasized versions of military exploits. Needless to say, that painting was way too ahead of its time to really find its market.

"I really like it—especially the little cat," I said.

"It's really cute!" Teto chirped. "And Teto likes fish a lot; it makes me hungry just looking at it."

On hearing that Teto and I were calling the cat in the painting "cute," Kuro meowed grumpily, almost as if to say, "Hey, I'm cuter!" and I had to stifle a laugh.

"I can tell you two like cats—you even have one with you." The shopkeeper laughed. He probably thought that the two of us were kids and that his comment would make us giggle, but my gaze was still riveted on the painting, a small smile on my face.

"The cat in this picture is a symbol of prosperity. I think it's quite auspicious," I said.

"What do you mean?" the man asked, his eyebrows shooting up in surprise.

"In poor places, people have no choice but to eat the stray cats for sustenance, meaning there are next to none in the streets. But in this painting, you can see that not only is there a cat walking around, but its fur even looks soft and healthy. These people are well-fed. It might be a very common sight for most people here, but you can tell that they are truly happy."

I had spent a couple of years roaming around the inland parts of Lawbyle, where the harvests had been poor due to a monster sucking up all the region's mana, and I hadn't seen a single stray cat. But the people in the painting looked healthy and happy, and that sight warmed my heart. This must have been why it resonated with me so much.

Seeing as I was staring at that painting quite intensely, the shopkeeper asked me with a serious expression, "If you had to put a price on that painting, how much do you think it'd be, girlie?"

I hummed. "I think one large gold."

I produced a pouch from my magic bag and took out a single large gold coin—the equivalent of one million yen.

"That much?" the man muttered breathlessly.

"Yes. I'm not saying that I'll become that artist's patron, but I'd still like to pay for his supper. I think his day in the sun is coming."

I bought the painting and spent the rest of the morning walking around the commercial district while looking for more hidden gems.

After that, whenever I went to the commercial district, I always made sure to go back to that shop to buy that artist's new paintings, along with tableware and ceramics that I thought were cute. I threw a couple of preservation spells on the paintings and handed them off to Beretta so she could hang them in the mansion.

The Struggling Artist Ragond Zoyle's Side

I was born the third son of a merchant in the capital of Lawbyle and, even as an adult, still relied on my parents' finances to survive. When I was a kid, I'd spend most of my days gazing at the ships coming in and out of the port; I'd always loved the city's mélange of cultures. I decided to start painting some of my favorite scenes so I could always look back on them.

But while my parents were affluent, they weren't so rich that they could support me from the cradle to the grave. Despite my father's grumbling, I still decided to pursue an artist's career, all while he and my mother footed the bill for my living expenses. My uncle ran a tableware and ceramics store, so I asked him to let me display some of my paintings in his shop. At first, he had put them in a place where the customers could easily see them, but since no one was buying them, he began selling them to other artists in need of canvases, erasing my own in the process.

I had begun to think that art wasn't for me and was on the verge of giving up, but I'd decided to go give the painting I'd just finished to my uncle for him to display it.

And, to my surprise, he came to see me a few days later, completely flustered.

"Ragond! I sold your painting!" he told me.

"What?! My painting? Seriously?"

I couldn't believe my ears. To be completely honest, I was certain it would never sell. But when my uncle told me what the buyer had said, I couldn't help but cry, gripping the large gold in my hand tightly. I had no idea anyone would ever give my work that much thought. It gave me the courage I needed to keep my dream alive.

One large gold might seem like nothing to a merchant, but to me, it was more than I could ever have hoped for.

"Thanks. I think I'm going to keep on trying for a bit longer," I told my uncle.

"Sure thing, kiddo. Still, never knew there was such a profound meaning to your paintings."

"I didn't really think there was, to be honest with you."

I simply wanted to draw these scenes because I liked them so much. My uncle burst out laughing at my honest response; I couldn't help but smile myself.

I kept on drawing. I experimented with my style and even tried drawing a portrait of the cat the girl who had bought my painting had called cute. That drew the attention of a pile of noble ladies who all wanted me to paint their *own* pets, and I managed to start making a real living with this work.

Even if they never sold terribly well, I still kept painting scenes of everyday life, and the girl who had bought the first painting I had ever sold bought every single one of them. That girl had sharp eyes, soft eyebrows, and long, beautiful black hair; she was always accompanied by a pretty girl with tanned skin and slight curves, and an adorable black cat. Every time she came to my studio, she always seemed to have a good time looking at my paintings.

Once, five years into meeting them, I took a really good look at them—although they hadn't changed in the slightest compared to when we first met—and, when I arrived back home, I picked up my brush and started drawing them.

I kept this painting of my personal Goddesses of Fortune until the day I died.

It was all thanks to her that I realized my dream of making a living as a painter.

A Maid Sometime in the Future's Side

Ragond Zoyle, the maestro.

Born the third son of a merchant in the capital of the Kingdom of Lawbyle, he spent his entire life devoting himself to art.

At first, he had been an unlucky, struggling artist, forced to rely on his family's funds well into his twenties. However, when he entered his late twenties, he gained recognition for his paintings of animals and received countless commissions to capture all manner of life on his canvases. All the while, he painted a long series of works capturing prosaic scenes from his birthplace and the many regions to which he'd traveled.

When he reached his sixties, he decided to recreate the first painting he had ever sold and finally gave it a name: *The Morning Market*.

To this day, that painting is considered one of the world's great masterpieces; the most recent trustworthy appraisal pegs its worth at at least fifty billion gold.

Furthermore, modern-day analysis spells allowed us to uncover some of his earliest works, which had been sold as canvases for other artists to practice their art on; only a single work of his proved more elusive—a piece he refused to part with until his death. It depicted two young girls and a black cat, and it was called *Goddesses of Fortune*. Careful examination of the historical record matches the subjects of the painting to the famed adventuring party known to the world as the Carpet Riders. It is also possible that one of the girls in the picture is the Witch of Creation, one of the best-known transcendent beings.

It is unclear why Ragond Zoyle painted the piece. Some theories suggest that one of the girls was his first love, while others say they could have been his muses. However, we can confirm nothing.

Many of Ragond Zoyle's early works—including the original copy of *The Morning Market*, which has been reproduced many times all around the world—remain missing, and we are really hoping to, one day, discover them all.

[Excerpt of *Great Figures throughout History*]

I was in the mansion's library, reading the new book Master had bought, when I heard some of the other maids chatting with each other—clearly lingering a little between Miss Beretta's tasks.

"This month's edition of *Great Figures throughout History* was really interesting! Maestro Ragond Zoyle, huh? He must have been dead and buried before we seventeenth-generation dolls were even thought up."

"Master, Lady Teto, and Miss Beretta were, though! Maybe they even got to talk to him!"

"The other maids probably haven't though. None of them could live outside the barrier with so little ambient mana."

The three new attendant dolls—well, mechanoids—were huddled in a corner, reading

the same book. They turned a page and were greeted with a photograph of one of Ragond Zoyle's famous paintings. Gazing at the image, they felt a spike of déjà vu and exchanged puzzled glances.

"That painting..."

"Yeah, it looks just like... Hmm, actually, not quite..."

They were staring at a painting hung on the wall. It had been displayed there long before we were born. It was a really, really old painting, but it had been enchanted with a preservation spell to keep it from deteriorating. The three maids looked closer and noticed something that looked exactly like Ragond's signature in the corner of the painting.

"No way," one of the maids chuckled. "This can't be the original *Morning Market*."

"If it really were, it'd mean that painting is worth fifty billion gold! Well, I don't really know how rich Master is, though. It would be so cool if it were the real one."

"There's no way. Master has lived for so long, surely they must've fallen for a forgery at least once."

The three of them examined the painting from every single angle, but they unfortunately, lacked the necessary aesthetic knowledge required to gauge if the painting was the original *Morning Market* or not.

"You three, your break is almost over!"

"Yes, Miss Beretta!"

The three maids put the book back on its shelf and exited the room. The painting hung on the wall, undisturbed as it always had been.

Could it really have been the original *Morning Market*?

CHAPTER 14

THE SUTHERLAND MAGIC SCHOOL

We'd been wandering down the streets of the royal capital for several hours at this point, and before we knew it, we had reached the western part of town. The atmosphere there was completely different from the rest of the city. The capital was divided into three main sections: the eastern part, housing the port and commercial district; the central part, home to the royal castle and noble residences; and, lastly, the western part where the common people lived.

"Oooh, it's our first time coming to this part of town!" Teto chirped.

"It is," I said with a nod. "The second adventurer's guild is located somewhere nearby, so let's go show our faces there, shall we?"

The royal capital was so large there were two adventurer's guilds on either side of town. We'd gone to the one located near the harbor when we first arrived—which was where we'd met Mr. Zelitch—but I wanted to check out the western guild's quest board just to see what they had to offer.

"Kuro, we're going to make a quick stop at the guild. Come back," I told the little kitten, who immediately turned around and jumped into my arms.

After a few more minutes of walking, we found the guild, and the three of us made our way to the quest board.

"So this is the western guild, huh? Let's check out the quests..." I muttered, surveying the quest board. "Ah, I see."

At the eastern guild, most of the quests had consisted of merchant ship escort missions, port-related chores, and slaying the monsters that regularly washed up on the beach.

But here, the quests were completely different. It seemed that there was a dungeon about two hours on foot from the royal capital, and a lot of the quests had to do with the dungeon itself or the monsters that occasionally left it to attack the nearby villages.

There were also a lot of medicinal-herb-collecting missions.

"It's funny that the quests are so vastly different depending on which part of the city you're in," I said.

"It is!" Teto nodded.

It was early afternoon, so the guild was mostly empty, and I was discussing with Teto whether we should turn in some of our medicinal herbs or not when a group of men clad in good-quality robes and holding staves entered the guild, a few other, plainer-looking adventurers in tow.

"Hey! Bring the loot to the counter!" one of the mages ordered.

"Y-Yes!"

The plain-looking adventurers looked like they wanted to protest at being talked to like servants by the haughty mages, but they bit their tongues and brought the monster loot to the counter in silence. A few more groups wearing the same dark green robes as the first entered the guild, and they all had the same self-important attitude.

"Lady Witch, I don't like this," Teto whispered to me.

"Let's stand back for now. These people seem like bad news," I whispered back; the three of us made our way towards the back of the guild, where we observed the situation from afar.

"As per our agreement, we'll take the materials required to craft wind and water catalysts. Oh, and also half of the money from the sale of the loot," one of the mages said.

"What?! We're fine with you getting the materials for the catalysts, but you want *half* of our hard-earned money too?! That's tyrannical!" an adventurer protested.

"Do you want to lodge a complaint to the Sutherland Magic School, then? I wouldn't do that if I were you; how are you going to fight those monsters if you can't hire mages anymore?"

The adventurer bit his lip, unable to retort, eliciting a self-satisfied smirk from the

Sutherland mage.

"Cat got your tongue, huh?" the mage said. "That's good; just shut up and do as you're told. We're magic students! Unlike you commoners, we need money to fund our noble research."

The mages got their materials and their money and left the guild.

Still a little rattled by the surprising display I had just witnessed, I made my way to the now-free buying-and-selling counter, Teto in tow.

"Hello," I said.

"Hi, girlies. What brings you here?" the receptionist asked me with a smile.

"We'd like to turn these in, please," I said, setting down the medicinal herbs I had discreetly taken out of my magic bag earlier on the counter.

I didn't hand him my guild card, pretending I was a regular citizen of Lawbyle who had just come to sell herbs to the guild for some pocket money.

"What's that 'Sutherland Magic School' that man spoke about?" I asked, looking up at him with big, innocent eyes, hugging Kuro against my chest tightly.

The man's gaze softened, and he replied, "You don't know? Sutherland is the most famous magic school in the country."

"So they're, like, really amazing people?" I asked childishly.

A bitter smile formed on the man's face, and he stayed silent. It seemed he didn't *quite* agree with that statement but couldn't say it.

I asked the man a few more questions while he was counting up the herbs I had brought. When he was done, I noticed that the regular-looking adventurers from earlier had taken a seat at the guild's drinking hall and were complaining about the Sutherland mages, so I decided to approach them to glean some more information.

"It must've been hard for you," Teto said sympathetically.

"You're working really hard, misters," I added.

“Meow.”

“I know! But these guys have all those nobles backing them up... Damn it!” one of the men said before shaking his head. “Well, talking about this sort of stuff with kids and a kitten isn’t gonna help.”

We spent the afternoon learning about this new facet of the royal capital. The school was centered around the earl of Sutherland and his relatives, one of the most prestigious mage families in the entire kingdom and specialists in Wind Magic. They had apparently produced a large number of court magicians. Furthermore, Lawbyle was a coastal kingdom, so Wind Magic users were much more valuable than other mages, as they could help ships advance even when the weather conditions weren’t great and protect the city from heavy rain and tsunamis. As such, the Sutherland mages considered Wind Magic superior to every other type of magic. They always donned their trademark deep green robes to make it apparent that they were part of the Sutherland school.

As a side note, while these were commonly referred to as magic “schools,” they were more akin to apprenticeship systems than proper schools. There were simply too few people who could use magic in this day and age, so building and running a school wasn’t worth it—not to mention that mages were usually very protective of their techniques and wouldn’t teach them to just anyone. Still, the kingdom’s next generation of mages still needed raising; a master-and-apprentice model was a natural adaptation.

“The Sutherland mages have been using adventurers to help them kill monsters in the dungeon and level up, huh?” I mused as we were heading home that evening.

“Teto doesn’t like their attitude at all!” Teto said, pouting and cradling Kuro against her chest.

I couldn’t blame her; those mages sure hadn’t come off as particularly likable. However, I couldn’t help but be impressed by the Sutherland Magic School. Not only were their teaching methods extremely efficient, but their research really caught my attention as well. The Sutherland school put its focus exclusively on Wind Magic, and they had come up with tons of ways to amplify it using catalysts and potions, as well as all sorts of tattoos, magic circles, and magic items to enhance the effect of their spells. They also had done a lot of research on how to develop the kind of magic that was most suitable for one’s environment.

“It sounds really interesting,” I said.

“Teto’s happy you’re having fun, Lady Witch... Ah!”

“Meow!”

As Teto was talking, Kuro suddenly jumped out of her arms and dashed into a back alley.

“Kuro, wait!” Teto exclaimed, running after the cat.

“Did it find something?” I wondered.

Kuro was a mythical beast; it wouldn’t just run off for no reason. No, it must’ve sensed *something* in that back alley. I chased after the little kitten and found it sniffing at a pile of dark-colored fabric on the ground.

“What’s going on, Kuro?” I asked.

The kitten meowed, repeatedly pressing its front paw into the pile. Something started stirring under it, and I hurriedly lifted the end of the fabric, revealing a head full of auburn hair.

“Did something happen to them?” I muttered.

“Lady Witch, it’s a girl!”

Teto was right; the little silhouette lying on the floor seemed to be a girl of around twelve years old. I went to check her pulse, but, right as the tips of my fingers came in contact with her skin, I felt something akin to an electric shock run through me, and I hurriedly withdrew my hand. I didn’t know why, but, after touching her, I felt a strong connection to this little girl.

“Lady Witch, what’s wrong?” Teto asked me.

“Nothing,” I replied after a short pause. “Nothing at all.”

Still puzzled by what had just happened, I surveyed our surroundings. In the royal capital, small back alleys like this one weren’t really safe at night; I couldn’t in good conscience leave this poor girl here.

"We don't really have a choice, do we?" I mused. "Let's take her with us."

I tasked Teto with carrying the unconscious girl, and we resumed our walk home. When we reached a more well-lit area, it suddenly struck me that I'd seen the robe the girl was wearing before.

"Oh, she's wearing the same robe as the mages from earlier. She's from the Sutherland Magic School."

But why was a mage from such an influential school passed out in the streets in the middle of the night? She didn't seem hurt or wounded, but her complexion wasn't looking too good and she looked exhausted; perhaps she had overworked herself and didn't make it home?

Puzzled about this whole situation, we took her back to our house and put her to bed. All we could do now was wait for her to wake up and tell us what had happened to her.

CHAPTER 15

THE GOOD-FOR-NOTHING MAGE

“As promised, I’m going to make some cold soup for dinner.”

“Teto can help, Lady Witch!”

Teto and I stood side by side in the kitchen as we worked on our meal. That night, the star of the show was a potato and milk cold soup, but we also prepared a fish meunière, some vegetables and mushrooms sautéed with butter, and a refreshing seaweed salad. It all looked really yummy.

“All righty, this should be good,” I said.

“It looks delicious!”

We were about to start eating when we heard Kuro meow in the background. Turning around, we were met with the sight of the girl from earlier standing in the doorway of the kitchen and trembling like a leaf.

“U-Um... Where am I?” she asked timidly.

“This is our house,” I answered softly so as not to scare her further. “Kuro found you passed out on the floor, so we brought you back with us.”

“Kuro?” she asked, her head tilted to the side in curiosity.

“The kitten next to you! It’s very cute and smart!” Teto chirped, extending a hand towards Kuro.

The little girl looked in the direction Teto was pointing, and the anxious look on her face turned into a soft, mellow smile.

“You’re the one who saved me?” she asked Kuro. “Thank you!” she said, crouching down and extending a hand towards the kitten.

But Kuro simply meowed before turning around to go eat its meal. I saw the little girl's shoulders slump in disappointment and asked her with a smile, "We were about to have dinner. Would you like to join us?"

"Oh, I couldn't! You saved me and even let me sleep in your bed. I don't want to trouble you fur—"

Growl.

The girl had tried to refuse my offer, but the loud growling coming from her stomach betrayed her. Perhaps the smell of melted butter had stimulated her appetite.

The girl's face instantly turned red as a tomato.

"Don't worry about it. Besides, I can't let a little girl starve under my roof now, can I?" I said.

"Lady Witch's right! You should eat with us; Lady Witch's cooking is really yummy!" Teto piped up.



"U-Um, a little girl? Lady Witch?" the girl repeated. "I mean... Thank you..."

The little girl sat down at the dinner table and started eating.

"Hmm?! What's this bread? It's so white and fluffy! And it's sweet! This soup is so silky and smooth, but at the same time, the coldness of it makes me feel a lot more energized. Ooh, and this fish meunière is delicious! And this salad is so refreshing! The dressing is to die for. This crispy stuff... That's seaweed, right? I never knew you could eat it like this!"

I had made plenty of food knowing Teto would eat every last bit of it, but the little girl must've been really hungry, because she was eating with gusto.

It always made me really happy to see someone enjoy the food I'd made.

"Thank you for the meal. It was delicious," the girl said politely, remembering her manners now that her tummy was full. She bowed her head in gratitude and eyed us timidly, waiting for us to say something.

I decided now was probably a good time to tell the girl our names. "We haven't introduced ourselves yet, have we? I'm Chise," I said.

"Teto is Teto! And I already told you earlier, but this is Kuro!" Teto piped up, picking up the kitten, who was on the verge of falling into a food coma, and making it raise its front paws in a celebratory pose.

This elicited a smile from the young girl. "My name is Yuicia. I'm a mage... apprentice from the Sutherland school," she said, hesitating a bit before the "apprentice" part. "Thank you again for saving me."

"Well then, Miss Yuicia from the Sutherland school, could you tell us what made you collapse in the middle of the street?" I asked.

A frustrated expression flashed across Yuicia's face before she gave a slight nod and told us the blow-by-blow.

Yuicia's Side

I was born a commoner in the lower part of the royal capital.

One day, my father, a fisherman by trade, ventured out to sea and fell victim to a ruthless storm. Not long after, my mother succumbed to an epidemic, almost as if to follow him into the afterlife. I was only ten at the time.

However, I didn't have much time to mourn them; right when my mother passed away, I discovered that I could use magic and was promptly sent to become an apprentice at the Sutherland Magic School. I moved into the dorms and promised myself I would do everything in my power to become a court magician. That way, I'd never have to worry about money and my parents wouldn't have to worry about me, wherever they were.

But unfortunately it became evident before long that while I could use the everyday stuff, I was hopeless at offensive magic.

The other young mages were out there, sharpening their skills by helping adventurers take on dungeon monsters, leveling up their magical damage and expanding their mana pools. But while I had a surprisingly high amount of MP for a commoner, I couldn't defeat a single monster. My magic progress hit a plateau, and a large gap in power emerged between me and my fellow apprentices. Besides, most of the top students came from noble or rich families; they could easily buy catalysts and magic enhancement potions with their parents' money, while we commoners had to take care of routine tasks at the guild or run errands for the school to earn enough money to pay for our boarding expenses.

For a while, I considered transferring to another magic school, one that was centered more on magic research rather than practice. But to my dismay, most magic schools had very bad relationships with each other, and they never accepted apprentices from other schools, fearing that they might be spies aiming to steal their research.

Still, I didn't give up on my dream; I decided to take on more jobs and cut down on food expenses to save up enough money to buy a catalyst to improve my magic. But my body reached its limits before I could reach my goal.

I passed out in the streets and got rescued by two very kind girls who even shared their dinner with me.

"Anyway, that's the gist of it," I said once I was done telling them my life story. "Ah, I'm

“Sorry for monopolizing the conversation!”

While I was truly sorry, I also felt a little relieved after having shared my concerns with them.

The Witch's Side

“Thank you for the food. I’m going to go back to the dorms now,” Yuicia said.

“It’s already quite late; you should stay the night. Children like you shouldn’t wander the streets at night.”

“Lady Witch is right; you should let us spoil you today! Oh, we have dessert too. Do you want some?” Teto asked the girl.

Yuicia threw us a confused look, as if we had said something weird. “Children like me? Chise, aren’t we about the same age? And you haven’t asked your parents or guardian if I’m allowed to stay yet.”

“Well, we might look young, but Teto and I are actually much older than you,” I said. Yuicia’s eyes went wide.

Jeez, when did I turn into a meddling auntie? I thought, inwardly sighing. I couldn’t help it; it just wouldn’t sit right with me to leave a young girl like Yuicia to her own devices.

“I actually have a little proposition for you, Yuicia,” I said.

“F-For me? What is it?”

I thought back on the weird connection I felt to Yuicia when I’d brushed up against her. I still had no idea what could’ve caused that feeling, but I really, really wanted to know, so I came up with an idea.

“What would you say about living here with us?” I offered.

“Living here... with you?” Yuicia repeated, her eyes widening even further.

“We still have plenty of empty rooms and we wouldn’t ask you to pay rent. We’ll also

provide you with food and other daily commodities. All we want in exchange is for you to look after Kuro when we're out and to check the sea to see if the floating island is visible or not," I said, before muttering to myself, "Well, Kuro's pretty smart, so I'm sure it'll let her know when it's mealtime."

"So I'd basically be like live-in help, is that it?" Yuicia summarized.

"Something like that, yeah. But you wouldn't have to pay for any living expenses, unlike at your dorm, so it'd cause less of a strain on your budget."

"But *why*? I'm just a stranger to you..." she muttered, perplexed.

On the one hand, she must've been suspicious as to why I was offering her such a good deal, but on the other, not having living expenses of her own would allow her to save up for that catalyst she wanted. But then again, she didn't know us; she couldn't know what our true intentions were.

"Could you please give me some time to think it over?" she asked after a pause.

"Of course. Anyway, it's getting pretty late. We should have a bath and go to bed," I suggested in an extra cheery tone so as to stop her from worrying too much.

"Roger!" Teto chirped.

"Huh? A bath?!" Yuicia repeated, her jaw hitting the floor.

We headed to the bathroom I had made with my magic.

"*Water! Fire Ball!*" I chanted, holding out a hand towards the bathtub, filling it with water that I then heated up.

"Huuuh?!" Yuicia yelled upon seeing my unconventional method of getting a bath going.

"You must be tired, so you can go in first," I told the girl. "There's soap there; you can use it to wash up, okay? I'll go get you a change of clothes."

I gently pushed the little girl into the bathroom and made a pajama set for her with my Creation Magic.

"Lady Witch, is Yuicia going to come live with us?" Teto asked.

"Who knows? I'm hoping she will, now that she's seen my little display of magic," I said, gazing at Kuro as it slept in its little pet bed, curled up into a ball.

It might've been a cat-sith, but at the end of the day it was still a kitten; walking for an entire day must've tired it out.

Teto and I sipped on some tea while we waited for Yuicia to come out of the bathroom. When she did, clad in the pajamas I made for her, there was a resolute expression on her face, which contrasted drastically with her timid demeanor from earlier.

"Miss Chise, you clearly are a much better mage than me. Please teach me magic! I'll help you around the house; I'll do anything!" she said, bowing her head to me.

"Sure thing," I casually agreed. "Well then, I'm going to take a bath. Go ahead and turn in for the night if you want. You can use the bed you were sleeping in earlier."

"Teto's gonna go have a bath with Lady Witch!"

"Huuuh?!"

Once again, Yuicia let out a shocked cry, flabbergasted at how easily I agreed to her request—and also at Teto's proclamation.

This was my first meeting with Yuicia—the girl who was to become my apprentice.

CHAPTER 16

SEMIRETIEMENT AND WAITING FOR THE FLOATING ISLAND

The next morning, when I woke up and went to open the window, I was greeted with a slightly overcast sky and the deep, azure sea glimmering.

“Still not there, huh?” I muttered, half disappointed that the floating island still hadn’t come and half glad that I’d still get to spend some more time with Kuro.

I headed to the kitchen and got started on breakfast.

“Let’s see... I’m thinking toast, bacon, scrambled eggs, and consommé. I’m also going to take out the strawberry jam and some yogurt, and I can make boiled vegetables and olive-marinated fish too. And, last but not least, an orange for each of us.”

I took out the ingredients and got to cooking, using all sorts of different spells to help me. First, I used *Fire* to turn on the stove. Then I filled a pot with the really convenient *Water* spell, before casting *Wind Cutter* to cut the vegetables I was holding in midair with *Psychokinesis*. I was using the same spell to maneuver all the pots and pans at the same time. It must’ve been a pretty extraordinary sight.

I never used my magic for cooking when Beretta or Teto were with me, since it could get pretty overwhelming, but when I was alone, I liked using all sorts of different spells to help me get things done faster, making sure to adjust every spell so it wasn’t too strong or too weak. This was my way of training my control over my magic, so I hopefully wouldn’t end up in a situation where it’d go haywire on me.

As I was cooking, I heard the sound of footsteps behind me and turned around.

“Amazing...” Yuicia breathed out. “But, hold on, how do you even...? And why...?”

The girl was speechless.

“Good morning,” I greeted her. “Did you sleep well?”

"Ah! G-Good morning. And, um, thank you."

I poured some black tea into a cup and handed it to Yuicia, using my magic to set the table.

"Wow, amazing..." she marveled, her eyes shining with excitement, mesmerized by the floating tableware. "You're just like the mages in the fairytales I used to read when I was little!"

I couldn't resist the smile that broke across my face.

"A-Ah, I'm sorry!" Yuicia said, seemingly remembering herself.

"Don't worry. I was thinking about my daughter; she used to love to watch me do this when she was little."

"I know you said you're older than me, but, um, you have a daughter, Miss Chise?" Yuicia asked in a small voice.

"An adopted daughter," I clarified. "Well, she's all grown-up now, though; she even has a husband."

I made idle small talk with Yuicia while I finished preparing breakfast, waiting for Teto to wake up.

My adopted daughter—Selene—had gotten married many years ago now, but I still liked to reminisce about her occasionally.

Is that proof that I've grown old? I wondered inwardly.

"I didn't want to scare her off by using offensive magic in front of her, so I always made sure to only show her neat little tricks like these," I explained.

"How old is she exactly?" I heard Yuicia mutter. "Even most court magicians can't use more than one type of magic—never mind all of them."

I'd neglected to show off all the *other* stuff I'd mastered. As my body had stopped aging, my stamina and my physical strength were rather subpar. To remedy that, I had perfected the art of Body Strengthening to make my body as tough as an adult male's, and I could put up barriers to protect myself from surprise attacks. And when that

wasn't enough, I could always use Body Hardening—the advanced version of Body Strengthening—and layer barriers to create an almost impervious defense.

I debated telling Yuicia about my status as an A-rank adventurer, but I was feeling a little mischievous and decided to hold off a little longer.

"I'm just a regular witch. I taught myself some magic while working as an adventurer, and I've only arrived in Lawbyle pretty recently," I said.

"Ooh, you're an adventurer?" Yuicia asked, sounding impressed as she dug into her breakfast.

I heard another set of footsteps coming towards the kitchen; Teto must've woken up.

"Lady Wiiitch, why didn't you wake me up? That's mean! I wanted to help you make breakfast," she whined when she entered the room.

"Sorry, Teto. You were sleeping so peacefully, I couldn't bring myself to wake you. Besides, I wanted to make breakfast on my own this morning."

"Then I forgive you! Oooh, the food looks so yummy! I'm digging in!"

Without wasting a single second, Teto took a seat at the table and started stuffing her face. Yuicia looked a little surprised at that, but, well, that was a daily occurrence, so I didn't bat an eye at it.

"Lady Witch, what are we doing today?"

"Let's go to the guild to pick up some quests. What are your plans, Yuicia?" I asked our little guest.

"I'm... I'm going to go get my things at the dorm and move them here, if that's all right with you," she said timidly.

We were going to have to split up for a bit. I nodded and went to retrieve something. "Here's a spare key. You can put your things in the room you used yesterday."

"Th-Thank you."

"What about you, Kuro? What are your plans for the day?" Teto asked the little kitten.

Having eaten its fill of cat food, Kuro let out a little meow, jumped out of the window, and dashed away.

"Huh? It's gone!" Yuicia panicked. "Should we go after it?"

"No, it's fine. Kuro has a collar, and it probably just went on a little walk. It might even go play with some stray cats. Who knows?"

I had used magic to hide Kuro's real identity, and I had put a tracking enchantment in its collar so I could know where it was at all times. It also had an emergency barrier enchantment, which would ensure it wouldn't get hurt. As long as it didn't leave the royal capital, we could go rescue it at any time.

"O-Oh, I see," Yuicia said. "Well then, I'm going to head out too."

She headed to the door—having changed into her clothes from the previous day before coming down for breakfast—and Teto and I saw her off. Then we changed into our adventurer's gear and started for the guild. Today, we decided to go to the one near the harbor. As soon as we entered the building, the receptionist shot up and came to the door to greet us.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto, we've been waiting eagerly for your arrival!"

"Ah, no need for such formality. Just treat us like any other adventurers, all right?" I said with a smile.

"Lady Witch is right!"

"Understood. Mr. Zelitch is out, but he entrusted me with a list of quests for you," the receptionist said, taking a sheet of paper out of a file full of missions the Grand Master had compiled for us. I noticed a few of the quests on the memo were crossed out.

"What does that mean?" I asked the receptionist, pointing at one of them.

"These are quests that the client withdrew or that have been taken on by other adventurers between the time the Grand Master compiled them and now."

So, basically, they had been crossed out so we wouldn't take on quests that had already been cleared.

I gave the list a quick read and pointed at a few of the quests.

"We brought enough medicinal herbs with us to clear these ones. Can we turn them in now?" I asked.

"Of course. How many are we talking about?"

"We should probably move to another room to count them," I said, patting my magic bag to signify that it was *a lot* of herbs.

I had created an environment for all of the medicinal herbs used in potions to grow in the wasteland, and I regularly harvested them, so I had more than enough to clear all of these quests—not to mention the quality of the herbs was also way above what the client had asked for. We assessed the herbs with one of the guild's sales and acquisitions staff, and just like that, we had cleared several quests at once.

"Thank you so much. We're always struggling with medicinal herbs due to the location of our guild; most people deliver theirs to the one on the other side of town, as it's closer to the entrance," the receptionist explained.

I couldn't help but think she knew a lot about the guild's internal state of affairs for a receptionist. She must've noticed the slight change in my expression as she said, "Ah, I haven't introduced myself yet, have I? I'm the submaster of the eastern branch of the royal capital's adventurer's guild; my name is Sheryl. I take on guildmaster duties when Mr. Zelitch is busy with his duties as duke."

"Oh, the submaster, huh?"

"It's rare for a lady to be submaster!" Teto piped up.

For better or for worse, the world of adventurers tended to be male-dominated, so it was pretty rare to see a woman in a high position.

She must be really good at what she does, I mused, impressed.

"I will mark these quests as cleared then," Sheryl said. "If I may, you seem to have some time on your hands. Would it be possible for you to take on a few more quests?" she asked tentatively.

"I actually wanted to talk to you about that."

At first, I had told Mr. Zelitch that I didn't want to take on long quests, as we couldn't leave Kuro alone for too long. Of course, our flying carpet basically allowed us to cut travel time in half, but I was still a bit unsure. However, now that we had Yuicia staying with us, she could take care of Kuro during our absence.

I told Sheryl that we could take on longer quests as long as we wouldn't have to be away for longer than a week at a time. However, since we didn't have the slightest interest in dealing with people in positions of power, we wouldn't take on quests issued by nobles or magic schools.

"Understood. I'll make sure not to assign those to you," Sheryl said.

"Thanks. For today, we're just going to take on a few routine quests in town."

"Routine quests... Are you sure? You're A-rank adventurers," she said, furrowing her brow.

She most likely couldn't fathom why two adventurers whose strength could rival an entire country's military power would take on easy tasks even the lowest-ranked adventurers could do.

"It's Lady Witch's hobby! And we like strolling around town," Teto chirped.

"I can make more than enough money to cover our living expenses simply by making potions with the herbs I grow and selling them to the guild, so we really don't need to take on better-paying quests," I explained.

And so, just as we'd done in Gald all these years, we set out to clear all the routine quests no one wanted to take on to help the people of Lawbyle.

CHAPTER 17

THE WITCH'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

First, we took on a few delivery jobs. The capital of Lawbyle was hilly, which made delivering goods quite difficult for most people. But it wasn't a problem for us; all we had to do was store everything in our magic bag and leisurely stroll around town until we reached our destination.

"That was all for this merchant," I said when I was done unloading the goods. "That was our last job of the day, right?"

"Yup! All we have to do is report to the guild and we can go home!" Teto chirped.

And so we did just that.

"Meow!"

"Oh, Kuro! Are you done with your walk?"

"Welcome back!"

Kuro had found us on our way back. It gracefully leaped from the roof it was standing on, landing smoothly on my shoulder. We stopped by the guild quickly to collect our reward for clearing the delivery quests and headed back home.

Yuicia was already there, preparing dinner in the kitchen.

"Ah, welcome home, Miss Chise, Miss Teto!" she greeted us with a smile that soon turned into an anxious grimace. "Um, I'm sorry for using your ingredients without asking."

"I don't mind; I told you we'd cover your food expenses, right? And besides, it looks delicious!"

"Teto wants to eat your cooking too, Yuicia! It looks yummy!"

Kuro meowed, almost as if to say it agreed with us, which elicited a chuckle from the young girl.

“It’s almost ready. Just a few more minutes, okay?”

“I’ll set the table,” I offered.

“Teto will help too!”

We helped Yuicia get everything ready, and, when the food was done, the three of us sat down and enjoyed a nice dinner. After that, we drank some tea while I petted Kuro—who was lying on my lap—to recharge its mana. When it had gotten its fill, Teto picked it up from behind.

“Lady Wiiitch, Kuro and I are gonna take a bath!”

“Meow meow?!”

“Okay, Teto, enjoy your bath.”

I had gotten the bathtub ready before dinner.

I watched Teto as she took a struggling Kuro to the bathroom with her—cat-siths, just like other cats, did *not* like baths—before turning back to Yuicia.

“Okay, so, you said you wanted to become a mage, right? What kind of mage do you want to become exactly?”

“What kind of... mage?” she said, before pondering over the question for a few seconds.
“I don’t suppose ‘a rich court magician’ is a good answer.”

I nodded. “That’s right; I’m asking what kind of *you* you want to become.”

“Um... I want to become like the mages in the books I read when I was little. But that’s not a very concrete answer, is it? I’ve never thought about this before...” Yuicia said hesitantly, her brow furrowing.

Having been deemed a “failure” by her magic school and needing to spend most of her time trying to pay for her lodging fees, she had probably never had time to ask herself what she truly wanted to do.

"Well, you can take your time to think about that, okay? For now, my goal is to help you reach a certain milestone."

"A certain milestone?" she repeated, loudly gulping out of nervousness. "Y-You're going to pass down your knowledge to me?"

"Exactly; I will teach you how to earn three silver coins a day."

"Excuse me?" Yuicia said, tilting her head to the side in utter confusion.

I was dead serious.

"Um, um... Is that really all you're going to teach me? Not how to use intermediate-level magic or any of your secret spells or special techniques?"

"Nope. I'll teach you how to earn three silver coins a day. Well, to be precise, how to earn thirty of them in a month."

One silver coin was equal to ten thousand yen. If Yuicia earned three silver coins a day, then she'd only have to work for ten days to reach a monthly income of thirty silver coins, and she could dedicate the remaining twenty days to magic research, training, resting, or earning even more money if she so wished. Three silver coins a day was the base salary for a professional mage. Most commoners usually worked tirelessly to earn one silver coin a day and had to live pretty modest lives, so although it didn't compare to the salary of a court magician, three silver coins was a pretty decent income.

"The more money you earn in a day, the more time you have to do other things, so my goal right now is for you to be able to stand on your own," I explained.

"That's not really what I was expecting when you said you'd teach me magic. Our teachers and mentors never talked about money," Yuicia said.

"Well, that doesn't surprise me. Court magicians get a pretty hefty salary and even research funds. But we adventurers have to ensure we can make a livelihood out of our craft before anything else."

Yuicia nodded. "I-I see," she said before looking around our rental home.

Up until now, she had been struggling to earn enough money to pay her lodging fees

to stay at her dorm. But if she found a way to earn a steady income, then she'd also be able to rent a home just like this one. That was what she must've been thinking right now.

"All righty then, can you show me your best daily-use spell?" I asked.

"Y-Yes!" she said before chanting, "I beseech thee, tranquil zephyr. *Wind!*"

This must've been one of the first spells she had been taught at the Sutherland Magic School, since they specialized in Wind Magic.

"How many MP did you spend on that spell?"

"Around 60," Yuicia replied.

"That's not very cost-efficient," I muttered.

An offensive spell, like *Fire Ball*, for instance, cost about ten to thirty MP, so having to spend sixty MP to make some wind was pretty inefficient.

"I-I'm sorry!" Yuicia said, almost by reflex.

She must've thought that the furrow in my brow was caused by anger, when, in reality, I was just wondering how to teach her how to be more economical with her mana.

"Cast the same spell one more time and try to maintain it."

"Y-Yes!"

She held out a hand and cast the *Wind* spell a second time. I went to stand behind her and placed my hand on hers.

"M-Miss Chise?!" Yuicia squeaked in surprise, almost cutting her spell off.

"Keep going. *Search!*"

This allowed me to check her status.

She has about 2,000 MP, huh? That's more than the regular person, but it's pretty low for a mage. She's so low-level, though, it's not that surprising. Besides, her mana-to-spell

conversion is really bad. That's because she hasn't upped her Mana Control skill at all. That's not all there is to it, though...

"You can stop," I said.

"A-All right."

Her face was all red and she hung her head in exhaustion. She clearly wasn't used to maintaining that spell.

I knew everything I needed to now.

"Yuicia, your right arm got injured in the past, didn't it?" I said.

"Huh?! How do you know that?!" She gawked at me.

"Bingo. So that's why your mana-to-spell conversion is so bad."

People circulated their mana through their bodies by sending it from their cores to other places—in most mages' their hands or staves. However, if someone sustained a large injury, their mana vessels would get tighter, making it more difficult for the mana to travel in that part of their body.

"Adventurers who use Body Strengthening do so by circulating their mana throughout their entire bodies. But if they hurt their mana vessels, they can sometimes find it difficult to use all of their strength," I explained.

"S-So that's why I..." Yuicia trailed off.

"Well, that's just one of the reasons your spells aren't cost-efficient. You also have a very low Mana Control skill, and you probably don't know enough about magic to use it efficiently."

"Eek!" Hearing me list all of the reasons why she was struggling with her magic seemed to have caused her quite a shock.

"Well, the first step is going to be to fix your arm. Here, let me. *Manipulation!*"

"Y-Yes. Ooh, it feels so warm!"

I put my hand on the old scar on Yuicia's arm and used my magic to fix her mana vessels. The girl closed her eyes in bliss at the warm sensation in her arm. All in all, it took me less than a minute to fix the issue.

"All righty, now your arm is back to normal. Your Mana Control and your visualization skills are both still pretty weak though, so I'll help you train those all while teaching you ways to earn money quickly."

Just as we finished, Teto and Kuro emerged from the bathroom.

"We're back!" Teto chirped.

"You're both still wet," I remarked. "Come here."

I used a combination of *Heat* and *Wind* to create a warm breeze to dry them. Just like this morning, Yuicia's jaw hit the floor when she saw me use spells from two different magic families and maintain them simultaneously.

"You can keep those spells up like it's nothing," she breathed in amazement.

"Well, that's how I make a living, after all." I chuckled, eliciting a smile from Teto, who was obediently letting me dry her hair.

Yuicia went to take a bath next, and then it was finally my turn. With my body thoroughly warmed up, I readied myself for the night and sat on the bed, Teto wrapping her arms around me from behind.

"Lady Witch, did you figure something out about Yuicia?" she asked me.

"I did; she's the same as me."

"What do you mean?"

"Her body has the disposition to stop aging."

When I used *Search* on her earlier, I had finally understood why I had felt that strange connection to her the first time I touched her.

"So she's going to live a long time like you?" Teto asked.

"At this stage, no. She needs to meet a few conditions for the ability to activate."

Liriel and the other goddesses had told me before that four generations of humans had succeeded each other in this world.

The first generation were the original humans, the ones created directly by the gods. The goddesses had granted them the capacity to live very long lives so they could help advance the world. Reincarnators like myself, as well as legendary sages and witches, had been blessed with the same ability.

The second generation were the descendants of the first generation. While the immortality factor hadn't been passed on to all of them, they possessed great quantities of mana, which allowed them to live incredibly long lives nonetheless. Furthermore, some humans reproduced with mythical beasts, spirits, and dragons, giving birth to new subspecies of humans, including beastfolks, elves, dwarves, and dragonfolks. However, due to their high dependency on mana, most of the second generation had perished during the disaster that struck the world two thousand years ago.

The third generation of humans were born with bodies that could withstand the low-mana environment caused by the previous generation's rampage. There were large discrepancies between each individual's mana pool, though, which meant that while some of them could live for hundreds of years, others had much shorter life spans. Most of the world's current population belonged to this third generation.

Lastly, the fourth generation were demons, who had appeared after the goddesses introduced the "status" system to help humans with low mana survive in this world. Their main characteristic was that they had a magic stone core, just like Teto and Beretta, for instance.

"Could Yuicia have inherited the capacity to stop aging from the original humans?" I wondered out loud.

Back when Selene had lived with us, she had grown her mana pool to the point where her aging was very slow. However, she hadn't achieved true immortality. Yuicia, on the other hand, had the real deal.

"Are you going to help Yuicia become immortal, then?" Teto asked me. "You'll get a friend who's just like you!"

I hummed. "I haven't decided yet."

To achieve true immortality, one needed not only the capacity to stop aging but also an insanely large mana pool. In my case, I had only unlocked the skill when my base MP had crossed the thirty-thousand mark. I didn't know how much MP Yuicia would need to gain that skill, but it was very likely that, if she grew it by eating a strange fruit every day just like I did, she'd end up reaching immortality as well.

"Besides, Yuicia's not going to attain true happiness if she just becomes immortal," I said.

"Hm? Teto is happy because she can stay with Lady Witch forever! Is it not the same for Yuicia?" Teto asked.

"The concept of 'happiness' is something that varies from person to person," I explained.

I wanted to help Yuicia become an outstanding mage. However, I didn't want to forcefully drag her down the path of immortality just because I had stopped aging myself.

As I thought about how I was going to help Yuicia improve her magic from tomorrow onwards, I drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER 18

THE WITCH OF CREATION'S TEACHING

METHODS

Teto and I had our daily routine.

We'd always start the day by heading to the guild for potion turn-ins before tackling a few of the unpopular quests. After work, we'd stroll through the market or visit shops selling artworks and imported goods. Sometimes, our quests took us to other towns and villages, but we'd always be back in time for dinner thanks to our trusty flying carpet.

As a student at the Sutherland Magic School, Yuicia also had her daily routine.

In the morning, she'd head to the school to learn magic and study all sorts of different things with the other apprentices. Back when she had been living in the dorms, she'd often do other people's chores or take care of the jobs none of the other mages wanted. It made for a meager income, but with living expenses to cover, she couldn't afford to be picky.

But now that she lived with us, she didn't have to worry about money as much, and she could spend more time working on her magic. And now that the mana vessels in her right arm were all fixed, it was finally time for me to start teaching her.

"Today, I'll tell you everything you need to know about learning magic."

"Yaaay, clap clap!" Teto said, clapping her hands in excitement.

"A-All right!"

I had created a small blackboard with my magic and installed it in the garden, where I'd now proceed with my little lecture. Despite the casualness of it all, Yuicia seemed pretty nervous. Kuro seemed to think the same from its spot on Yuicia's lap, and it softly tapped the girl's thigh as if to tell her to calm down.

"First, let's talk about the different methods of acquiring new spells," I said, picking up the chalk and scribbling on the blackboard.

There were two ways of learning new spells in this world.

The first one was acquiring new skills and leveling them up. Whenever I consumed the magic skill orbs that I created using my Creation Magic, they would automatically imbue my mind with information about the spell and provide vague but still useful visual guidelines. I'd need plenty of practice to actually cultivate a clear idea of how the spell worked. Nevertheless, it was entirely feasible to learn magic independently, without the guidance of a teacher, and there were some mages who took this route.

The second method was through applied magical theory, devising your own new spells from first principles. Mages who reached a high enough level of magic comprehension knew exactly what spells to combine to create new ones and how to use them.

"These are the two methods," I said, and Yuicia nodded vigorously. "We adventurers tend to do the former and prioritize leveling up our magic skills to learn new spells. How do they do it at the magic school?"

"Um... Our teachers don't talk that much about skills. They have the documents left behind by their predecessors, and they mostly focus on creating new spells using those as a base, so I guess they mostly go with the second method. O-Oh, and they put a big emphasis on growing our mana pools too," Yuicia answered.

A long time ago, certain mages had decided to commit everything they'd learned from mastering their skills in grimoires. The new generation of mages who inherited and studied such books could then acquire incredibly strong spells without having to level up their own skills—although understanding said books wasn't a walk in the park either. Not only that, but through diligent experimentation, they were even able to improve on the original canon of spells they'd received. This was the origin of the contemporary "magic school" institution, and these "secret techniques" they all boasted about were born from scholarly pedigree. Magic schools tended to put a strong emphasis on growing their students' mana pools so they'd become able to use those incredibly powerful spells, as well as on magic research to feed the bottomless demand for new and improved variations on the canon.

"—and that's roughly the difference between adventurers and magic schools," I

concluded. "With that in mind, I plan on helping you learn the magic skills necessary to most adventurers."

"A-All right!" Yuicia nodded nervously.

"We're going to start by having you alternate between partial Body Strengthening practice and basic meditation."

"U-Um... I thought we were going to work on my magic..." she said, looking slightly confused.

Body Strengthening was a physical combat skill; Yuicia probably thought it didn't make sense for a mage to learn its ins and outs.

"It's actually much easier to manipulate the mana in your body than it is to control the spell once you've cast it. And by learning how to properly use Body Strengthening on your five senses, you'll become able to hear spiritual voices and see things most people can't," I explained.

Besides, manipulating the mana inside one's body before turning it into magic could make certain spells a lot more powerful. In short, learning Body Strengthening was *crucial* for magic control.

Yuicia nodded. "I understand! I'll start right away!"

She stood up and tried to make her mana circulate through her entire body. However, since she had only ever transferred her mana from her core to her hand to cast her spells, she was having a difficult time making it travel through the rest of her body or concentrating it in one single spot; her face was all red. Meanwhile, Kuro was happily feeding on the mana emitted by Yuicia's body.

"Is... Is maintaining Body Strengthening supposed to be *this* difficult?" Yuicia asked, panting.

She had almost completely run out of mana and was now sitting on the grass as she tried to catch her breath.

"Well, keeping it up at all times will continuously eat up your mana, so most people only use it to enhance certain parts of their bodies one at a time. For example, a swordsman might focus it in his arm right as he slashes at his opponent to make the

strike more powerful," I explained.

"So this is how they economize their mana. Then why do mages with tons of MP never use Body Strengthening?" she asked.

The answer was actually quite straightforward.

"It only enhances your existing physical abilities. So basically..."

I marked a pause, grabbed a piece of chalk, and wrote on the blackboard: *Mage (10) x Body Strengthening (10) = 100 / Swordsman (30) x Body Strengthening (5) = 150*

"If your physical abilities are weak, then no matter how good you are at Body Strengthening, it won't make too much of a change. But for a swordsman who excels physically, even if their mastery of the skill isn't great, it can lead to a notable boost in physical prowess," I explained.

"Then what's the point in mages learning Body Strengthen—" Yuicia started, but I interrupted her.

"Well, a magic researcher probably won't need it, that's true. But for adventurers, having proficiency in Body Strengthening means you can sustain physical activity for longer."

If one could keep up their Body Strengthening without burning mana faster than it replenished, it would become an extremely useful ability to have when working as an adventurer.

"I understand." Yuicia nodded. "Well then, I ran out of mana, so I'm going to meditate for a bit."

She closed her eyes and stopped her mana's outwards flow, letting it slowly build back up. Kuro let out a displeased meow at having its snack taken away and went to sit beside me grumpily.

These exercises were relatively versatile and could be done anywhere by anyone who wanted to train their magic; I decided to have Yuicia repeat them for the next few weeks until she had a strong enough foundation to dive into proper spellcasting.

CHAPTER 19

A SIMPLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD TRAINING REGIMEN

“Miss Chise, Miss Teto, look!” Yuicia announced excitedly before raising her hand.
“Wind!”

A faint breeze emitted from her palm, much too weak to be used as an offensive spell, but she didn’t mind. Thanks to the Body Strengthening training I’d put her through for the past month, she had managed to acquire the Mana Control skill; now she was having a much easier time maintaining her spells.

“Good job, Yuicia,” I praised her.

“That was so cool!” Teto chirped.

Kuro meowed grumpily, repeatedly hitting Yuicia’s legs with its tail as if to say, “Why are you so proud of that puny little spell?”

“Ouch, ouch! It hurts, Kuro! What’s wrong?” Yuicia asked the kitten, who let out another haughty meow.

I wasn’t quite sure why, but Kuro had taken to treating Yuicia a bit like its subordinate and tended to be quite assertive with her. Maybe it considered itself her superior, since it had technically moved in with us first. But Kuro was just too cute even when it was angry, and Yuicia had a hard time stopping herself from smiling when the kitten acted grumpy. Still, she always rubbed its back and scratched its chin to try to put it in a better mood.

In the past, I had occasionally spotted Kuro secretly following Yuicia as she was out wandering the city, and it wasn’t uncommon for the kitten to slip under her blanket at night either.

“Kuro is really cute, isn’t it?” Yuicia beamed at us. “And it’s so smart for a kitten; it feels almost as if it understands what I’m saying.”

"These two sure get along, huh?" I muttered to myself.

"Teto gets along with Lady Witch!" Teto piped up from next to me.

Kuro meowed and left Yuicia's side to come sit beside me, rubbing its body against my legs and absorbing mana from my hand as I pet it. While Kuro was definitely a little cunning, it still got along quite well with Yuicia. I'd even go as far as to say it *liked* her... well, her mana, to be precise.

"Well, it looks like your foundation has gotten strong enough that I can start teaching you proper magic from now on," I said. "It'll mostly be through practice rather than actual study, though. That's how I help the mages at the guild train."

"Really?!" Yuicia asked, her eyes sparkling. "I mean, I can't complain—I've already picked up two whole skills, and my mana pool's gotten *huge*!"

Up until now, all the activities I had helped Yuicia practice—including reading, writing, calculating, and developing her magic fundamentals—could've been done indoors. Proper magic training, on the other hand, would require us to train somewhere spacious and, preferably, outside, as it could get a little dangerous otherwise.

As a side note, Yuicia's mana pool was growing so fast because I was sneaking strange fruits into her meals. To gain the Unaging skill, I was sure that one needed two things: the congenital capacity for it and a large enough mana pool. There could have been more conditions, but if there were, I didn't know them. For now, I decided that I'd do the same as I had with Selene: feed her strange fruits until she picked up Slowed Aging and reassess from there. Besides, the more mana Yuicia had, the more she would release into the air, which would help fix the world's mana drought.

"Let's go to the beach outside of town, okay?" I said.

"Teto's coming too!"

"A-All right!"

The three of us left the royal capital and walked all the way to a deserted strand of beach a little farther ahead.

"Lady Wiiitch, I found pretty rocks we can give to the others as souvenirs when we go home!" Teto piped up.

"There might be precious gems and raw ores on this beach," I noted as I walked on the rocky shore, picking up driftwood and other trinkets that got washed away to use as decor in our house.

All of a sudden, a voice called to me from behind.

"M-Miss Chise... Miss Teto... How do you have so much stamina...?" Yuicia panted.

It seemed that our little walk might've been too much for her, as she didn't usually get much exercise. Almost as if to tell her to push through, Kuro, who was standing on her shoulder, pressed its paw into her cheek. She threw the kitten a glare, as if to tell it she'd have a much easier time walking without it camped out on her shoulder, but Kuro simply looked away, totally nonchalant. I couldn't help the smile that formed across my face.

"Yuicia, focus mana in your eyes," I instructed.

"We're using Body Strengthening, Yuicia!" Teto chirped.

"Huh? A-All right!"

While Yuicia's mana pool was bigger than before, she still only had about 2,500 MP, which meant that she couldn't use Body Strengthening for long stretches. However, I had made sure to teach her to give herself the occasional targeted boost to make life easier.

"Oh! Miss Chise, Miss Teto, your whole bodies are surrounded by mana!"

"Exactly. Teto and I are using Body Strengthening to up our stamina so we get tired less easily than you," I said.

"But it's always good to train your muscles!" Teto chirped.

Yuicia was still growing; not only could she level up her Body Strengthening skill, but she could also build up muscle to make the effects even stronger. Meanwhile, as I was stuck as an eternal twelve-year-old, I could never improve my physical abilities, and they wouldn't deteriorate either. Unfortunately, this meant that, unless I used Body Strengthening, my body would crap out in no time.

"Body Strengthening..." Yuicia muttered, having stopped to reflect on our words.

She wrapped her entire body in mana and focused on recovering her stamina. After a while, her breathing was back to normal... but she only had about half of her MP left. With a strained smile, I took a mana potion out of my magic bag and handed it to her.

"Do you understand just how important it is to build your stamina now? You spent a lot of mana regaining your stamina, so drink this for now, and let's have a little chat about magic."

"Y-Yes... I'm sorry, and thank you," the girl said meekly.

Not only did we let her stay for free at our house, but I also provided her with three meals a day, let her read the magic books I didn't have a use for anymore, and paid for all of her daily commodities, and now I'd even given her a potion. She was clearly feeling embarrassed by the amount of money we spent on her; I forced a smile on my face as if to tell her I didn't mind.

Teto didn't know a thing about magic theory, so she went ahead and started picking up things on the shore.

"All righty then, let's talk magic. What is magic in the first place?" I asked Yuicia, who was gulping down the mana potion.

She paused. "Magic is a phenomenon caused by mana. Its manifestations can range from the reproduction of natural phenomena to the realization of one's fantasies," she explained, a serious look on her face.

"Good answer. Next question: what are the different magic families and the spell categories?"

"There are seven of them: Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Light, Dark, and Unaspected Magic, or the spells that don't fit into any of the other categories. They can be combined to form advanced magic categories, like Ice or Lightning. Spells can belong to one or several categories, including but not limited to enhancement, transformation, emission, manipulation, and materialization!" she explained without a single pause.

This was the general theory of magic: the base everything was built on. Mages mixed and matched all of these components to create powerful spells.

"Good job. You remembered everything. But let's forget about magic theory for now."

"Huh? What do you mean?" Yuicia asked, tilting her head in confusion.

Understanding magical theory was incredibly important. I'd personally learned it directly from Liriel and the others, and, as a result, my mana consumption and magic control improved drastically.

However...

"Do you know what the first spell ever cast in this world was?" I asked.

"H-Huh? Why are you asking me that all of a sudden?"

When she saw I was dead serious, she gulped loudly and went silent as she pondered her answer.

"In the holy texts, it's said that there are eminent people who received magic directly from the goddesses," she said. "So I'm assuming it must be one of these? Maybe a spell to make rain fall, or one to make food grow, or maybe one to fight bad people."

"Um... Not quite," I said, shaking my head.

A lot of the stories in the church's holy texts and magic books were based on real miracles performed by the goddesses. However, they were exaggerated and dramatized so that people could identify more with them. Not only that, but the scriptures also mentioned that the goddesses were the ones who had granted magic to the humans for them to replicate their miracles.

However, that wasn't the first time humans had used magic.

Way before the catastrophe that fell upon the world two thousand years ago, the first humans—the ones made by the Creator God—learned how to do magic by themselves, way before the goddesses taught them about it.

"The first spell that was used in the world was one to make a handful of drinkable water appear. Just like this," I said, casting a quick *Water* spell.

"Ooh, I get it now! That was a very convoluted thought experiment, Miss Chise. I know what you're doing: you're trying to cheer me up by saying that the first mages in the world weren't those super powerful ones from the scriptures but ones who could only do basic spells like me!" Yuicia said, laughing.

A smile spread across my face, and I shook my head from left to right. “That wasn’t my intention. Next question: why did that person make water appear in the first place?”

“Huh? ‘Why’?” Yuicia repeated, looking around as if she could find the answer on the ground.

Then, she closed her eyes, racking her brain to come up with an answer.

“Because... they were thirsty?” she said after a few seconds.

“Bingo. The first spell was born after someone wished to drink water because they were thirsty. People always say that, in magic, the most important thing is to replicate the vision of the person who first used that spell. But I believe that thinking about how they were *feeling* when they created the spell is much more important.”

“How they were feeling...”

While ages had passed since then, our current world wasn’t that different from how it had been when the Creator God had made it; some places were arid, while others suffered repeated crop failure due to the harsh weather conditions. Prelapsarian lands of milk and honey were purely the stuff of myth and legend.

One day, a man who was on the verge of dying of thirst wandered for hours in the hopes of finding even the smallest sip of water. He prayed and prayed and prayed so fervently that, all of a sudden, a handful materialized in front of him. This was the first magic spell any human had ever used.

This slim dram allowed the man to hang on long enough to hurry back to his village, where he created more water to share with his companions.

I had heard this story from Liriel in a dream oracle many years ago.

“It’s important to think about what the person was feeling when they created the spell you’re attempting to use, not just their vision for the spell itself. Why did they create it? And for whom? You have to think about all of this before attempting to use a spell,” I explained.

“Ugh, that’s so complicated, though,” Yuicia grumbled. “There’s no way for me to know the answer to those questions.”

"That's true. But I always have my students think about these questions first when I teach them magic."

I wasn't a teacher by any means, but I had helped my adoptive daughter, Selene, learn magic, and I often helped the mages from the adventurer's guild train. And every single time, I always asked them to think about these two questions.

"One last thing: magic is nothing more than a phenomenon," I added. "Take a look at the water sphere I conjured earlier. Depending on how you use it, you could actually kill a person with it."

"What? You're joking, aren't you?" Yuicia said, a nervous look appearing on her face as she stared fixedly at the water sphere.

I had laced my voice with a bit of mana, and it seemed that it had a rather strong effect on Yuicia. I hadn't been lying either; one *could* technically use a *Water* spell to block their opponent's mouth or nose and suffocate them. One could even break a rock by casting several thousand *Water* spells in quick succession.

"Magic is just like a sharp blade; you have to think of how you want to use it and for what purpose."

To put it plainly, magic was a tool one could use to kill others or even themselves. A spell could achieve two completely different purposes depending on who cast it.

"Y-Yes," Yuicia said with a nod.

"I'm glad you finally understand how scary magic can be. Well then, what would you think about doing a little training drill?"

"A-All right!"

I headed towards the beach, Yuicia following me awkwardly, and the two of us started casting a few spells in the direction of the ocean.

As a fervent believer in practice over theory, I decided to show some spells to Yuicia and have her drill them. When she couldn't successfully cast a spell after a few tries, I broke it down into the different components that went into it and advised her on what she should be focusing on to get a clearer image of the spell, which in turn would make the spell all the more powerful.

"Your way of teaching is completely different from my teachers' methods at school," she said.

"I'm not very big on theory and rely on my instincts for most things; that's probably why. Learning the theory behind a spell is all nice and dandy, but you're not going to think about it when you actually cast it. Having a clear idea of what phenomenon you want to create is the most important... Well, at least, that's what I think."

The Sutherland Magic School was technically a more practice-oriented school, but they still put a big emphasis on magic research. As such, they were always looking for all the possible approaches that could lead to their desired result.

Adventurers, on the other hand, only had one question in mind: "What is the fastest and most efficient way to inflict as much damage as possible on my opponent?" For that reason, most adventurers trained by repeatedly casting the same spell over and over again rather than studying the theory behind it.

That was just one of the many differences between magic scholars and adventurers.

"Ugh, with my mana pool, I can't use powerful attack spells at all," Yuicia lamented.

"Be patient; you just need time and practice. Also, if you remember all of the components that go into a spell, you'll have a much better understanding of it, and it'll cost you even less MP. Oh, and you should only work on a few spells at once. I'd say start with the ones you're sure are going to be of use to you in combat," I advised her.

"I-In combat..." she muttered, seemingly dreading the idea.

"You don't need to start fighting right away," I said with a smile. "But if you kill monsters, you'll level up and expand your mana pool, which means you'll have even more spells to play with."

No matter how clear one's vision was of what they wanted to accomplish with their magic, if they didn't have the skills to back it up, it wouldn't work. However, I didn't think there was any need for Yuicia to rush; by keeping up her current effort, she'd gradually get used to wielding magic and, slowly but surely, get stronger.

"Y-Yes! I'll do my best!"

"Once you reach a certain level, you'll be able to start working as an adventurer, and

you'll make those three silver coins a day," I said. "And if you really don't want to fight monsters, I can teach you something safer, like potion-making. That's sure to cover your living expenses."

"R-Right, three silver coins a day; that's the goal you set for me. I'll work hard!"

I had her repeatedly cast *Fire* spells at the ocean for a couple more hours.

CHAPTER 20

YUICIA'S MAGIC STAFF

I helped Yuicia train about twice a week. Through our lessons, I discovered that Yuicia's best compatibility was with Water Magic, with Fire and Earth coming next, and she had a pretty low affinity with Wind, Light, and Dark Magic. I helped her learn about those latter ones by teaching her the theory behind them, and I had her practice them—along with the other magic types—by repeatedly throwing spells at the ocean.

At home, I often shared my magic books with her, be they the ones I bought from the bookstore or some of the many, many books I had stored in the wasteland, which I would occasionally go and grab to lend to her.

"Yuicia, I brought you new books. Wanna read them?"

"And I got us some yummy snacks! Let's eat them together," Teto chirped.

"Y-Yes!" Yuicia said before letting out a sigh of delight. "I can't believe I get to read all of these amazing books I couldn't afford before. And I can even eat sweets at the same time! Am I in heaven?"

"Don't you think you're exaggerating a bit?" I asked with a chuckle. "Let me know what you thought of the books later, okay?"

"Yes! We can have a long, in-depth discussion about them!"

Teto wasn't a big book person, so it was nice finally having a reading buddy to talk lit with, especially one as diligent as Yuicia. She was also a very helpful housemate, always lending us a hand with cooking and cleaning. This felt somewhat refreshing; in the wasteland, Beretta took care of everything, and Teto and I didn't get to help her very often. Our current situation was a little similar to when we had lived with Selene, except that Yuicia was my student and not my daughter, so there was more distance between us than there had been with Selene. Not that I minded though; as I said, it felt new and refreshing.

That day, Yuicia had taken the books I had brought to her room. After a while, she came

out, a serious look on her face.

"Miss Teto, Miss Chise, there's something I'd like to ask you..."

I let out a quizzical hum. "What is it?"

"Is something troubling you?" Teto asked.

Yuicia held up the book she was holding.

"Please teach me how to make a magic weapon!"

I took a sip of tea and thought for a bit before saying, "You want me to teach you how to make one? Not buy you one?"

"Y-Yes. You two have already helped me with so many things. I can't ask you to buy me a weapon too. So I thought making it myself might be cheaper," she explained.

I brought a hand to my chin and started thinking under Yuicia's nervous gaze.

"Lady Witch? What are you thinking about?" Teto asked me.

"I'm wondering what type of weapon would be best adapted to Yuicia's fighting style."

There were so many options to weigh when it came to magic weapons; I had to give it some thought.

"For instance, if you want something easy to carry, you could go for a wand or even a rod. If you want something more solid, a mace would work better, since the tip's metal. You could always go for a staff, but they're quite tall and not as practical as some of the other options."

Each type of magic weapon had its own perks and drawbacks.

Wands couldn't amplify spells as well as other weapons, but they were small and compact, which meant the mana had to travel a shorter distance before turning into magic, making it easier for one to control their spells. Overall, they were good weapons for casting extremely precise spells.

Next, you had rods. These had spots for one to place catalysts in, which allowed the

user to amplify a certain magic type's effects, making their spells more powerful. However, they'd have a much harder time controlling their spells than with a wand.

Maces were mostly used by clergymen and were, overall, quite similar to rods, except that their tips were made of metal. This made the mana-to-magic conversion less efficient, leaving combat spells less preferable than a trusty mundane weapon. However, the metal tip meant that it could be used in physical combat as well.

And lastly, we had staves like the one I was using. Staves had the same advantages and drawbacks as rods but multiplied tenfold, since they were even longer; while this let you drastically improve the potency of your spells, fine-tuning was a huge ordeal.

"Anyway, that's the gist of it," I concluded when I was done with my explanation.

"Wands seem perfect for me, since I'm still working on my magic control!" Yuicia said, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

I nodded, a distant look on my face as I thought back on my own beginnings as a witch. At that time, I had thought it would look cool if I had a proper magic staff and had made one with my Creation Magic. To think that I had spent years swinging that thing around without being able to use it properly...

Let's pretend it never happened.

But then again, considering how quickly I'd grown my mana pool thanks to my trusty strange fruits, I'd started slinging some really potent magic really early on; I'd clearly been using my staff's full potential, so perhaps it hadn't been *that* bad of a mistake.

"All righty, let's start working on your wand," I declared.

"Huh? Right now?! But, um, what about the material?" Yuicia asked, her eyes shooting wide open.

I already knew what I was going to use.

"Teto picked up a bunch of stuff on the beach!" Teto piped up. "You can use some of it!"

"The driftwood Teto picked up is basically worthless, so it doesn't count as us spending money on you, right? Though it got soaked in seawater, so we're going to have to boil it to remove the salt. After that, we'll just have to polish it and give it a nice

coat of varnish. Let's start working on it while you do your daily practice, okay?"

"A-All right!"

I took the driftwood Teto had picked up on the beach to my potion room and boiled it in my big cauldron to remove the salt and other debris. I left it there for about thirty minutes, occasionally topping off the water, before letting it cool down. When it was cool, I used my trusty *Dry* spell to remove all the moisture from it and cut it down to the size of a wand.

"Another good thing with wands is that they can help you aim better," I explained.
"Let's make it thinner the closer we get to the tip."

"O-Okay," Yuicia said nervously.

Teto and I started shaving our own bits of driftwood to show Yuicia what she was supposed to do, and the girl diligently copied us. After that, all she had to do was put a coat of varnish on it and let it dry, and her new magic wand was ready.

"I did it!" she exclaimed in delight. "My first magic weapon!"

She cast a *Light* spell to test out her new wand and happily swung it around.

"Meow!"

Kuro's feline instincts got the best of the kitten, and it sprang at the floating light orb, trying to knock it down with its front paws. But unfortunately for Kuro, the light orb stayed high in the air. Yuicia kept waving her wand around, and the little cat-sith made several fruitless attempts at knocking down the glowing mote. Teto and I couldn't help but chuckle at its antics.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto! I'll treasure this wand forever!"

"That's good, but at some point, you're going to have to change to another weapon," I said with a smile.

"It doesn't look very sturdy, so it probably won't last long," Teto pointed out.

Kuro, whose focus had shifted from the swaying orb to the wand Yuicia was waving around, leaped at the girl and started nipping at it.

“Aaah, Kuro, stop! You’re going to break it!”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at the scene.

Yuicia was so excited by her new wand that she started taking her magic training even more seriously than before, making drastic improvements in a short amount of time.

CHAPTER 21

OUR FIFTH YEAR LIVING WITH YUICIA

It had been five years since Yuicia had moved in with us. While at first her magic hadn't been great, she had gradually improved her skills by trying to incorporate it into daily life, such as using Water Magic to do laundry and Fire Magic to adjust the fire's strength when we were cooking. Not only that, but she could even sustain two spells of different magic families at the same time.

I was sure those snobs from the magic school would consider using spells for menial tasks an insult to magic, but it helped Yuicia improve her magic control drastically, and she was only going to get better.

Moreover, whenever we came across a quest Yuicia could do with her magic, we'd always take her with us so she could put what she'd learned into practice. Not only that, but I also taught her how to make potions, as well as small magical trinkets, so she could make a living for herself if she needed to.

Teto and I would occasionally leave town, either to go clear a quest or to pay a visit to Beretta and the others in the wasteland, and I now had no issues leaving Yuicia alone while we did so; she had become strong enough both magically and mentally that she could protect herself.

Overall, she had long achieved the original goal I had set for her, which was being able to support herself under her own power. However, our little cohabitation turned out a lot more enjoyable than I had expected, and I couldn't bring myself to send her on her way. And so, for five years, she stayed with us while we waited for the floating island—with no luck on that front so far.

Today we'd decided to head to the dungeon near the capital of Lawbyle for Yuicia to train her combat skills; we were currently on the twelfth floor.

"Ice Lance!" Yuicia chanted. "Take this!"

Immediately, dozens of ice spears appeared in the air and shot at the last monster in the room, a C-rank cockatrice. In a last-ditch attempt, the monster directed its

paralyzing glare towards Yuicia, but she repelled the effects with Body Strengthening, and the monster fell dead.

"Miss Chise! Miss Teto! I've leveled up! My mana pool just reached over 20,000 MP!" Yuicia informed us excitedly.

"That's great, Yuicia," I said. "With that much mana, you're now on the same level as most court magicians."

"Congrats!" Teto chirped.

Thanks to the strange fruit she ate every day, Yuicia's mana pool was growing rapidly, and that combined with her diligent training had helped her improve drastically; her Water Magic skill had already reached level five. This also seemed to have improved her self-confidence, as she was now a lot more cheerful and bubbly than when we had first met her. Her large mana pool had also slowed her aging, but she still hadn't received the Slowed Aging skill—the first level of Unaging. It seemed that certain people needed more mana than others to develop it.

"I've come such a long way from the good-for-nothing apprentice I used to be! Now I'm a proper mage! If I keep going, my dream of becoming a court magician might actually come true," Yuicia said, excited.

Teto and I smiled and nodded, but Kuro seemed displeased by Yuicia's words.

The Kingdom of Lawbyle had its own hierarchy for mages. When one entered a magic school, they were first put into the "apprentice" category and could progress through the ranks by passing exams—including practical and written tests—submitting research papers, and completing special assignments. They would go from apprentice to Third Rank mage and then Second Rank mage. The ones who achieved First Rank were the cream of the crop. Only when one became First Rank were they allowed to take the court magician exam. To this day, most of the Sutherland mages considered Yuicia a failure and treated her pretty badly, but the other magic schools and the adventurers of the royal capital knew the kid was a force to be reckoned with.

"Meow, meow!"

"Ah! K-Kuro! What's wrong?" Yuicia asked.

Kuro was slapping her cheek with its little paw, almost as if to tell her not to get ahead

of herself. I had noticed that Kuro had been acting almost big brotherly towards Yuicia recently. It had grown tremendously; it was now the size of an adult cat. You could most often find it sitting on Yuicia's shoulder.



“You’ve really grown a lot, Yuicia.”

“That’s not true! I’m still very immature compared to you and Miss Teto.”

Despite her protests, it was undeniable that she had grown into a fine young lady. Not only had her magic skills grown, but her body had too; she was now much taller than before, which only served to enhance her cuteness.

Oh, and her breasts had grown bigger too. While not as impressive as Teto’s melons, they still had a nice shape to them. Whenever I noticed them under her robe, I couldn’t help but feel envious.

Maybe I should’ve had her grow her mana pool faster to drag her into the flat-chests club with me, the devil on my shoulder said.

My expression must’ve changed when I thought this, as Teto and Yuicia had started looking at me with puzzled expressions.

“Miss Chise, is something wrong?”

“Nope,” I said after a short pause. “Nothing at all. Anyway, this seems like a good time to head home, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, let’s go home and eat something yummy!” Teto piped up.

And so, the three of us left the dungeon. I threw a glance at the sky and noticed that the sun was already setting.

“Ah, we ended up staying in there longer than I thought,” Yuicia said. “Sorry! Is there a carriage available?”

While the dungeon was considered close to the capital, it was still a two-hour walk from the city. And so, the guild had installed a subbranch near the dungeon’s entrance where horse-drawn carriages would regularly stop to drop adventurers off.

Unfortunately, it seemed that there weren’t any at the moment.

“Sorry, kids, but a big group of students from the magic school just came out of the dungeon with a bunch of loot, and they took all of the carriages,” the guild’s employee told us.

“I-I see,” Yuicia said.

It seemed that there were no carriages left for us to ride home, and considering the hour, there probably wouldn’t be any more adventurers going to the dungeon today; the carriages wouldn’t be coming back.

In this situation, most adventurers would walk the grueling journey back to the city or stay the night and wait for the carriages to resume in the morning.

“Miss Chise, Miss Teto, what should we do?” Yuicia asked.

“Well, we don’t really have a choice, do we? We have to walk all the way back to the capital. We could also use Body Strengthening and run,” I said.

“If we don’t hurry, we’re gonna miss dinnertime!” Teto pouted.

The walk was technically two hours, but if we kept Body Strengthening up the entire time, we could be back in the capital in less than an hour.

“I-I see... I don’t have a lot of mana left, though, and I don’t think I can drink another mana potion...”

Yuicia had defeated a lot of monsters to level up today, so she’d had to drink multiple mana potions to restore her MP. Unfortunately, her stomach seemed to have reached its limits, and she would have a difficult time running if she drank another one.

“Well, desperate times call for desperate measures. Hold on a second.”

I shot Yuicia a smile and took out our flying carpet from our magic bag.

“Miss Chise, what’s that?”

“It’s a magical transportation device; it’s called a flying carpet. Come on up.”

“A magical transportation device?! And it can *fly*!?” Yuicia gawked at me.

While Teto and I regularly used our flying carpet to go clear quests in other towns, we’d never shown it to Yuicia before.

“Everyone aboard? Yuicia, make sure to hold on to Kuro, okay?” I said.

“Yes, Lady Witch!” Teto chirped.

“I-I’ve never flown in the sky before! Are we going to be okay?!”

I made sure everyone was properly seated and started slowly pouring mana into our flying carpet, which gently lifted up from the ground, going higher and higher until we were in the sky.

“Whoaaa! We’re flying?! We’re really flying!”

“Meow!”

Yuicia and Kuro were trying to look at the scenery under us.

“Don’t bend over the edge of the carpet. You’ll fall,” I chided them, stirring the carpet with my mind.

Upon hearing my warning, they immediately sat back straight.

“I’m going to make it go faster, okay?” I said, pouring some more mana into the flying carpet, making it pick up speed.

We were now going much faster than the carriages on the road, and Yuicia couldn’t help but exclaim in awe at the scenery, looking like a child on Christmas morning. In no time, we had passed the carriages that had left the dungeon right before we left, and we made it to the capital in less than thirty minutes.

A Sutherland Bigwig on a Carriage Ride’s Side

“Good grief, why do *we* have to take care of such menial tasks? We’re court magicians; it’s beneath our station! We should just leave that work to the adventurers.”

“Unfortunately, we don’t have a choice, Lord Olvart. Let’s think of this as yet another display of our esteemed Sutherland school’s prestige.”

Olvart Sutherland—a court magician and the heir of the Sutherland earldom—was riding back from the dungeon near the royal capital.

The dungeons in the Lawbyle kingdom were all relatively stable, only producing stampedes on very rare occasions. Nevertheless, they couldn't be left alone all the time if everyone wanted to *keep* the stampede rate that low. As such, knights and court magicians were periodically sent to the dungeons, where they would spend a few days orchestrating a cull. Not only did it allow them to level up, but they were also entitled to keep all of the monster loot and treasures they found, meaning that the court magicians could use them for their research or sell them to merchants. This provided an excellent source of revenue for the kingdom.

Still, Olvart found such tasks deathly boring—hence his foul mood. He had settled on watching the scenery from the window when he noticed a black shadow passing above the carriage. Looking up, he saw that it was some sort of flying carpet. The thing was fast, passing all of the carriages on the road in seconds. Olvart couldn't believe his eyes. But what shocked him even more was the fact that a girl wearing the robes of the Sutherland Magic School—*his* magic school—was riding on that carpet.

"What's that?" he asked his retainer. But the man didn't know either and simply shook his head without a word.

The knight who was sharing their carriage, on the other hand, seemed to have an inkling.

"I've heard rumors about a little girl zooming past a caravan on her flying carpet before. I thought it was baseless gossip, but it looks like it might've actually been true."

"What?!" Olvart needed to know more. "Tell me everything you know!"

"I don't know anything else," the knight said. "I told you; I thought it was just pointless hearsay, so I didn't look into it any further. It must be some sort of magic item from a big dungeon somewhere," he said, shrugging.

Olvart clicked his tongue in annoyance and thought back on the flying carpet that had since disappeared on the horizon. It was quite common to find magic items in dungeons. Of course, you had your magic swords and other weapons, but there were also a bunch of handy tools and other peculiar trinkets in there. Studying these things and trying to find ways to replicate them so they could be mass-produced was actually one of the court magicians' many tasks.

"I want one of those," Olvart said.

The Sutherland Magic School specialized in Wind Magic, and they often sent their apprentices to work on merchant ships and warships, where they would provide propulsion. This had contributed greatly to turning Lawbyle into the maritime power it was nowadays, and the Sutherland Magic School reaped immense benefits from the country's overseas trade. However, their next ambition lay in extending their influence *inland*. Unfortunately, replicating the same strategy by sending their apprentices to propel ships on the river wouldn't be enough, as it wouldn't allow them to have a large enough reach. But if they had flying carpets that could go faster than any carriage and travel without being impacted by traffic conditions, it'd completely solve their issues!

Thus, Olvart, who was set to inherit the legacy of the Sutherland Magic School, coveted the Flying Carpet to fulfill his ambitions.

CHAPTER 22

THE SUTHERLANDS' CLUTCHES

A week had passed since we'd gone to the dungeon to help Yuicia level up. On this day, Teto and I had accompanied Yuicia to the guild so she could sell her potions. But while we were waiting for her to finish up, Mr. Zelitch asked to see us.

"I apologize for calling you here all of a sudden," he said when Teto and I entered the drawing room. "There's something I'd like to ask you."

"Is something the matter?" I asked.

"We'll gladly help if there's a problem!" Teto added.

Perhaps an urgent situation had come up and Mr. Zelitch needed our help.

"We just received an inquiry from a member of the Sutherland earl's family," Mr. Zelitch said.

"The Sutherland earl?" I repeated, and he nodded.

"Yes, the family in charge of the Sutherland Magic School."

The Sutherland name carried a lot of weight in Lawbyle. Not only had they founded the eponymous magic school, but most court magicians were, in fact, Sutherlands.

"They told us that they were looking for the owners of a flying carpet. They'd like for you to, um, forfeit it to them so they can study it and attempt to replicate it. They say it's for the sake of the kingdom's growth."

"Forfeit it, huh?" I muttered, not impressed.

When a noble family asked adventurers to "forfeit" something to them, it usually meant that they'd use their influence and position to forcibly seize the item they wanted.

"We obviously refuse," I said.

"Yeah! The flying carpet is very important to Teto and Lady Witch!" Teto added.

Not only was it a big part of our identity—we were the Carpet Riders, after all—but it was also a memento of ours. Sure, I could technically make another one, but I didn't feel like handing it to anyone, nor did I want to be responsible for the sudden proliferation of air travel. Besides, nobles always pretended that whatever they were doing was "for the sake of the kingdom," but that was nothing more than empty words to coerce adventurers into handing over their magic items; they didn't actually have the authority to forcibly take anything.

When I explained my reasoning to Mr. Zelitch, he nodded gravely.

"Adventurers often find themselves in disadvantageous positions because of the Sutherland apprentices, so it is difficult to trust them," he said before quickly adding that not all Sutherland apprentices were bad, and that Yuicia, in particular, was a very nice girl.

"Usually, they go directly to the adventurers, but since they didn't know who we were, they went to you, huh?" I surmised.

"Exactly." Mr. Zelitch nodded. "I'd also like to mention that the Sutherland family has its fair share of, let's say, unsettling rumors surrounding them."

"Unsettling rumors..."

Conducting illegal spell research on slaves, blackmailing and assassinating innocent people with the private militia they were raising from infancy, using their influence to hush up certain scandals and their financial power to coerce people into giving them more advantageous deals... These were only a fraction of the rumors surrounding the Sutherland family.

"That's scary," I noted.

"These people are dangerous! We should try to keep our distance from them, Lady Witch," Teto advised.

"What can we do, though? Trouble somehow always seems to find its way to me." I sighed. "What a pain."

"Perhaps you should be more cautious, then," Mr. Zelitch muttered under his breath.

I heard him, though.

"Well, I'll try to be careful," I declared before standing up.

"Bye-bye, Mr. Zelitch! We'll come back!" Teto said.

We left the room and regrouped with Yuicia, who was looking at the quest board to pass the time. It seemed that she was done turning in her potions.

"Ah, Miss Chise! Miss Teto! Are you done?" she asked us when she spotted us.

"Yeah, it was nothing major," I said. "More importantly, how much did you make from the potions?"

"Um... We got five silver coins each," she replied.

A big smile formed across my face.

"This means you've earned more than thirty coins this month, then. Congratulations, Yuicia."

"Congrats!" Teto chirped. "You've reached your goal!"

Yuicia seemed surprised for a second before chuckling softly.

"I completely forgot that this was the goal you set for me," she said. "Three silver coins a day, thirty a month, right? I've been having so much fun studying magic under you, it completely slipped my mind."

"This calls for a celebration," I said.

"Let's buy some yummy food and go home!" Teto suggested.

Yuicia appeared a bit taken aback, but I remained firm in my resolve; she had achieved her goal, and it deserved to be celebrated.

"Are you sure?" she asked. "Let's go to the market, then! If I remember correctly, a merchant ship from the South arrived at the port yesterday, so we might be able to

find some southern ingredients."

"Let's go, then."

With those words, the three of us headed to the marketplace to go buy the ingredients for Yuicia's favorite dishes. When we were done, we started making our way home.

The Lawbylean capital stood in the shadow of a hill facing the sea, guarded against high tides and tsunamis, which meant our journey involved ascending the slope to reach our destination. As we strolled along, a horse-drawn wagon loaded with wooden crates passed us by. I couldn't tell you why, but the instant I saw it go up the hill, I knew *something* was off.

And sure enough, my premonition turned into reality. The wagon stopped dead in its tracks with a loud clatter before suddenly starting to roll back down the slope.

"The horses' harnesses broke!" I noted.

That's right; every single one of the horses' harnesses broke all at once, and the wagon started descending the slope, rolling right past us.

This was bad. The marketplace was right down this hill, and it was teeming with people. With the wagon's current speed and momentum, there would undoubtedly be casualties if nothing was done to stop it.

"Teto, let's go!"

"Roger!"

I hurriedly took my new staff out of my bag, and Teto and I rushed downhill. We stood right in front of the wagon, blocking its path.

"*Psychokinesis!*" I chanted.

"*Earth Bind!*"

Teto manipulated the dirt path while I used Gravity Magic to bring the wagon to a halt. This caused the cargo to fly out, but I quickly caught the crates with my magic and gently lowered them to the ground.

"There doesn't seem to be any damage," I said with a relieved sigh. "Yuicia, go tell the city guards and the adventurer's guild staff what just happened."

"Yes!" She nodded before dashing towards the guard's station. Meanwhile, a small crowd had gathered a little farther ahead, curious as to what had happened.

It really was a close call.

I turned around, ready to go tell the coachman off for overloading his wagons. But when I looked uphill, I noticed that only the horses were left. A strange sense of unease began to gnaw at the pit of my stomach.

"Lady Witch, look at this!" Teto said, pointing at the parts of the harnesses that were still dangling from the wagon.

I turned around and inspected them.

"Teto, that's..."

The harnesses hadn't succumbed to wear and tear. They had been deliberately severed with clean, precise cuts.

Perhaps this "accident" had not been so accidental after all.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto! I brought the guards and the guild staff!" Yuicia said, running towards us with the aforementioned people in tow, who proceeded to inspect the scene.

While at first glance it might've seemed like a simple horse wagon accident, the disappearance of the coachman and the fact that the horses' harnesses had been cleanly severed made it incredibly suspicious. Not only that, but it was unclear which shop the goods in the crates came from, as they were filled to the brim with a hodgepodge of miscellaneous items. Had these crates broken and their contents scattered around the marketplace, it would've caused quite the pandemonium.

I let out another sigh. "This was weird. Let's go home."

"I'm really tired now." Teto pouted. "Lady Witch, can you replenish my energy later?"

"Good job stopping the cart, Miss Chise, Miss Teto," Yuicia said.

With these words, the three of us resumed our walk back home, where we prepared all of Yuicia's favorite dishes with the ingredients we'd bought earlier.

However, I couldn't shake off the lingering sense of unease I felt, even after several hours.

CHAPTER 23

THE BEGINNING OF THE SUTHERLAND FAMILY'S DOWNFALL

“The timing of that ‘accident’ was way too suspicious,” I mused out loud.

It had happened mere hours after I refused to forfeit our flying carpet to the Sutherland family. What’s more, the clean cuts on the horses’ harnesses left me almost certain it was no accident at all. Perhaps the perpetrator’s aim had been to create chaos and seize the moment when Teto and I were distracted by the wagon to snatch our magic bag from us.

Most dungeons’ magic items were recovered in a state that allowed anyone to use them, and the majority of people would then put an enchantment on them to make it so nobody else could use their items. But what if the owner died? Well, technically speaking, it’d mean that no one else could use the item ever again. For that reason, certain highly skilled mages had developed techniques to remove enchantments from magic items so that they wouldn’t be locked forever. It was a long and tedious process, but it was possible. Perhaps that was what the Sutherland family planned to do with our magic bag if they got their hands on it.

Speaking of our magic bag, it was a bit special, as it nullified the effects of time on the items stored inside. Originally, it hadn’t had much capacity, but through trial and error, I had discovered a way to expand the storage space by pouring mana straight into the bag. As a result, its capacity had grown quite large over time. I didn’t know if anyone had ever tried something like that before; in fact, I was pretty sure most people didn’t have enough mana to pour in their own magic bags to make them bigger.

“Um, Miss Chise? Miss Chise!”

Yuicia’s voice pulled me back to reality.

“Hm? Is something wrong, Yuicia?”

“I’m fine. It’s you I’m worried about,” she said. “You’ve had a worried look on your face

for a while now. Is something wrong?"

It seemed I had been lost in my thoughts for longer than I realized. Both Yuicia and Kuro were staring at me with looks of concern on their faces.

"Sorry for worrying you. I'm—"

I was about to brush it off with a quick "I'm fine," but I stopped myself midsentence. A sudden realization had dawned on me: if the Sutherlands were after my and Teto's magic carpet, it was highly probable that they'd set their sights on Yuicia too. I couldn't keep this whole situation a secret from her anymore.

"Yuicia," I said, "you remember when the guildmaster called Teto and me yesterday? Well, it turned out that some people wanted to buy our flying carpet from us."

I explained the situation to Yuicia: the Sutherland family requesting we sell them our flying carpet, my suspicions about the horse wagon incident, that I didn't think they were going to stop targeting us anytime soon, et cetera.

"They might come after you next," I said.

"Y-You shouldn't worry about me right now! You have to run away," she exclaimed, her eyes as wide as saucers. "Use your flying carpet and fly away from the capital!"

I shook my head. "We have to wait for the floating island to come by" I said.

Yuicia's brow furrowed. "Why are you so bent on seeing the floating island?" she asked.

"That's a secret."

"But it's really, really, really important to us and Kuro!" Teto chimed in.

"Meow!"

A saddened look appeared on Yuicia's face when she realized we weren't going to change our minds.

But then...

"I'd like to ask you whether you want to stay with us or leave, but, unfortunately, it

seems it's going to have to wait a bit."

"Huh?" the girl asked, blinking in confusion.

Meanwhile, Teto had already stood up to retrieve her sword.

"They've entered the perimeter, Lady Witch."

"I can sense about ten of them... Assassins, most likely."

Our Mana Perception skill had allowed Teto and me to identify intruders on our property.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto, is everything okay?!" Yuicia asked hurriedly.

"Ah, don't worry; it's over already."

"They're all taking a nice little nap on the ground!" Teto chirped.

"Huh? Wh-What do you mean?"

"Meow!"

I understood Yuicia's confusion; one second we talked about assassins having entered our property, and the next I told her the problem was taken care of already. Kuro leaped off of Yuicia's shoulder and made a beeline for the backyard.

"They got caught in the security enchantments we set up around the house," I explained to Yuicia as we followed Kuro outside.

The first thing I had done when we moved into this house was put up a special barrier around the perimeter; it immediately detected anyone who approached our house with ill intent and stunned them with Lightning Magic. Teto then used her magic from afar to manipulate the earth and restrict the intruders' movements.

"A-Are you sure it's fine?!" Yuicia asked.

"It is. They're stunned *and* restrained."

I had become quite accustomed to restraining individuals through numerous mock

battles with fellow adventurers and apprehending robbers and bounty targets. The *Stun* spell I used dealt an electric shock to the target, making them feel numb and drastically weakening them. Subsequently, Teto's Earth Magic would secure their capture; though the restraints she made were essentially composed of dirt and pebbles, the mana she infused into them made them difficult to break even with Body Strengthening.

We came out of the house and, sure enough, were met with the sight of ten men lying on the floor, struggling against their restraints.

I looked down at one of them and said, "Well then, can you tell me what brings you here? Who's your employer?"

The man's face was blank; he didn't answer my question. I noticed that he was about to bite on the poison pill he had secured behind his molar.

As if I'd let him do that.

"*Analyze!*" I chanted. "Let's see what poison that is... Okay, got it. *Antidote!*"

I used an advanced version of my appraisal spell to identify what type of poison he was trying to kill himself with and easily detoxified it, along with all of his comrades'. The excruciating pain coursing through the men's bodies came to a stop, and they all looked at me with consternation.

"I dabble in healing magic and alchemy, you see. I won't let you die that easily," I said, an indifferent look on my face.

Finally realizing that they wouldn't be able to escape or kill themselves to stay silent, the men hung their heads in silence.

Even if they attempted to bite off their tongues, I'd simply grow them back with a regeneration spell, and Teto would stuff their mouths with dirt so they wouldn't try doing it again.

"I'll ask you again. What is your goal and who hired you?"

"We won't tell ya," one of them replied.

Fine by me.

"Okay. You're going to have to spend the whole night here then," I said matter-of-factly before turning towards Teto and Yuicia. "It's already pretty late; we should go to bed soon."

"Roger!"

"Huh?! Are you sure we can leave them here? They came to kill you!" Yuicia exclaimed, gawking at us.

"I don't like interrogating and torturing people," I said. "So I'll leave that job to the city guards and the knights."

"Lady Witch is too nice! She doesn't like hurting people!" Teto chimed in.

I turned my face to the side in embarrassment, as if to say, "That's not true." Thankfully, this seemed to ease Yuicia's worries, as the nervous look on her face softened ever so slightly.

"You really are nice, Miss Chise. Sweet, even," she said.

"I'm not sweet," I argued, a bitter smile on my face. "I'm just cowardly and cautious. That's why I surrounded our home with security spells and I'm forcing the dirty work on other people."

I just didn't really care for violence and generally gravitated more towards healing, protecting, and nurturing than fighting. I did what I had to do to protect myself and the people I held dear against threats, but that was about it, which was why I had decided to leave the questioning of the assassins to the authorities.

I went back inside and let out a long yawn.

"Seriously, what *are* you two?" Yuicia asked.

I chuckled. "I can't tell you just yet."

"It's still a secret for now!" Teto chirped, a mischievous smile on her face.

This seemed to soothe Yuicia's nerves.

"I'm still a bit shaken up from what just happened... I'll sleep with you two tonight,"

she declared.

"Sure thing. Let's sleep side by side, then," I said.

"It's gonna be so much fun!" Teto chirped.

"Meow!"

And so, we left the assassins in the backyard for the night and headed to bed.

The Sutherland Family's Heir Olvart's Side

"Damn it! I can't believe it! Not only did those kids have the flying carpet, but they were hiding a powerful staff all along?! Go get it! Now!" Olvart's voice brimmed with frustration and urgency.

"Please regain your calm, Lord Olvart. I'm confident our assassins have already secured both the staff and the carpet," reassured one of the two other men in the room.

"Poor things; they were mere children, yet their lives had to be taken," the other chimed in, punctuating his words with a sinister chuckle.

The two men standing with Olvart in the mansion he used for his research were his two personal attendants, handpicked by the earl of Sutherland himself.

"Still, I was quite surprised myself; to think that these girls have both an incredible flying carpet and such a potent staff... These have the Sutherland name written all over them, if I dare say so myself!" one of Olvart's attendants said.

After the two girls refused to sell them their flying carpet, Olvart had immediately come up with a plan to steal it by staging an accident near them. Olvart had quickly noticed that the staff the girl with the black hair had used to stop the carriage had a limiter on it, yet it had already more than proved its value.

"A flying magic item and a unique staff... How come these kids own items we've never had or even seen before? Not only that, but they easily prevented the wagon accident we had so carefully planned. Just who *are* these girls?" the second man said.

On top of being Olvart's assistant, he was also one of the assassins the Sutherland family had raised since childhood. He had no qualms about getting his hands dirty as long as he got paid for it, and he had already killed many people to get what he wanted.

"Who cares about that?" Olvart said impatiently. "That kid is a rogue mage who just so happened to stumble upon more power than she can handle. She'd never be able to become a court magician like *me!*"

Olvart believed that court magicians were superior to anyone else in the entire world, although his attendant didn't share his opinion.

"As long as I get paid, I don't really care what I have to do." The assassin shrugged. "I sent ten of my underlings to those kids' house. No matter how strong of a mage that black-haired girl is, once she's asleep, they'll make quick work of killing her," he said with a practiced nonchalance.

Unfortunately for Olvart, he'd been too preoccupied with fantasizing about what he'd do with his prizes to do any actual probing into the nature of his enemies. He had only done the bare minimum of research; he'd seen nothing of what they could do firsthand. Well, that wasn't quite right; he *had* watched them stop the wagon. However, seeing Chise use her staff had only further clouded his judgment. In the end the girls had done too good a job of reining their prowess in, leading him to act out of pure, blind greed.

As the night wore on, they grew more and more anxious about the assassins, who still hadn't returned.

"What's keeping those idiots?!" Olvart barked.

"They are taking quite a while indeed," his other attendants said. "Perhaps it would be ideal to rest for the night. I am sure we will wake up to very good news."

"They sure as hell are taking their sweet time," the assassin added. "I'm gonna beat the hell out of them when they're back."

Anxiously awaiting the killers' return, the three men turned in for the night. When they woke the next morning, they were informed that the assassins had been captured by adventurers and handed over to the authorities.

CHAPTER 24

TRUE IDENTITY

The following day, we turned our would-be assailants over to the city guards and decided to play it safe for the rest of the day by staying home.

"U-Um, Miss Chise... Are you sure it's a good idea to be so... relaxed, considering the situation?" Yuicia asked, understandably worried about the recent attempts on our lives.

"It's not like we can *do* anything," I replied.

"Just take it easy, Yuicia," Teto added.

"I-I mean, you're right, but still..."

Kuro rubbed his body against Yuicia's back in an attempt to calm her down.

"I'm worried," she said. "I have no idea what's going on, and I don't even know who the two of you really are."

Initially, the Sutherland family had targeted us for our flying carpet. But they had sent assassins after us mere hours after the wagon accident. Could it be they were also after something else?

Perhaps now is a good time to tell Yuicia about our true identities, I thought.

But right as I opened my mouth, someone knocked at our front door.

"Lady Witch, we have a visitor."

"Ah, good timing. Let's say hi," I said, doing just that.

Sheryl, the adventurer's guild submaster, was standing on our porch.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto, Miss Yuicia," she said, greeting us with a nod. "Lord Zelitch is

waiting for you at the guild."

"Okay. Yuicia, I'll tell you everything at the guild."

"All right."

We climbed into the carriage Sheryl had prepared for us and made our way to the guild near the port, where we were ushered into the reception office. There, Mr. Zelitch was waiting for us, a grave look on his face.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto, I was awaiting your arrival," he said before turning towards Yuicia. "Yuicia, right? I believe it is our first time meeting."

"Y-Yes! My name is Yuicia; I'm an apprentice at the Sutherland Magic School. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance," she said, bowing her head.

She had registered as an adventurer recently and had just become D-rank; to her, the Grand Master of the guild must've been quite the impressive figure.

"Did you call us to talk about yesterday's events? Or maybe this morning's?" I asked.

Still looking quite tense, Mr. Zelitch replied, "Both. We got a complaint and a compensation claim from the Sutherland family. They said that the carriage you two stopped was carrying ingredients for potions and, since you're adventurers, they want us to pay the cost of those ingredients back to them."

"I see..." I muttered.

"What?! That's messed up! The guards said it was an accident! The driver lost control of the cart!" Yuicia protested.

"Rest assured, we denied their request," Mr. Zelitch said. "The guards interrogated the assassins you handed over to them this morning, and they finally spilled that they had been sent to kill you by the Sutherland family. We're currently in the process of investigating the full extent of their criminal records."

"What's going to happen to the Sutherlands?" I asked.

A slightly worried look formed on Mr. Zelitch's face.

"These two accidents haven't caused any casualties, but we've been informed by trusted adventurers that Olvart and his crew have been banned from other countries after committing grave offenses like embezzlement and attempted murder; this is apparently not their first 'wagon accident.' Once their guilt is confirmed, they'll most likely be demoted from their positions as court magicians, and their influence and power will diminish significantly," he explained.

The Lawbyle guild was already receiving backlash from the Gald Beastmen Nation and even from Ischea, despite it not being a neighboring country, about the importance of protecting adventurers from people like the Sutherlands. Not only that, but the Church of the Five Goddesses had also gotten involved. Teto and I occasionally engaged in charitable activities for them, like supporting orphanages and making donations.

If all the Kingdom of Lawbyle had to do to protect their ties with other countries and the Church of the Five Goddesses was to get rid of the Sutherland family, then it was a no-brainer.

"I have to apologize to you, Yuicia," Mr. Zelitch continued. "The Sutherland Magic School is going to lose a lot of influence. I also plan on balancing power among all magic schools more equally and encouraging them to focus more on researching magical technology."

Mr. Zelitch bore the countenance of a statesman ready to change the nation.

"U-Um... I don't really care about the Sutherland Magic School's influence, so, um, I don't really understand what you're talking about," Yuicia said, panicking slightly. "I'm just happy if it means there'll be fewer people being mean to adventurers when they team up with them."

"Understood. I'll keep those words in mind and work on ways to improve the relationships between adventurers and the Sutherland apprentices," Mr. Zelitch said, his expression softening. "This entire situation is our fault; we gave the earl of Sutherland too much power, as his family's prowess with Wind Magic was convenient to us. I'm deeply sorry."

Seeing the Grand Master of the adventurer's guild—who also happened to be a former crown prince—bow his head to us, Yuicia's eyes shot wide open and she threw us a puzzled look.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto... Just *who* are you? Why would the Grand Master bow his head to you?" she asked.

Mr. Zelitch let out a quizzical hum. "Miss Chise, Miss Teto, have you not told Yuicia about your identities? She's been living with you for five years, has she not?"

I quickly averted my gaze.

"Well... I thought she'd get nervous around us if she knew," I muttered.

"We wanted her to be herself!" Teto added.

Mr. Zelitch let out a sigh and turned towards Yuicia. "Miss Chise and Miss Teto are A-rank adventurers. Their party name is the 'Carpet Riders,'" he explained to her.

Yuicia's reaction was instant.

"Huuuh?! Miss Chise, Miss Teto! You were A-rank adventurers all along?!" she squeaked.

We hadn't done anything really praiseworthy in several years now, so our fame had waned a little, and bards had stopped singing our praises. Still, learning that your housemates of five years were A-rank adventurers was a pretty big deal. There was a blank look on Yuicia's face as she muttered, "A-An A-rank adventurer taught me magic..."

"Well, we actually just came to Lawbyle to enjoy our newly retired life and eat seafood, so we've been only taking on simple quests and hiding our rank from everyone," I said.

"But we're having so much fun living with you!" Teto added.

"Retired life??" Yuicia repeated. "How old are you?!"

I had to take a quick look at my guild card to answer her. Since my physical appearance didn't change, I tended to forget how old I really was. It seemed that I had turned forty-seven this year and Teto fifty-two. It'd been thirty-five years since I reincarnated into this world, huh? I was doing pretty well for myself, wasn't I?

"Fo-Forty-seven and fifty-two..." Yuicia breathed. "But you look the exact same as you did five years ago. I can't believe it... You look so young! You look like *children*!"

"That's because of the size of our mana pools," I explained. "The more mana you have, the slower you age."

"Still, you should've at least aged a little bit, right?! Are you hiding something else from me?"

"That's a secret," I said.

"Miss Chiseee!" Yuicia whined, looking on the verge of tears.

Mr. Zelitch, who had been watching our little exchange for the past few minutes, cleared his throat to get our attention. It seemed he wasn't done talking to us.

"We have already started the arrangements to oust the Sutherlands in order to protect you two. Things might be hectic for the next few days, but we'll do our utmost to keep you safe."

"Thanks. We can protect ourselves, but just in case, we're counting on you."

"Thank you!" Teto said.

We were pretty much done here; Mr. Zelitch told us he'd take care of the rest himself.

To me, getting targeted by nobles and having assassins sent after me were nothing more than minor inconveniences. However, I soon realized that the consequences of this whole ordeal would turn out to be a lot bigger than I had initially thought.

CHAPTER 25

OLVART'S LAST-DITCH EFFORT

The Sutherland Heir Olvart's Side

"Damn it! This wasn't the way things were supposed to go!" Olvart raged as he tore at his own hair and vented his frustration on the priceless furniture of his family's mansion.

An extravagant flying carpet and a staff powerful enough it could stop a carriage going full speed—Olvart could not afford to let such treasures slip through his grasp. And so, he had proceeded in the same manner as usual to get them... but this time he had woefully underestimated his opponents. Not only had they not decided to sell him the flying carpet—*him*, the heir of the Sutherland earldom—but they had completely wiped out the assassins he had sent after them. And to make matters even worse, those idiotic assassins had spilled *everything* to the guards!

"Please calm down, Lord Olvart!"

"How do you expect me to remain calm in this situation?! This is the biggest predicament our family has ever faced!"

How could he have known that that stupid little girl was actually a renowned adventurer with close ties not only to other countries, but to the *church*?! Even the adventurer's guild considered her one of their most valuable members.

His assassins were the Sutherland family's all-important covert forces. It wasn't the first time one of them had been apprehended by the city guards, but in the past, it had been a matter easily resolved with a discreet exchange of hush money and a well-placed corpse handpicked from the slums. The guards would pretend the assassins had killed themselves and secretly release them. However, this time, it wasn't the guards Olvart had to deal with but the kingdom's chivalric order; his usual method wouldn't work on them.

"If I had known who that little girl really was, I wouldn't have tried to get her killed! Shit! And to top it all off, *he* ran away when I needed him the most!"

Olvart's second attendant—the assassin—had made his escape as soon as he got word that the attempt on Chise and Teto had failed, and not without making sure to steal some money and other valuable trinkets from Olvart first. He'd managed to sneak out of the capital unnoticed ahead of the knights' official involvement.

"They said she helped them resolve one of the kingdom's biggest problems... Bullshit! Did they forget everything *we* did for the kingdom?!"

Apparently, this kid had rid the kingdom of a big slaver ring. The authorities had gone so far as to dub her the nation's "savior." On hearing that she'd been attacked, the knights had immediately suspected her attackers had some tie to said organization, which had prompted them to get involved in the first place.

"My family has been orchestrating murders for generations! Why did this have to happen to *me*?!" Olvart lamented.

He seemed less ashamed of his family's actions than he was incensed by the fact that *he* was the one lined up to pay for them. His father and his grandfather before him had done much the same in the name of "the progression of the nation and the advancement of magic research." Now that the knights were obliged to start poking their noses into the Sutherland family history, they couldn't save their necks by pretending Olvart's actions had been an isolated incident. For now, they had managed to buy some time by claiming the little girl had damaged their potion ingredients during the "wagon accident." They adamantly refused to face trial until they were compensated for their losses, all the while hoping this delay would stall the authorities long enough to concoct a strategy for their survival.

"Did you find any more dirt on the girls?!" Olvart barked at his attendant. "Something we can use to our advantage?"

"I compiled the intel we gathered here," the man said, handing him a folder. "However, it is still incomplete."

Olvart's brow furrowed as he perused the folder's contents. His attendant had compiled all the information the guild possessed about the two girls, as well as the tales the bards sang and stories from the Gald Beastman Nation. But no matter how one looked at it, it all seemed like absolute nonsense.

"Chise was twelve and Teto seventeen when they registered as adventurers? And

they've been doing it for *thirty-five years?!*"

Naturally, Olvart was aware that the larger one's mana pool was, the slower they aged. However, it didn't mean that one could stop aging altogether. His own father—the head of the court magicians and of the Sutherland family—had over 40,000 MP, but he was still aging, just at a much slower pace than regular people. The average life span for head court magicians hovered around a hundred and fifty years, with no recorded cases surpassing three hundred.

"That's odd. Why have their appearances not changed in the slightest since they joined the guild?" Olvart muttered.

Most Galdians had no clue about how any of this worked, and most of them were convinced Chise and Teto had elven or dwarven ancestry that explained their youthful appearances. But even if that was the case, there should at least have been *some* change.

"Perhaps... No, that's impossible. Unless..." Olvart muttered, struck by a sudden realization.

"What is it, my lord?"

Olvart was a haughty and greedy man, but one thing was for sure; he wasn't stupid. Having been born into a prestigious magus family and being a court magician himself, he was particularly well-versed in thaumaturgical matters. And he might've just figured out what these girls' secrets were.

"They might be immortal," he said.

"Immortal?!" his attendant exclaimed, his eyes as wide as saucers.

"No one can stay twelve years old forever... unless they have the Unaging skill."

The documents stated that Chise was much smarter and more composed than one might think based on her appearance. It defied logic for a real child to possess such wisdom. Immortal sages and wizards, though rare, weren't unheard of in the annals of history. They often lived in secrecy, emerging into society only after the passage of time had blurred memories of their existence. It seemed entirely plausible to Olvart that Chise might be one of these elusive sages. Perhaps she had made herself look younger with magic or used a potion to change her appearance. The more Olvart

thought about it, the more convinced he was. After all, it wouldn't be surprising for her to possess all of those powerful items if she truly were an immortal sage.

Of course, Chise wasn't a sage; she was simply a reincarnator who'd put a lot of effort into growing her mana pool. But Olvart didn't know that. Either way, what truly mattered was that Olvart had managed to uncover her secret.

"I'm going to request an audience with the king right away. You keep on digging up information about those two!"

"Y-Yes, my lord!"

With those words, Olvart made his way to the royal palace and asked to see the king. Despite the cloud of disgrace that loomed over the Sutherlands, the king couldn't outright refuse a meeting with Olvart, considering the substantial contributions his family had made to the kingdom.

"What business do you have here today?" the king asked him indifferently. Olvart could tell all of the knights and civil officials were looking at him with scorn and contempt.

His pride in shambles, he mustered every nerve in his body to hold himself together as he uttered the following words: "There is something you need to know, Your Majesty."

"Is that so? I wonder what a criminal who has endangered our nation has to tell me. Pray, let us know," the king replied lethargically.

The Lawbylean king was the kind of man who always wanted *more*; he could've owned everything in the world, yet it still wouldn't be enough. Thanks to Lawbyle's maritime trade power, the king was swimming in money and rare items, and his position as head of the nation meant that he was never lacking in women, jewels, and food. Compared to his brother, who had given up on the title of crown prince and gone on to become Grand Master of the adventurer's guild, he was a rather mediocre ruler and relied entirely on those around him. Anyone would be content with this life, but the old king was never satisfied. He gorged himself to his bodily limit and had never once ignored a compulsion of the body or spirit. It was all priming him for an early grave. Olvart knew this and fully intended to use it to his advantage.

"I entered into a dispute with that adventurer girl for your sake and that of the kingdom, Your Majesty!" Olvart declared.

"What nonsense are you spouting?! That girl liberated our nation from the slaver menace. Mind your tongue!" the knight captain reprimanded Olvart.

"She has the Unaging skill!" he retorted. "She possesses rare treasures and knowledge which I am sure would help our kingdom flourish if we had them!"

"Impossible. There is no such skill," the knight captain said. "You're merely spewing nonsense in a desperate attempt to save your own skin! Besides, even if what you're saying were true, it still wouldn't give you any right to steal from her!"

Olvart paid the man no mind and continued, "We already know of several immortal sages and wizards. Think about it, Your Majesty; if we were to investigate that girl's body—her hair, her blood, or even her flesh—we might be able to learn the secret to immortality!"

"Is that so?" the king responded, a glimmer of genuine interest sparking in his eyes for the first time since the conversation had begun.

"We, the Sutherland family, pledge to use our knowledge of magic and potion-making to obtain the secret of immortality and offer it to you, Your Majesty," Olvart promised.

It was, of course, utter nonsense. Most people in the room objected, saying that Olvart's claims were completely unfounded, but, for better or for worse, his words managed to get the king's attention. Not only could he escape his impending death, but he could make history by being the first immortal ruler.

"I shall postpone the Sutherland family's trial," the king declared. "Obtain the secret to immortality and bring it to us. However, everything we discussed here shall remain strictly confidential. Beware that if we discover you were lying to us, it'll be considered treason against the royal family. Do you understand?"

"Naturally, Your Majesty. I pledge to find the secret to immortality, even if it costs me my life."

Olvart's last-ditch effort was a resounding success.

CHAPTER 26

THE FLOATING ISLAND IS APPROACHING AND YUICIA HAS MADE HER DECISION

Yuicia's Side

I had been very anxious ever since Miss Chise and Miss Teto got attacked by the Sutherland family, but, surprisingly, nothing had happened since the last assassination attempt. The days passed without much change; it was almost anticlimactic.

"It seems that the knights are watching the Sutherlands' every move. We don't need to get involved," Miss Chise said.

"That's true, but..." I trailed off, unsure of what to say.

"We have way more important things to do!" Miss Teto chimed in. "We haven't decided what we're going to have for lunch!"

"Meow!"

Ever since I had learned that the two of them were A-rank adventurers, I'd been feeling a little awkward around them. But Miss Chise and Miss Teto hadn't changed their attitude towards me, and I frankly felt a little bit stupid for being so nervous around them in the first place.

And just like that, an uneventful month went by. But then...

"Miss Chise! Miss Teto!" I called out to them one morning. "The floating island! It's coming!"

Miss Chise immediately came beside me to look at the sky. "You're right. From what I've read, it's going to stay close for three days before leaving again."

"Then we have to leave tomorrow!" Miss Teto said. "Let's get everything ready today."

“Meow!”

“You two are going there using flight magic, right?” I asked. “I really wish I could come with you. What a shame.”

“Sorry, Yuicia. We have no idea what’s waiting for us there; we can’t risk putting you in harm’s way,” Miss Chise said.

“We’ll tell you everything when we’re back, though!” Miss Teto added.

“Meow!”

I was very disappointed I wouldn’t get to go on the floating island with Miss Chise and Miss Teto. I started petting Kuro’s back to distract myself, and it nuzzled against me. Kuro was a little difficult with me sometimes, but it always made me happy when I got to baby it a little.

Miss Chise and Miss Teto sent me out to turn in potions at the guild while they headed to parts unknown to get ready for the day to come. I made a conscious effort to steer clear of the Sutherland school during my outing.

“Hello, Miss Sheryl,” I said when I entered the guild. “I brought potions for turn-ins!”

“Oh, Yuicia! Hi!”

Entering the guild—I had decided to go to the one near the port—I made my way to the counter and started lining up bottles on the table.

“You haven’t been to the dungeon recently, have you?” Miss Sheryl asked me. “Do you want me to introduce you to an adventuring party so they take you along with them?”

“Hey, Yuicia! Come with us next time!” a female adventurer who must’ve overheard our conversation offered.

“Hey, that’s not fair! You should go with us instead,” a man said. “Let’s go tackle quests together, Yuicia!”

“Wanna become a permanent member of our team? We’re a strong bunch!” a third one offered.

I forced a smile on my face and bowed my head slightly. "Sorry, everyone," I said, chuckling awkwardly. "I can't right now. Maybe later, when the situation has calmed down."

With the ongoing scandal with the Sutherland family, the guild's Grand Master, Mr. Zelitch, had forbidden Sutherland apprentices from joining adventuring parties and, by extension, setting foot in the dungeon. The teachers at the magic school always recommended we go there to level up, increase our mana pool, and secure funds and materials for our research. But unlike the other apprentices, I had always been kind to the people of the guild, and a lot of adventurers wanted me to join their parties, regardless of the letter of the law.

Once I'd politely declined the other adventurers' invites, I headed to the quest board and selected a few routine jobs to take on. I made my rounds and completed my circuit back to the guild, only to find Kuro sitting in a corner of the drinking hall, purring happily as dozens of adventurers fussed over it.

"Kuro is really cute," Miss Sheryl commented. "Somehow, looking at it makes me feel less tired."

I chuckled awkwardly. "I'm sorry for... that," I said, gesturing in the cat's direction.

"I told you: it's cute, so I don't mind. And besides, they might not look like it, but most adventurers want to forget about their jobs and just pet a cat sometimes, you know?" she replied with a smile.

It made sense; most adventurers spent their time fighting monsters, so it was only natural they'd want to wind down at some point.

"Sometimes Kuro follows you when you clear your quests, but I really prefer when it just waits for you to come back here. It's adorable."

I looked in Kuro's direction. The cat must've felt my gaze, as it disengaged from the adventurers who were petting it and came to stand by my side.

"Let's go home, Kuro," I said, and it meowed happily.

I bent down slightly so it'd have an easier time climbing onto my shoulder, and it skillfully jumped onto my back before finding its natural place.

I really got used to this, huh? I thought as I absentmindedly rubbed its chin. It started purring contentedly.

But right as I stepped out...

"You're Yuicia from the Sutherland Magic School, right?" a voice asked beside me.

I halted before turning towards the person who'd addressed me. "O-Oh, you're a knight," I said, relieved.

Despite the many hours Miss Teto had spent teaching me self-defense techniques for close combat, I'd left my guard down. I hadn't noticed the knight's presence at all. I couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed in myself; it seemed I still had some ways to go.

"I would like you to tell us exactly what happened when the two A-rank adventurers got attacked," the man said.

"Oh, um, sure." I nodded.

He ushered me into a carriage. I was still a little traumatized about the "wagon accident" from one month ago but obediently climbed into the carriage.

After a while, I looked outside the window and noticed that we weren't headed towards the knights' station. Instead, the carriage seemed to be making its way towards the nobles' district.

"Um... The knights' station is the other way, isn't it?" I asked, but the man didn't answer, his arms crossed over his chest.

Kuro—who had jumped from my shoulder when I entered the carriage and was now sitting in my lap—let out a low, threatening meow, its fur bristling to make itself look more menacing.

It was obvious something was up, but I still had no idea what was going on, so I decided to wait until we reached our destination before doing anything.

Soon after, the carriage stopped in front of the Sutherland family's main estate.

"Th-That's..."

“Hurry.”

The man—who I had since realized was not a knight, just some guy in a costume—pushed a knife against my back and ordered me to move. With no other choice, Kuro and I entered the mansion.

We were ushered into a room on the second floor where, to my astonishment, Olvart stood waiting for us. I was confused; wasn’t he supposed to be under house arrest and closely monitored by the knights?

“Mr. Olvart...” I said.

“I’ve been awaiting your arrival. Yuicia, right? Come take a seat.”

The man dressed in full knight garb silently went to stand behind Olvart as I reluctantly sat on the sofa.

“I’ve heard you’re good friends with those two adventurer girls,” Olvart said.

“Y-Yes,” I said, trying desperately to hide the trembling of my voice.

An unpleasant smile curled on Olvart’s lips. “Excellent. I’d like you to administer this drug to them and use these handcuffs and collars to strip them of their powers,” he said, producing a couple of small pills as well as two pairs of handcuffs and two collars.

“Huh?!”

“These little things here,” he continued, lifting up the pills, “are powerful sleeping drugs. All you have to do is mix them with their meal, and poof! They’ll be out cold for an entire day. These shackles have an enchantment that’ll prevent anyone who wears them from using their magic; the collars are slave collars. We can’t have them cause us too much trouble, after all, so you’d best ensure these are snugly fastened.”

“A-And why would I do that?!” I asked, standing up in indignation while Kuro hissed at Olvart next to me.

“What an undisciplined little apprentice and her familiar,” Olvart said, throwing me a glare. “You’re part of the Sutherland Magic School; you have to obey me.”

“I have no intention of going along with your outrageous plan! Why are you so bent on

capturing Miss Chise and Miss Teto in the first place? Do you really want their flying carpet that much?"

Olvart let out a scornful chuckle. "I couldn't care less about that thing! Or her staff, for that matter. No, I've discovered something much, *much* more valuable."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

With a crazed, twisted grin on his face, Olvart proceeded to tell me about his plan. "That adventurer girl—Chise, was it?—possesses the Unaging skill. The king ordered me to find out the secret behind her immortality. I can't do that without capturing her, now can I?"

The *king*? It hit me like a lightning bolt; the past few weeks hadn't been calm because the knights had been trying to take down the Sutherlands but because they had somehow managed to sway the king to their cause and were plotting to capture Miss Chise.

"I'm not asking you to do it for free, of course," Olvart continued. "If I remember correctly, your dream is to become a court magician, right? If you do as you're told, I'll make sure to put in a good word for you. However, should you defy me, you will be expelled from the Sutherland Magic School. You're no doubt aware that once an apprentice is cast out from their school, the gates to becoming a court magician slam shut forever."

My eyes cast downwards, I clenched my fists as hard as I could. "I refuse," I said, my voice strained.

"Really? Let me repeat it for you: the *king* told me to capture these two adventurers."

"I don't care! I refuse to betray Miss Chise and Miss Teto!"

Kuro meowed loudly, as if to show its agreement.

Instantly, Olvart's face turned red with anger. "Have you forgotten that we took you in when you were nothing more than a dirty little orphan?!" he spat.

"All you did was grab me off the street! I had to work for hours every day just to be able to pay for food and afford the dorms. I barely did any magic at all! All the others did was make me take care of their chores for them. You didn't teach me magic; Miss

Chise and Miss Teto did!" I yelled, my eyes shining with unshed tears.

Olvart clucked his tongue. "Change of plan! We're going to capture her and hold her hostage to lure the other two here!"

All of a sudden, the assassins who had been tasked with killing Miss Chise and Miss Teto entered the room, followed closely by the Sutherland court magicians.

"I won't let you!" I exclaimed, grabbing my wand from inside my robes and readying myself for combat.

CHAPTER 27

THE GIRL AND THE CAT ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES

There were five assassins and three court magicians in the room. I barely had time to mentally prepare myself before one of the assassins started running at me.

“Can you really fight so many people at once, girlie?” he asked.

“I’ve been working hard to be ready for this!” I said.

I could do everything Miss Chise and Miss Teto had taught me.

I activated Body Strengthening and managed to fend off the incoming onslaught as I stepped back, buying myself breathing room. I had no intention of fighting these men head-on. All I needed to do was bail.

“Kuro, let’s make a run for it!” I told the cat before chanting, “*Ice Lance!*”

I launched a long ice blade at the wall, blasting a hole in it, and dashed for the opening, Kuro keeping pace with me.

“Don’t let her escape!” Olvart barked. “Go after her!”

“Don’t get in my way!” I said, turning around for a split second and chanting, “*Ice Bind!*”

“Meow!”

I froze the ground underneath our pursuers’ feet, rooting them to the spot. Meanwhile, Kuro puffed out its tail and unleashed a bolt of lightning from the tip, electrifying the man who was trying to grab us.

“That cat can use magic?!” Olvart exclaimed. “It’s not a regular familiar, is it? That’s a monster! E-Either way, hurry and catch her! I don’t care if you get rough with it. Just do it!”

"Wind Arrow!" I heard a mage chant behind us.

But Kuro and I managed to flee the room before a single arrow could reach us.

"I had no idea you could use magic, Kuro!" I said, impressed, as we beat feet down the hallway.

The cat let out a self-satisfied meow. I had thought I'd have to fight my way through alone; I was glad to have Kuro's assistance, even if it had come as a complete surprise.

"She got away! Go after her!" Olvart's voice echoed throughout the entire mansion. Of course, a master at Wind Magic like himself would know how to use the *Whisper* spell. The reinforcements that were stationed in the other rooms began to appear one after the other in the hallway.

"Did Olvart plan on sending all of these people after Miss Chise and Miss Teto? Then if I manage to defeat them all right now..." I said.

Kuro let out a meow of warning.

"Ah, don't worry, Kuro; I'll be careful. *Water!*"

I swung my wand as I ran and made countless little water spheres appear around me.

"Are you trying to stop us with a *Water* spell? Don't make me laugh! We were right all along—you really are a good-for-nothing!"

I was surrounded by a bunch of other Sutherland apprentices, all around the same age as me. One of them started laughing at my water spheres, and my lips curled into a provocative smile.

"A handful of water is more than enough to defeat someone," I said. "Go!"

I gave my wand another shake, launching my water spheres at the Sutherland apprentices. They used their magic as well as their arms and robes to protect themselves from the water spheres, thinking it was just water anyway, but the spheres simply danced around them before engulfing their heads. With their noses and mouths blocked, the apprentices started panicking, uselessly lifting their hands to try and pry the water spheres away.

"Wh-What did you do?!" a man asked.

"It's not that surprising, is it?" I replied, conjuring more water spheres and launching one of them at him. "There's a lot of spells that can be controlled after being cast. This is all thanks to the Mana Control skill Miss Chise made me train. You don't need super powerful attack spells to really put the hurt on."

Not stopping for a single second, I launched my water spheres at everyone who tried to get in my way. I didn't kill anyone; the water spheres would automatically retreat when the target was about to suffocate.

I noticed that a group of mages were lying in wait farther down the hallway, perhaps in an attempt to avoid my counterassault.

"*Blast Bomb!*" they all chanted at once, launching a large magic sphere at us.

Kuro let out a panicked meow.

"This way, Kuro! *Ice Wall!*"

I quickly conjured an ice barrier and took cover behind it with Kuro, waiting for the magic bomb to detonate. When it did, the force of it was so strong that the walls shook and the windows shattered.

"That wind bomb would've hurt me pretty bad, but if you add the broken glass flying everywhere and the roof tiles raining from above..." I trailed off.

It seemed that they had given up on capturing me alive and were simply throwing whatever they had at me so I wouldn't escape. I could feel my ice barrier starting to shatter under another volley of bombs. I needed to figure out an escape route, and quickly. Unfortunately, I couldn't counter this new offensive with the same approach; my water spheres would just scatter into vapor amid the bursts of wind.

I had no choice but to throw spells at them from behind the wall.

"*Water Cutter!*"

I launched countless blades of water towards the mages—well, not quite exactly at them, as that would've been too dangerous. Instead, I directed them towards the ceiling, which crumbled onto their heads. With them buried under the rubble, I could

make my escape.

Kuro let out a happy meow, and I chuckled.

"We definitely can't go that way, so we're going to have to blast another hole through the wall," I said, casting *Ice Lance* for the second time today and escaping through the newly formed hole in the wall. Finally, we reached the staircase. I had started running down two steps at a time, Kuro in tow, when all of a sudden...

"Damn it! I can't believe you've destroyed our glorious Sutherland mansion! That's a blatant attack on nobility!" Olvart shouted from the second floor's landing.

The anger I had felt when Olvart ordered me to capture Miss Chise had given way to a growing sense of calm as I fought the mages he had sent on my way. One thing was for sure: court magicians were nowhere near as powerful as A-rank adventurers like Miss Chise and Miss Teto.

"I guess I have no choice but to do it myself," he said before chanting, "Tempest, I summon thee! Annihilate our foes! *Aerial Storm!*"

This clearly was a high-level spell, most likely only taught to a select few of the Sutherland mages. A tornado appeared in the middle of the grand hall, making its way towards us.

"Meow?! Meow meow!"

"Kuro!"

The little cat got caught in the tornado, and I hurriedly reached out to help it, only to get drawn up with it, my feet leaving the ground. Still, I managed to grab on to Kuro right before the tornado engulfed us whole, cradling the cat against my chest to protect it.

"Mwa ha ha! That's your punishment for making a fool of our prestigious Sutherland family! Sacrifice your body to my masterwork and atone for your sins!"

Olvart's laughter echoed throughout the grand hall as the tornado sucked up everything that wasn't nailed down. I squeezed Kuro even tighter to protect it from the growing cloud of debris within the current, only to notice that a thin spherical barrier had appeared around us.

“A barrier? Kuro! Your collar’s glowing!”

“Meow!”

The cat’s collar must’ve been a magic item Miss Chise had made so it wouldn’t get hurt. However, the barrier soon started creaking under the stream of shrapnel. I had to do something!

“Kuro, I’m going to get us out of here. It’s going to be very sudden, but as soon as we’re out, we need to start running towards Miss Chise and Miss Teto, okay?” I said.

The kitten meowed and nodded, and my lips curled into a smile. I forced a more serious expression onto my face and started focusing everything I had into my magic.

“Aaaaaah!”

I drew every last drop of mana in my core for one spell: a giant shield of ice. My plan was to create the biggest mass I could to tear down the tornado from the inside out. It was a random spell; it didn’t even have a name. But sure enough, a curtain of ice formed around us slowly but steadily, shielding us from the debris. Unfortunately, it didn’t take long for the furniture scraps to chip away at it, causing ice particles to scatter within the tornado.

“Not enough! I need more power!” I said, letting my emotions rise. Despite that, my mind remained cool as I drew even more mana from my core.

Kuro meowed repeatedly as if to encourage me. The ice barrier grew stronger and stronger, some debris even getting incorporated into it. When my body reached its limits, I felt a sudden surge of mana coming from deep within, and I channeled every last bit of it into my spell.

“Come ooon!” I yelled.

The ice barrier surrounding us suddenly expanded, with large ice splinters appearing on the surface, piercing the walls of the tornado.

“I-Impossible! She broke free from that spell?!”

The tornado crumbled under the pressure, and the recoil from the spell made its way up Olvart’s staff, shattering the catalyst at the tip.

“My family’s most powerful staff!”

“I’m not done yet!” I yelled.

The ice splinters kept growing until they pierced the walls, ceiling, and floor of the mansion, making it crumble all around us.

“Stop! Don’t come near me! Don’t!”

One of the branching tendrils of ice jammed Olvart into the wall; the man croaked like a frog as it punched the air out of him before losing consciousness under the pressure.

“Is it... over?” I asked, panting.

“Meow!”

The barrier surrounding us had long disappeared; Kuro and I were still inside the ice shield. As I was the one who’d materialized it, I was able to use my Mana Control to make part of the sphere disappear, allowing Kuro and me to slip out.

“Let’s go home, Kuro,” I said before pausing. “I suppose I don’t need this robe anymore.”

“Meow, meow!”

We left the mansion, and I turned around to take a look at my handiwork. Dozens of ice splinters sheared out of the walls and ceiling; the mansion was completely ruined. I removed my tattered deep green robe and threw it on the ground before making my way home with Kuro.

The Sutherland family’s main estate was no more.

CHAPTER 28

YUICIA BECOMES THE WITCH'S DISCIPLE

After noticing that the floating island Kuro had fallen from had reached the capital, Teto and I hurriedly made our way to the wasteland to get everything ready for our trip.

"Master, I do not want to be a nuisance to you, but we have noticed that you have been going for longer periods of time without returning to the wasteland. It makes us feel a little sad," Beretta told me right as I was about to head back to our house in Lawbyle.

"Sorry, Beretta. Don't worry; we plan on taking a long vacation in the wasteland when things have calmed down," I said.

"Teto's getting a little tired of seafood!"

"Understood. We shall eagerly await your return, Master, Lady Teto."

With that, Teto and I passed through the transfer gate. I couldn't help but feel a bit sorry for Beretta and the others.

With Yuicia being almost all grown-up and the Sutherlands at our heels, it might soon be time for us to leave Lawbyle altogether.

"We're home! Huh? Looks like Yuicia and Kuro aren't back yet," I noted as we emerged from the transfer gate.

"It's weird; usually Yuicia's home and cooking dinner by now," Teto said.

"Well, maybe she decided to hang out a li— Teto! The barrier on Kuro's necklace activated!" I exclaimed, feeling the switch flip. Checking the tracking enchantment I had put in its collar, it seemed that it was somewhere in the noble district. Since Kuro pretty much always followed Yuicia around, I was positive the two of them were together. They must have been in trouble.

"Let's go look for them!"

“Roger!”

We quickly straddled my new staff and hurtled off towards the nobles’ district while scanning for Kuro and Yuicia’s mana signatures. Before long, we had located them. Yuicia’s hair was all tousled, as if she had just come out of a tempest, and she wasn’t wearing her dark green robe. Her clothes were splotched with dust all over. Kuro wasn’t in a much better state, having turned basically entirely gray. Fortunately, though, they didn’t seem hurt.

“Ah! Miss Chise! Heeey, we’re here!” she yelled, waving at us from the ground.

“Meooow!”

I noticed that Yuicia seemed rather unsteady on her feet. But despite that, there was a bright smile on her face, as if she had accomplished something significant.

“Miss Chise, Miss Teto, we’re back!”

“Welcome back... Is that what you expected me to say?! You have some explaining to do! What *happened* to you?”

“Your clothes are all dirty and tattered!” Teto added.

An awkward smile formed on Yuicia’s face, and she chuckled. “Olvert expelled me from the magic school.”

“Expelled?!” Teto exclaimed before turning towards me. “Lady Witch, what does ‘expelled’ mean?”

Teto’s innocent question helped me relax slightly.

“It means she’s been evicted... banned from the magic school,” I said.

“That’s... a bad thing? Yuicia doesn’t need the magic school. She can live anywhere she wants,” Teto said, tilting her head to the side.

“That’s right, Miss Teto! That’s why I got expelled!” Yuicia announced, her chest puffed up in pride.

“Let’s start for home; you can tell us what happened on the way,” I said, still appalled

at her words. “Leaving aside the matter of your expulsion, what happened with Olvart? And why were you talking to him in the first place?”

I laid out our flying carpet, had everyone climb on, and started flying home.

“Basically...”

Yuicia proceeded to recall that day’s events to us.

“You shouldn’t follow strangers! That’s dangerous!” I admonished her.

“Don’t treat me like a kid.” She pouted. “He was dressed like a knight. How could I have known? And besides, how was I supposed to know the king was involved and that he asked Olvart to experiment on you?”

“You make a fair point.”

Beside me, Teto looked at Kuro, and the two of them nodded to each other.

“Kuro, Teto’s going to go beat up the mean people who tried to hurt Lady Witch and Yuicia. You’re coming with me?” she said, a serious look on her face.

“Meow!”

“Come on, you two, don’t start plotting things together!” I reprimanded them.

When I was sure they wouldn’t make off to go kill Olvart, I examined Yuicia. As I thought, she didn’t have a single scratch; she really managed to get out of that situation unscathed all by herself. Just to be sure, I used a quick appraisal spell on her only to be met with shocking results.

“When I was trying to get away from Olvart, I suddenly felt a burst of mana welling up inside my body,” Yuicia explained. “It was amazing. I felt like I could do anything I wanted!”

“Yuicia, your mana pool did expand. You’ve reached 50,000 MP,” I said.

“What?!”

She pretty much had no mana left after fighting for her life at the Sutherland mansion,

so she hadn't noticed, but Yuicia's mana pool had grown tremendously in a single day. It was a real textbook last-minute power-up, straight out of your typical meatheaded power fantasy. As a result, her mana pool was now quite big.

"No way... Whoa, it's true!" Yuicia said, taking a look at her status. "Hold on... I have a new skill... 'Slowed Aging'?!"

I probably should have congratulated her on that, but I was facing a bit of a dilemma at the moment. I had taken Yuicia in because I had noticed she had the ability to gain the Unaging skill. My plan was to help her grow her mana pool until she got the Slowed Aging skill and to let her go once she did. I knew it was what would be best for her, but...

"Miss Chise! I have a request!" Yuicia said, pulling me out of my thoughts.

"What's gotten into you all of a sudden?" I asked.

"I want to become a mage—no, I want to become a *witch* just like you! Please make me your disciple!" she pleaded.

It reminded me of when she had asked me to teach her magic when we first met.

"Sure," I said. "You'll be my first, then. Let's get along well from now on, Yuicia, same as always."

"We're gonna have lots more fun together!" Teto chimed in.

"Miss Chise, you're way too casual about this!" Yuicia whined.

Tears had started running down her cheeks, and Kuro hurriedly went to lick them.

"We planned on having you stay here and look after the house while we went to the floating island, but I guess that's out of the question now that you've got the Sutherlands breathing down your neck," I said.

"Ah... Yes. Sorry," Yuicia said sheepishly.

"It's not your fault. Once the king has his eyes on you, you could be the whitest swan in the world, but he'd still manage to convince folks you were the black swan all along," I said.

“Lady Witch, Yuicia’s not a swan!”

“It’s a metaphor, Teto...”

Yuicia must’ve found our little exchange amusing; her lips curled up into a small smile.

It wasn’t long before we arrived home. As we hopped down from the flying carpet, Yuicia seemed to remember something. “Oh, Miss Chise, I had a question. When we were attacked by the Sutherlands, I saw Kuro use magic. It’s not a normal cat, is it? What kind of monster is it?” she asked.

Kuro meowed indignantly and slapped Yuicia’s face with its paw.

“Ouch! You don’t like me calling you a ‘monster’? I’m sorry!” Yuicia hurriedly said.

“Kuro, come here,” I said, and the cat stopped fighting with Yuicia to come sit beside me. “Good kitty. I’m going to remove your collar, okay?”

And so I did just that, gently petting the cat as I did. Instantly, the concealment enchantment dissipated, and two fairy wings sprouted from Kuro’s back. When we first met Kuro, its wings had been tiny and frail, but they were now much bigger and sturdier, glowing with strong mana.

“So pretty... So that’s Kuro’s true form,” Yuicia breathed in amazement.



"Kuro's not a monster, it's a cat-sith—a mythical creature. It fell from the floating island. That's why we want to go there; we have to bring it back to its family," I explained.

"So that's why you were waiting for the floating island... For Kuro," Yuicia said, gently petting Kuro's back.

"Meow."

After that, the two of them went to take a bath. Once they were back—in clean clothes and feeling refreshed—we started brainstorming about our plans for the next day.

"Now that you've gotten involved in this whole thing, I guess our best bet is to take you along," I said.

"We're going to go visit Kuro's home island together!" Teto chirped.

"H-Huuuh?! You want to bring me?!" Yuicia asked, her jaw hitting the floor.

I couldn't leave her here by herself when the Sutherlands had already come after her once.

"Of course. All righty then, let's pack all of our stuff into the magic bag. We leave at first light."

"Huh?! Hold on, Miss Chise! That's way too sudden! And, um, why did your attitude change all of a sudden?!" Yuicia asked, flapping her arms left and right.

"Well, I kept a lot of things secret out of consideration for you, but now that you're my disciple, I don't need to hide anything anymore, do I?" I said.

"Lady Witch, you look like you're having a lot of fun!" Teto said, a bright smile on her face.

Yuicia, on the other hand, wore a blank look, and I worried that I might've sprung everything on her a bit *too* suddenly. We spent the rest of our last night in the royal capital packing everything in the house into our magic bag to prepare for our trip to the floating island.

CHAPTER 29

THE TRAVELERS AND THE RULER

"Hm..." I mumbled, cracking an eye open and seeing the light flowing in through the windows. "Time to wake up. It's awfully noisy this morning," I noted.

I heard Teto whine next to me. "I wanna sleep mooore."

We had spent most of the night getting ready for our expedition to the floating island and only managed to catch a few winks of sleep before being woken up by the daybreak and the commotion coming from outside. It was weird; we lived in the suburbs of the royal capital, and it was usually pretty quiet around here, so why was it so loud today? I got up and went to find Yuicia. To my surprise, she was already awake—perhaps she had been too anxious to sleep—and was peering out of the window. She must've also been wondering what was going on.

"U-Um, Miss Chise," she said when she noticed my presence, "there's a bunch of knights, court magicians, and adventurers in front of the house."

"They came to arrest us, huh? It seems that they can't make it past the barrier, though. They most likely don't want to bother the neighbors with the kind of magic it would take to bust through," I noted.

They must've learned about Yuicia destroying the Sutherland mansion last night and had come here to take us into custody and question us. But with the barrier up, they didn't have a choice but to post up and wait for us to come out. I glanced at the surrounding houses and noticed that the tense atmosphere had affected the neighbors as well, most of them looking anxiously at the gathering in front of our house through their windows.

We had to leave, and quickly.

"Yuicia, are you ready? We're leaving now."

"Y-Yes! I am." She nodded anxiously.

She stood up; I noticed she had donned one of my spare robes. The three of us made our way to the second floor, where we sneaked up onto the roof through the window. Looking up at the sky, I was glad to see that conditions were clear and the floating island was even closer to us than it had been yesterday. Our flying carpet could probably make it.

"Teto, Yuicia, Kuro, get on," I said, spreading the flying carpet out on the roof. "Yuicia, make sure to hold Kuro tight the entire time."

"Roger!"

"A-Are we really going to fly that high?" Yuicia asked, gawking at me. "Does the carpet even go that high?!"

The initial plan had been for me and Teto to go to the floating island on Flying Jade with Teto holding Kuro in her arms. But since we couldn't leave Yuicia in town after yesterday's events, we had no choice but to count on the carpet.

Teto was sitting next to me, with Yuicia behind us. She grabbed Teto's clothes with one hand while holding Kuro with the other, the little cat-sith snugly nestled inside her robe.

"All righty then, let's go!"

"Destination: the floating island!" Teto chirped.

The flying carpet took off, eliciting a startled cry from Yuicia. The people gathered on the street gawked as we made our escape.

"Miss Chise, hostile spells inbound!" Yuicia informed me, panic lacing her voice.

"It's okay. I've set up a barrier around the flying carpet; they won't reach us," I reassured her.

Meanwhile, Teto was looking down at our former neighbors' houses and waving her hand. "Bye-bye everyone!"

The adventurers and knights must've thought she was taunting them, as they followed up with a second volley, but I simply steered the carpet out of their trajectory and towards the floating island.

"Whoa, the ground is so far away! And we're so close to the island!" Yuicia marveled.

Meanwhile, Kuro was meowing excitedly, happy to be so close to home.

Gathering mana in my eyes, I noticed that the island was surrounded by the same kind of barrier as the one I had set up in the wasteland so the mana couldn't leak out.

"Brace yourselves for a rapid ascent!" I told my companions.

"Roger, Lady Witch!"

We pierced through the clouds and dashed through the barrier. In a matter of minutes, we had arrived.

"So this is Kuro's home, huh?" Yuicia mused.

The floating island was covered in a beautiful, lush forest, with what seemed like remnants of small rivers and mountains scattered across the surface. While admiring our surroundings, I gently lowered the carpet onto the ground.

Zelitch's Side

I was born the second prince of the Kingdom of Lawbyle. After giving up my status as a member of the royal family, I was granted the title of duke. Every day, I worked hard for the good of the nation, but this brought its own complications.

"Why is the king such a mediocre ruler while his brother excels at political matters?" the nobles would always ask.

The public's approval of the king had cratered once crop failure had hit the inner territories several dozen years back. No matter what they tried, the state had been unable to find a way to restore its breadbasket; instead, they had decided to focus all of their efforts on maritime trade to make up for the low tax yields. Thankfully, the crop problem seemed to have resolved itself in the past few years. The Sutherland family was the main factor behind the kingdom's maritime power, as their Wind Magic made our vessels markedly more efficient than their competitors, and the Sutherlands soon became one of the most powerful families in the nation.

"This is quite a troublesome matter. Hopefully it'll be resolved soon," I muttered to myself.

With the Sutherland family's overwhelming presence in the royal capital, the kingdom needed to appoint a powerful Grand Master of the adventurer's guild to keep them in check; a regular adventurer, no matter how excellent, simply wouldn't do. That was why the former Grand Master suggested that I take the position. Under regular circumstances, it was frowned upon for a noble to have such an important position at the guild, but, in this case, it was a necessary evil. At that time, I wanted nothing more than to distance myself from my brother, the king; the opportunity seemed like a godsend. I accepted and nominated Sheryl, a B-rank adventurer, as sub-master. Since then, I'd been quietly stymieing the Sutherlands' ploys to secure total control of the royal capital.

Then the perfect opportunity presented itself: the Sutherland heir attempted to assassinate Chise and Teto, two excellent A-rank adventurers, to steal their treasures. I obviously couldn't stand by under such circumstances. I was on the verge of pulling the bastards up root and branch and restoring the kingdom to its peaceful state when a shocking piece of news reached my ears. The Sutherland heir had somehow convinced my brother that he could find the secret to immortality if he gave the Sutherlands carte blanche to seize and study Chise. The king ordered that we assist him in apprehending her, and so a group of adventurers under my command, as well as the country's knights (torn between their duty and their sense of justice), ended up stationed in front of Chise and Teto's house this morning.

As I watched Chise and her companions soar through the morning sky and the chaos around me calmed down, I came to a realization.

"My brother has lost his mind," I muttered.

Lawbyle was in deep shit. If my brother remained king, it was only a matter of time before our domestic and internal affairs were turned completely on their heads.

I had to do something.

A year passed in Chise and Teto's absence. With the help of some of the other nobles, we managed to overthrow and incarcerate my brother, who had succumbed entirely to his fantasies of immortality. The Sutherland family—the root of all evil—was executed as punishment for their crimes, as well as for manipulating the king and

disrupting the peace. From now on, the Sutherland name would only be associated with the eponymous magic school.

I had already renounced my title as crown prince of the kingdom and had no intention of becoming king. Besides, I realized that perhaps concentrating all the nation's power in a single person along lines of blood inheritance was foolish; after all, the root of the whole idiotic affair that put us here was my brother's own greed. I made the case for Lawbyle to take up a parliamentary government. I appointed lords who had my trust as members of said parliament and took on the post of chairman.

Future historians would recount that this political upheaval was the result of the king and a powerful noble family trying to lay a hand on the Witch of Creation, an elusive entity that appeared in most history books.

"The Witch of Creation," the history books said, "was the mirror in which society saw itself: she repaid kindness with kindness, and malice with malice."

CHAPTER 30

THE FLOATING ISLAND'S INHABITANTS

After landing on the floating island, I stood up and took in a long, deep breath.

"We finally made it!" I said, feeling a bit drained. I had ended up having to use quite a lot of mana to get the four of us here.

If I had used my flying staff, I wouldn't have had to use as much mana, as the cavorite it used as a catalyst could amplify flying magic tenfold. However, my flying carpet didn't have anything of the sort, and I had needed to power it all by myself, which had ended up costing me a whopping 100,000 MP.

"So this is Kuro's home, huh? It's pretty!" Teto said.

"Meow!"

As we were looking around the floating island, Kuro jumped out of Yuicia's robe and started walking. After a few meters, it turned around and waved at us with its tail, letting out another meow.

"It wants us to follow," Yuicia noted.

"Let's go, then. Teto, stay on your guard. Just in case."

Teto nodded enthusiastically. "Roger!"

We followed the little cat-sith. In no time, we found ourselves surrounded by dozens of mythical creatures.

"Wings on a horse, huh?" I said, looking at one of them. "That's a pegasus."

"Lady Witch, look! Kuro's family's here!" Teto told me, pointing at a group of cat-siths.

"Miss Chise, there are even horned squirrels and dogs with fairy wings!" Yuicia said.

The “horned squirrels” were ratatoskrs, a type of mythical beast who lived in World Trees, and the “dogs with fairy wings” were cu-siths.

And that wasn’t everything. There were also a few wolf-looking creatures called fenrirs; aquilas, which were large eagles; almirajs, or horned bunnies; aspidochelones, which were giant turtles; griffons, a mix between eagles and lions; as well as a few carbuncles—mice with gemstones embedded in their foreheads. For whatever reason, all of these creatures had started crowding around me.

“Uh, there’s too many of you... Can’t breathe...” I panted.

“Lady Witch is so popular!” Teto piped up.

“I wonder why,” Yuicia mused.

They probably could feel that I had been using magic mere minutes ago and were trying to absorb my mana. I didn’t hate being surrounded by a bunch of fluffy animals, but I was starting to suffocate.

“I can’t move! Let me go!” I snapped, letting out some mana in a hopeful and blessedly effective bid to calm the creatures down. Their appetite momentarily sated, they gave me some space—albeit not much. Instead of going back to the forest, they stayed near us, probably hoping I’d give them another little mana treat.

“They got to eat some of Lady Witch’s mana!” Teto pouted. “Teto’s jealous!”

“I’ll charge you later, Teto, don’t worry,” I said.

“Charge?” Yuicia repeated, her head tilted to the side.

Ah, right. I still hadn’t told her Teto was an earthnoid. I made a mental note to do that later.

“I wonder where they’re taking us, though,” I said as we followed Kuro and the other mythical beasts. They were leading us towards a spot where it seemed a mountain had once stood back when the floating island had been part of the continent.

More mythical creatures joined us on the way, walking near me in the hopes I’d give them some mana. But each time a new creature approached, the others intimidated it into standing farther away, which resulted in a line of creatures forming behind me. I

gently patted each of the creatures on the head and gave them a *Charge*. Once they had their fill of mana, they'd leave, making way for the next creature.

"Lady Wiiitch, pat my head too!" Teto demanded.

"Fine, fine. Here you go, Teto. Good girl, good girl," I said, half-heartedly patting her head. She didn't seem to mind though, a satisfied smile spreading across her lips.



"I'm glad the mythical beasts like me, but it's hard to walk like this," I muttered.

As it turned out, it was much harder to make progress when surrounded by benign mythical creatures than by monsters that wanted you dead.

"I'm definitely flagging," said Yuicia. "Between the brawl at the Sutherlands', spending the whole night packing, and the trip up here, I'm pooped."

"I got to catch a few winks, but you didn't manage to fall asleep at all, huh?" I said.
"Let's rest for a bit."

The three of us made our way to a fallen tree and sat down. I took out some fruit from my magic bag; the mythical beasts looked as if they wanted some, so we ended up sharing our snack with them. But as we were munching on our fruit, I suddenly felt strong mana coming from above. Looking up, I noticed several humanoid silhouettes approaching us. They hung between us and the sun, so I couldn't make out their appearance very well, but I noticed that they had wings.

"Birdfolk?" I asked, readying my staff. But then I heard a noise coming from behind us, and more humanoid silhouettes emerged from the bushes. They'd somehow managed to completely evade my Mana Perception.

"Miss Chise, they look like some sort of lizardfolk subspecies," Yuicia told me.

The creatures' bodies were covered in green and blue scales, and they had reptilian-looking heads with horns. They didn't quite look like lizardfolk; they were more akin to Dragonchanged dragonmen. I thought only mythical beasts lived on the island. What were these guys doing here? I readjusted my grip on my staff, ready to fight in case they were hostile, but then felt Teto grip the back of my robe and pull on it.

"Lady Witch, these people... They're like Teto," she told me.

"Like you? Demons, you mean?" I asked.

"Huh?! Miss Teto, you're a *demon*!?" Yuicia asked, her jaw on the floor.

I thought she'd have a more dramatic reaction than that.

The flying demons landed in front of us, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“You’d better apologize, human!” a girl with white wings and a sparkling halo told me with a scowl. “You deserve to die a thousand deaths for comparing our noble selves to mere *birdfolk*!”

“Angels?” I heard Yuicia whisper beside me.

“Indeed! We are the goddesses’ servants—godkin! You may call me Shael,” the girl said, puffing out her chest self-importantly.

So they weren’t demons. I couldn’t say I had the slightest clue what “godkin” were, though. I knew about angels; they were mana life-forms—much like devils—that obeyed the goddesses. While some of them *could* occasionally take on a physical appearance, it was clear to me that Shael and her friends were a completely different sort of angel.

“If Shael has introduced herself, I shall do the same. I am Yahad, a dragonkin warrior and faithful servant of the Ancient Dragon,” said one of the not-lizardfolk. He made a grand display of swinging his spear, shaking the ground under his feet. The remaining angels and dragonkin warriors came to stand behind Shael and Yahad, respectively, and we found ourselves completely surrounded. But then, the mythical beasts growled and gathered in front of us, forming a barrier between us and the newcomers.

“Mythical beasts! Why are you protecting these intruders?” Shael asked.

It was almost as if they didn’t want us to start fighting. I decided to respect their wishes and lowered my staff.

“I’m Chise the witch,” I said. “We only came here to bring a cat-sith who fell from the island back to its family; we bear no hostile intent. And I’m sorry for calling you ‘birdfolk.’ I didn’t mean to offend.” I lowered my head in front of them; Teto did the same.

“We’re really sorry!”

Falling a bit behind, Yuicia bowed too, apologizing for calling the dragonkin warriors “lizardfolk.”

Kuro came to stand in front of Shael and Yahad, and their eyes widened in surprise.

“You’re alive?! We thought you had died during that storm!”

"I can hardly believe it! It's a miracle! Our friend who we thought was lost has come back to us! Quick, come let everyone at the village know!"

They had immediately recognized Kuro. Shael extended a hand to the cat-sith, who simply turned its little head in disinterest before going to nuzzle against Yuicia's legs. A displeased expression appeared on Shael's face, and she threw Yuicia a murderous glare. Yahad's lips curled into a small smile, and he sent one of his men to inform their comrades of Kuro's return.

"We understand the reason for your visit. I just sent someone to inform the Great Elder of your arrival; he will decide what to do with you. In the twelve hundred years since the creation of the island, we have never heard of any human coming up here," Yahad informed us.

Shael and he didn't budge, eyeing us with caution while they waited for the messenger to come back. Thankfully, things didn't escalate into a fight, mostly due to the mythical beasts' protection. It didn't take long for Yahad's companion to return and inform us that the "Great Elder" had summoned us.

We followed Shael and Yahad, surrounded on all sides by angels and dragonkin warriors. But just like earlier, more and more mythical beasts kept approaching me to ask for some mana, which seemed to surprise our hosts.

"What *are* you? I can't believe how welcoming the mythical beasts are to you."

"Lady Witch is Lady Witch!" Teto chirped.

"They're just interested in my mana," I said.

It seemed that all types of creatures that fed on mana had their own preferences, and Teto had claimed many times in the past that mine was "delicious." The taste of my mana must have been a compelling bit of novelty for the local fauna.

After a few minutes of walking, we arrived at a settlement at the foot of where the mountain had once stood, where we encountered even more angels and dragonkin warriors. They seemed to live rather simple lives, although I was impressed to see the sheer volume of goods and trinkets that had been crafted out of dead mythical beasts' body parts and fur. If one tried to sell these anywhere outside the floating island, they would with no doubt earn the kind of fortune you could use to build a palace.

We walked through the village and arrived at a corner of the former mountain's foothill.

"The Great Elder is coming. Don't be rude to him!" Shael warned us.

As soon as the words left her mouth, the ground started shaking. It seemed that a giant creature was coming towards us. I could tell its mana pool dwarfed even mine. Yuicia instantly stiffened beside me, but judging by Kuro's meows of joy, I understood that whatever was coming wasn't an enemy.

A moment later, the Great Elder appeared before us.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, kind soul. Thank you for bringing this little one back to us," it told us through telepathic communication.

The kind and gentle, almost grandfatherly voice belonged to a massive dragon.

"A d-d-d... A dragon..." Yuicia said under her breath before losing consciousness, a few mythical beasts hurriedly moving to catch her before she could hit the ground.

"Oh, it appears that this young lady got a little too overwhelmed by my appearance," the Great Elder said. "The goddess Luriel informed me of your visit in a dream oracle. Welcome to the floating island, Lady Luriel's prophet... and company."

So Luriel had already told the Great Elder about us, huh? When he uttered the words "Lady Luriel's prophet," Shael and the other angels cast me a look of utter bewilderment.

Meanwhile, Kuro had jumped in front of the Great Elder, letting out a series of happy meows. The dragon gave it a fond gaze.

"I am glad you are unharmed, little troublemaker. Not only that, but you have also brought with you the floating island's last hope." The dragon chuckled warmly.

I tilted my head in confusion, and the Great Elder bowed its head to me.

"Lady Luriel's prophet, could you please save my children?" he asked me, but all that did was confuse me even more. Still, I lent an ear to what he was about to say.

CHAPTER 31

THE HISTORY OF THE FLOATING ISLAND AND THE ANCIENT DRAGON'S WISH

"Please wait a minute, Great Elder! We can take care of it ourselves! Why are you asking an outsider for help?" Shael asked.

"Shael's right. Should you really entrust such an important matter to these outsiders? We don't even know if they'd be up to the task," Yahad added.

"What I am about to tell you is of the utmost importance," the dragon told me before turning towards Shael and Yahad. "Shael, Yahad, leave us."

"Understood," the two said reluctantly before heading back to the village, their comrades in tow.

"Please make yourselves comfortable, dear guests," the Great Elder told us.

"Thanks."

"Teto's gonna sit on the ground!"

I did the same thing, the mythical beasts lying down behind us so we could lean on them. Some of them even nuzzled against us, which elicited a warm smile from the dragon.

"Mythical beasts rely more on their instinct than humans do. It seems that they like you. All the better that I entrust this gravest of matters to you," he said. "Ah, but I haven't introduced myself yet, have I? I'm the Ancient Verdigris Dragon. Well, I'm only a senile old fool of ten thousand summers, really. Everyone calls me 'the Great Elder.'"

"Nice to meet you. I'm Chise the witch, prophet of the goddess Liriel."

"And Teto is Teto! Teto is the, um... swordswoman? Who protects Lady Witch!"

The dragon nodded.

"Then I shall call you Lady Witch and Lady Guardian. Before I tell you about my request, I must ask: what do you know of our history?"

"Not much," I replied. "I've heard a legend that said that a thousand years and change ago, this place became a floating island to protect the mythical beasts that had taken refuge here."

This earned me another nod from the Great Elder.

"Just so. Let's see... It all started two thousand years ago, when almost all of the world's mana disappeared at once."

I had actually heard that story many, *many* times thanks to Liriel and the other goddesses, but I was interested to hear it from the Great Elder's point of view.

"Many creatures that relied on magic to survive lost their lives. We ancient dragons were born with the forging of the world. Our bodies bear the old strength; we have no need for the mana of others. We cast our lot with the goddesses, dwelling in the mountains, the valleys, and the forests, reserving our strength, dreaming our dreams, letting the vast reserves of our mana bleed back into the world, that it might live a while longer and a little brighter."

So not only had the goddesses put a barrier around the areas that were suffering from extremely low mana density to isolate them from the rest of the world, but they had also asked the ancient dragons for help.

"For the first five hundred years, everything went well. The effort drained us, but at least the world was regenerating. But as some faint luster returned to human civilization, they cast *their* lot against us."

"That's..." I trailed off, speechless.

"Some of us died; others left, and the work of healing the world runs much, much slower."

Teto and I stayed silent as we listened to the Great Elder's story.

"Many mythical beasts and people lived in hiding near my brethren. But when

humanity's bloodthirst turned upon them, much of the remainder came to me for protection."

"I've heard of stories about dragon hunts, but I never knew that's how it happened," I muttered, feeling full of sympathy for the poor dragon.

"You did your best, but the humans killed you and chased you from your homes! That's really sad," Teto added.

A self-deprecating smile appeared on the Great Elder's face.

"We cannot resent humanity. A very long time ago, we were much the same—callous in our vastness and self-interest. The wheel of fortune turns, steady and true. Besides, the dragons who left found a home elsewhere; as for the ones who fell... We ancient dragons are immortal; even if the current body should fail, the soul and all its memories shall find purchase in an egg somewhere—when the time comes for that egg to hatch, at a suitable concentration of mana."

I had accidentally acquired the Unaging skill myself, but I had no idea there were such things as immortal dragons; fantasy worlds sure were full of surprises.

"Let us return to the topic at hand. Naturally, humanity's greed pushed them to attack my home as well. If I died, all who had taken refuge in my territory would die, either killed by the humans or because of lack of mana."

"So you turned your territory into a floating island," I said.

"Precisely. You see, some of the refugees in my territory were the goddess Luriel's prophets. The goddess made cavorite crystals appear all over the peninsula, and I used my mana to make the island float, taking refuge in the sky."

"So Shael, Yahad, and the others are those 'people' who came to hide in your territory?" I asked.

"Yes. Shael and the others call themselves 'angels' and 'godkin,' but, in reality, they are not that different from what you call 'demons.'"

The Great Elder broke down the true nature of the godkin and dragonkin warriors for us.

It seemed that the local “angels”—to take a page from some old Earth apocrypha, it might be better to call them *nephilim*—came about when someone in a state of Celestial Descent (that is to say, inhabited by the sort of angel that’s made from pure mana and embodies the goddesses’ will) gave birth. Just like demonic possession, Celestial Descent allowed the practitioner to let an angel merge with their body, adding its mana to their own. While demonic possession had been classified as a forbidden technique, as it often led to the contamination of the host’s soul and, in some cases, the demon overpowering the host and taking over their body, an angel simply acted as their host’s subordinate during Celestial Descent, and the practitioner could choose to end it whenever they wished—or so I had read in some of the church’s holy texts.

It figured, then, that a child conceived or delivered as the parent was in a state of Celestial Descent would inherit some of the angel’s characteristics—such as their white wings and glimmering halos.

“So they call themselves ‘angels’ because they descend from them,” I said. “But why did that happen in the first place?”

“In the world as we knew it two thousand years ago, such a phenomenon would have been impossible. However, the introduction of Status into the world led to the creation of new races: the godkin are among them,” the dragon explained. “Well, I’m oversimplifying; there are other conditions that must be met for someone to give birth to a godkin—even with their body in a state of Celestial Descent—but you get the main idea.”

Once again, this was quite similar to demons; if all of the conditions were met and one had a child while in a state of demonic possession—or if they had a child with a demon who had taken on a material form—the child could be born with certain characteristics of the demon, creating a new race.

“Lady Luriel’s apostles—the sires of the godkin—were concerned that the church might wish to seize their children as unauthorized icons of the goddesses, so, under Lady Luriel’s guidance, they sought me out.”

“What about Yahad and the other dragonkin?” I asked. “Are they just demons?”

The Great Elder seemed somewhat uncomfortable at my question, averting his gaze.

"They... They were originally just humans. However, there was a period where men were scarce on the floating island, so, in order to prevent too much inbreeding, I gave my seed to willing individuals. In the primordial times, it was the copulation of a dragon and a human that gave birth to the dragonman race, so I thought a similar phenomenon would happen. However, they ended up taking more after me than I anticipated, creating a new race: the dragonkin," he said, looking embarrassed.

That explained a few things.

"So are the only humanoids on the floating island the angels and the dragonkin?" I asked.

"Yes. I do not know whether it was caused by the island's unique environment or by some sort of mysterious self-regulation system among the population so that those new races wouldn't go extinct after just one generation, but gradually, the humans stopped giving birth to human children."

According to the dragon, there were about three hundred and fifty people living on the floating island.

"Meow, meow!" I heard Teto say beside me.

Looking at her, I realized that she had completely lost interest in the conversation and was playing with Kuro and the other mythical beasts.

"Now that that is out of the way, let us move on to my point," the dragon said.

It had been such a fascinating story, I had completely forgotten that the dragon wanted to ask something of us.

"When you said you want us to save your 'children,' you meant the mythical beasts, the godkin and the dragonkin, right? What exactly should we save them from?" I asked.

"It has been twelve hundred years since the creation of the floating island. But the island erodes with every passing day. It has become difficult for all of the inhabitants to thrive and develop in such a cramped space. That's where you come in: I would like you to take my children back to the mainland."

I understood his request. Still, it would mean I'd be opening a massive can of worms; mythical beast, godkin, and dragonkin alike would all find the same threats on the

surface that had driven their ancestors skyward to begin with. The Great Elder probably wanted us to find a place for them to live in that would protect them from all of these dangers.

I immediately thought of the wasteland. Not only was it spacious enough for all of the islanders to live in peace, but it'd also come with its fair share of perks. While mythical beasts had to feed on mana when they were young, by the time they became adults, they'd be able to produce their own mana, which would help to regenerate the wasteland faster.

“Sure. I’m going to install a transfer gate here, and the inhabitants of the island can gradually move into the Wasteland of Nothingness,” I said.

“Lady Witch, does that mean that Kuro’s going to come back? And its friends too?”

“I suppose, yes,” I said.

The Great Elder bowed his head to me.

“You have my thanks. You’re just like Lady Luriel said you were,” he said, seeming relieved. “My children will finally get to leave this ark and resume a normal life.”

And so our first conversation with the Great Elder closed amicably.

CHAPTER 32

INVITATION TO THE WASTELAND OF NOTHINGNESS

Bringing all the inhabitants of the floating island back to the mainland wasn't the kind of thing that could be done in a day or two. I needed to come up with a plan. For now, we waved goodbye to the Great Elder, who went back to his cavern, before waking up Yuicia.

"A giant dragon!" she yelled when she woke up. "Huh? Miss Chise, you're alive?!"

I nodded. "I am. He was a very intelligent dragon; we had a nice discussion."

"Yup! Mister Great Elder is a nice grandpa dragon!" Teto added.

On hearing these words, Yuicia threw herself into my arms, tears of relief brimming in her eyes.

"I'm so glaad! I thought we were all going to die!" she sobbed.

I felt a bit bad. After all, I was the one who had brought her here, even though she was only seventeen years old.

When she had calmed down slightly, the three of us made our way back to the village.

"Is your discussion with the Great Elder over?" Shael asked me, a displeased expression on her face.

"Yes. He told us a nice little story, and we decided to help him with his request. It was quite long though, so if you want details, you should probably ask him directly."

"Fine! I'm going right now!" Shael said, turning on her heels.

"Hold on, Shael!" Yahad tried to stop her, but she had already flown off. "Good grief. Not exactly the most *hospitable* reaction," he said with a sigh. "I'll go ask the Great

Elder about what you three talked about tomorrow. That reminds me, where do you plan on sleeping tonight?"

There were no inns or anything of the sort on the floating island, after all. We had planned on spending the night in the wasteland, so all we needed was a little bit of space somewhere to set up our transfer gate.

"Could you lend us a bit of space? We're going to make a little hut for the night with magic."

"Sure. We have an empty plot of land right outside the village."

We followed him to said empty plot, and I had Teto build us a little house with her Earth Magic.

"Um, Miss Chise? This seems... very small. Are we really going to spend the night here?" Yuicia asked me, eyeing the little hut Teto had built warily.

"Don't worry. We're going somewhere else. Teto, I'm taking it out, okay?"

"Roger!"

I produced a transfer gate out of our magic bag.

"Um, Miss Chise? Miss Teto? What's... that?" Yuicia asked, looking up at the transfer gate I had set up. "If I remember correctly, there was one in the house as well, right? You said it was very important."

"It's a transfer gate, a magic tool that allows you to teleport to any other transfer gate it's connected to."

"When you walk through the portal the scenery changes super fast! It's really cool!" Teto chirped.

"Huh? Isn't Teleportation Magic really advanced?!" Yuicia asked, gawking at us. "They say that there's only one or two people per country who can do it..."

"Meow!"

"Ah! Wait, Kuro!"

The little cat-sith had jumped through the transfer gate.

"Kuro disappeared!" Yuicia exclaimed as she dashed behind the transfer gate, looking for Kuro.

"Let's register your mana signature and go, Yuicia," I said.

"Teto wants to go home quick and eat dinner!"

The two of us gently grabbed Yuicia's hands and made her touch the transfer gate, registering her mana signature. Now she could use the transfer gate whenever she wanted.

"Let's go."

Yuicia took a few deep breaths before nodding determinedly. "Yes!"

And so, we led her through the transfer gate, the three of us arriving in our mansion in the wasteland.

"Master, Lady Teto, welcome home. And welcome, Master's esteemed guests," the attendant dolls greeted us as soon as we arrived.

"We're back, Beretta, everyone."

"We're home!"

Yuicia opened her eyes—she had closed them when we walked through the gate—and her eyes shot wide open when she saw the two rows of attendant dolls bowing in front of us.

"This right here is my disciple, Yuicia," I introduced her to the attendant dolls.

"A-Ah! Yes! N-Nice to meet you!" Yuicia hurriedly said, bowing deeply.

Beretta greeted her with an equally deep, albeit much more graceful bow. "Lady Yuicia, I see. I am the head maid of this mansion; my name is Beretta. It is an honor to make your acquaintance."

Yuicia's eyes grew even wider when she heard the words "head maid" and "mansion,"

and she quickly started looking around the room. Noticing that we weren't on the floating island anymore and that the scenery we could see out of the window was completely different, she finally understood that we had teleported somewhere else.

"Miss Chise! We teleported here! It's amazing! The clouds are *above* our heads!" she exclaimed excitedly.

This must've been the biggest telltale sign to her, as the clouds had been below us before.

"I like your reaction. It's very fresh," I commented.

Yuicia's naive response to my magical abilities and my magic tools was always very endearing. Selene had never been taken so off guard, as she had grown up seeing me use magic on the regular. I was looking forward to seeing how Yuicia handled the site of our migration project.

"Miss Chise," Yuicia said to catch my attention, a puzzled look on her face. "Miss Beretta called you 'Master.' Does that mean you're a noble? Were you hiding your status and pretending to be a normal adventurer this entire time?!"

"Of course not. I'm a commoner, just like you," I said, but Yuicia didn't look convinced.

Beretta then ushered the three of us to the dining room.

"Beretta, what's on the menu tonight?" Teto asked.

"The main dish consists of a hamburger steak made with fresh tomatoes from the fields and ground orc meat."

"It sounds delicious," I said. "Did anything happen since last time?"

"I just made you my report a few days ago; nothing has changed since," Beretta replied.

We had just swung by the wasteland a couple of days ago—when Yuicia got abducted by Olvert Sutherland—to prepare for our upcoming trip to the floating island, and I had given Beretta instructions about what to do in case we didn't come home for a while. I'd had no idea we'd be back so soon.

"You came home rather early this time, Master. Have you reached the floating island?"

"We did!" Teto chirped. "We met all of Kuro's friends!"

"We ended the lease on our house in Lawbyle, so we plan on staying here for a little while with Yuicia. I'll explain everything in detail later."

"Understood. I get to pamper you, then," Beretta said with a smile as we reached the dining room.

We each took a seat at the table, and some of the other attendant dolls and newly evolved mechanoids came to join us. The others were still working; they'd take their dinner later.

"Let's eat, everyone," I announced.

"Let's dig in!" Teto said.

We started eating our meal. The attendant dolls were chatting among themselves, although their conversations felt quite stiff, as always. Still, they each had their own slight quirks whenever they talked, which I had gotten used to after so many years together. Meanwhile, Teto was happily shoveling food into her mouth. Yuicia, on the other hand, was looking a little awkward, and I smiled bitterly seeing her like that.

When we were done with our meal, Beretta served us some tea, and I started telling her about the floating island.

"So many things happened there," I said before recounting our experience. It was also Yuicia's first time hearing the tail end with the Great Elder, given that she'd spent the whole time insensate, and her face was looking more and more shocked as I spoke. It was a rather comical sight.

"I see. So you have accepted the Great Elder's request," Beretta said.

"We did. Fortunately, there is more than enough space in the wasteland for us to house all of the mythical beasts, the godkin, and the dragonkin."

The wasteland was the size of a small country, but its only inhabitants for the time being were Teto and me, as well as Beretta and the other twenty attendant dolls. Oh, and the golems we used for farmwork. Still, we could easily fit a few hundred mythical beasts and three hundred-odd demons here.

"I see," Beretta repeated. "However, if I may, there is a slight issue with your plan, Master."

"What is it?" I asked.

"If we use barrier devices to divide the wasteland into smaller sections, we can create areas with a high enough mana concentration for the mythical beasts to live in. However, I am afraid the environment itself might be a problem," she explained.

She was right; while we had made some progress reforesting the wasteland and trying to build an ecosystem, it was still quite bare-bones.

"Besides, each type of mythical beast has a preferred environment, and not all of them like the same plants or locations," Beretta continued. "We would need to analyze each creature's living habits before they move in."

"I understand your concerns," I said. "But I don't plan on having them all move in in the next couple of days; if we spend ten or so years working on it and introduce the creatures to the wasteland one by one, I'm sure we can manage."

Since Luriel had told the Great Elder about us, she had most definitely informed him that we were immortal too. Since I couldn't die of old age, there was no reason my plan should fail.

"I see. I apologize for my impertinence, Master," Beretta said.

"Don't be sorry; you're right. We've got a lot of research to do if we want to engineer a smooth transition for the islanders. Next time, you should come with us so we can start working on that together. You ought to meet the Great Elder too," I said.

"Understood."

After that, Beretta and I talked some more about the state of the wasteland.

Meanwhile...

"M-Miss Chise and Miss Beretta are talking about such difficult things... Miss Teto, do you understand what they're saying?" Yuicia asked Teto in a hushed voice.

"Nope! Teto doesn't understand complicated things! But Teto knows that if you leave

everything to Lady Witch, then it'll all be fine in the end!"

"I-I see," Yuicia said, chuckling awkwardly as she petted Kuro, who was sitting in her lap. "I wonder why you brought me here, though. If we do as you say and work on bringing these creatures here for *ten years*, I'm going to be really old by the time we're done!"

"You have the Slowed Aging skill, remember? If you keep growing your mana pool, by the time we're done introducing the mythical beasts to the wasteland, you probably won't look a day over twenty."

So many things had happened today that Yuicia seemed to have completely forgotten about her newly acquired skill. This was probably a good time to tell her about the other thing I'd been hiding from her...

"Yuicia, there's something I haven't told you yet," I said. "Do you know why I asked you to live with us on the day we found you in the streets?"

"Why you asked me to live with you? Wasn't it because you wanted someone to look after the house when you were away?" she asked.

I shook my head and told her the whole gory truth.

CHAPTER 33

THE IMMORTALITY FACTOR

"When I touched you that day, I felt a connection to you," I explained to Yuicia.

"A... connection?"

"Yes. And I felt that connection because, just like me, you possess the immortality factor. You can develop the Unaging skill."

Yuicia's jaw hit the ground. She looked even more shocked than when she had arrived in the wasteland.

"You're kidding, right?" she asked. "There's no way a good-for-nothing, commoner girl like me could do that."

"The immortality factor has nothing to do with your social class or your magical abilities," I explained.

The original humans had all been created with the immortality factor, which then transferred to a few of their descendants. If someone possessed the factor and developed a mana pool large enough, they would gain the Unaging skill, just like the sages and witches of legend.

However, if one's mana pool was too small, they wouldn't gain the skill, even if they possessed the factor, and the opposite was true as well: no matter how much mana one had, if they hadn't been born with the factor, they would never become immortal.

"Did you save me so you could have another immortal friend?" Yuicia asked next. "But you already have Miss Teto. She also has the Unaging skill, doesn't she?"

"Teto's case is... different. She's not a regular human but a Clay Golem I made who then turned into a demon."

"Yep, that's right!" Teto chirped, turning part of her body into mud to give Yuicia a little demonstration.

"I see," Yuicia said. "You really can do anything, can't you, Miss Chise?"

She didn't even seem that shocked upon learning Teto's true nature. Well, I supposed that after everything she had gone through today, it must've seemed quite trivial.

"Anyway, I didn't save you so I'd have a new immortal friend. As I told you before, I wanted to help you learn how to stand on your own feet," I said.

I had even planned on buying the house we'd been staying in and giving it to her as a gift, but with everything that had happened in the past few days, that was out of the window.

"Lady Witch even said that you might not be happy if you were immortal!" Teto added of her own accord.

Yuicia's brow furrowed. "Living forever without aging sounds amazing, though."

My lips curled up into a bitter smile. "I've only been immortal for thirty years; I only live such a carefree life because I'm powerful," I said.

"Oh..." she muttered, immediately understanding what I meant.

If I weren't strong, Olvart would have managed to capture me, and I'd have had to spend the rest of my life as his guinea pig. Or perhaps Yuicia had finally understood why I always looked so sad whenever I talked about Selene: it was incredibly painful to watch your own child age while you stayed young forever.

"I'm not going to force you to unlock the Unaging skill if you don't want to, even if you're my apprentice," I said. "Slowed Aging will already extend your life well beyond the norm."

She had already become able to earn over three silver coins a day all by herself, and since that night at the Sutherland mansion, her mana pool had grown drastically. While she couldn't go back to Lawbyle after everything that had happened, she could easily move to Gald or Ischea and enjoy a long and fulfilling life. I told her as much, but she shook her head forcefully.

"I still want you to teach me more things, Miss Chise! And I don't want to leave until we're sure that all of the mythical creatures and people from the floating island are safe!" she protested.

“Yuicia...”

“So I don’t care about the Unaging skill. All I want is to spend more time with you! Please!” She bowed her head deeply.

My lips curled into a resigned smile.

“And besides, living with you allowed me to see and do so many unusual things: going to a floating island, meeting mythical beasts—even an *ancient dragon*, hearing tales about the goddesses I’d never known... If I go back to my old life, I’ll probably—no, I’ll *definitely* regret leaving your side!” she continued.

I couldn’t help but chuckle. “You have a point.”

“Let’s do our best together from now on too, Yuicia!” Teto said.

And so, I decided to let Yuicia stay with us in the wasteland and teach her more magic while she helped us pave the way for our new migrant population.

Yuicia’s Side

My daily routine hadn’t changed that much since becoming Miss Chise’s disciple and moving into her mansion in the Wasteland of Nothingness.

“Good morning, Kuro, Miss Ai.”

“Meow!”

“Good morning, Lady Yuicia.”

Even though we had gone all the way to the floating island to return Kuro to its home, the little cat-sith still followed me around everywhere. I also had a new companion: Miss Beretta had assigned another maid called Miss Ai to guide me around the mansion until I got used to it. She had claimed that I’d definitely get lost if I were left to my own devices due to the sheer size of the place. I followed Miss Ai to the dining room, where I took my breakfast before moving on to my plans for the day.

“Miss Ai, I’d like to train my magic today,” I said.

"Understood. Please follow me to the transfer gates."

She ushered me to a room full of transfer gates and led me through one of them. The next instant, I emerged into a wide, deserted plain towards the north of the wasteland.

"There's nothing here," I breathed, looking around.

"We are currently in the process of reforesting the Wasteland of Nothingness. However, we have mostly been focusing our efforts on the central and southern parts for the time being, and we haven't started working on this part yet," Ai explained to me.

"I see. So I can train my magic as much as I want to here!"

"Precisely. Master also uses this place to practice new spells, and Lady Teto and Miss Beretta often spar here. We maids occasionally come here to work on our skills too."

Looking around, I noticed that there were small craters here and there—proof that this place saw a lot of fighting.

"Well then, Lady Yuicia, good luck with your training," Ai said, bowing deeply to me before turning around and taking out some cat toys from her apron, which she started swinging in front of Kuro.

I couldn't help but chuckle at the display.

I launched spell after spell until I ran out of mana, meditated to help it replenish faster, and repeated the process several times. There were no monsters to kill for me to level up, so I was mostly focusing on perfecting my spells by casting them over and over again, hoping it'd help me grow my mana pool even slightly.

I want to catch up to Miss Chise...

"Lady Yuicia, may I?" Miss Ai called out to me.

"Wh-What is it?" I asked, panting.

"You possess such a large quantity of mana that it seems that you are having some difficulties using it all simply by casting spells."

“You’re right...”

My MP had shot all the way up to 50,000 right after that night at the Sutherland mansion, so I was having a hard time spending it all. Not only that, but I also made sure to focus on my Mana Control with every single one of my spells, and it was really starting to wear me out.

“If you want to use your MP quicker, you could simply try to release a large quantity of mana at once in the air,” Ai suggested.

“Release my mana in the air?”

“Yes. If you train that skill, you will be able to release more and more mana at once, and it will also allow you to pour more MP into your spells in the future.”

“Really? I didn’t know that,” I said, surprised.

I had been taught to always think about leveling up back at the magic school, so the idea of simply letting out my mana without converting it into magic had never occurred to me.

“Besides, the mana concentration is still rather low here, so by releasing your mana in the air as is, you would be contributing to the regeneration of the wasteland.”

“I see... I’ll try doing that, then!”

I took a deep breath and focused on letting out as much mana as possible at once. However, I quickly realized that this type of training was quite hard on the body and decided to alternate between practical training and improving my knowledge of magic by reading the books Miss Chise stored in her library. On occasion, I would also accompany her to the floating island to get to know the mythical beasts and demons there better. If I didn’t feel like training, I walked around the forest, looking for medicinal herbs. The earth golems—who, for some reason, all had lumps of dirt on either side of their heads—always helped me pick them. I would then use the herbs I had collected to make potions, and with the help of Miss Chise’s Teleportation Magic, I’d go sell them in the neighboring villages to earn some money. The Lawbylean authorities must’ve informed the other countries about me, Miss Chise, and Miss Teto running away, so I pretended to be a regular commoner girl named Yui so as not to arouse people’s suspicions. Other than those trips, I stayed away from civilization.

The last thing I did every day was check my status to see if my Slowed Aging skill had evolved into the Unaging skill.

CHAPTER 34

YAHAD THE DRAGONKIN WARRIOR

The day after we took Yuicia to the wasteland for the first time, we headed back to the floating island with Beretta. The barrier surrounding it prevented mana from leaking out, which made it the perfect environment for Beretta and the others, as they'd be able to function for long periods of time without needing to recharge.

"It is an honor meeting you, Lord Ancient Verdigris Dragon. My name is Beretta."

"Oh, you're a doll from the previous civilization, are you not? But it seems you have gained a soul and become a demon. How peculiar," the Great Elder said.

"I am. Master found me in the ruins and gave me a new life."

"It was all Lady Witch's doing, I see. The world is still full of mysteries, even to an old dragon like me."

When the two of them were done chatting, we started surveying the floating island to learn about the different creatures' living habits, Shael and Yahad accompanying us as we did so.

"The Great Elder told me about your conversation. He said he wants us to help you as much as possible," Shael grumbled, dragging her feet.

"A lot of us have been feeling a little claustrophobic after staying on the island for so long and would love to move back to the mainland," Yahad said with a smile, his attitude contrasting drastically with Shael's. "Will we move to your land right away?" he asked.

"Not yet. We need to get everything ready first. For now, if you could tell us about the mythical creatures' living habits and diets, that'd already be a huge help," I replied.

"Of course. Ask us anything you want."

With Yahad acting as our guide, the four of us learned all the ins and outs of the floating

island. We'd come up there twice a week and listen to his lectures about the local biosphere while Shael glared at us from the sidelines. He even gave us seeds and saplings, which I made copies of and tasked the maids with planting all around the wasteland.

We also learned a lot about the godkin and dragonkin's culture and lifeways. Most of their buildings had been built using Earth Magic, and they practiced agriculture. They even used a crop rotation system, as suggested by the Great Elder.

"What is your main source of food?" I asked.

"Wheat and beans, as well as the tubers and fruits we harvest from the forest. Shael and the others also fish on the regular, using large nets they throw in the ocean," Yahad explained.

"That's impressive," I said.

The floating island was quite high in the sky, so I was amazed that the godkin could fly that far on a regular basis.

Shael let out a haughty harrumph. "We ran out of livestock several hundred years ago, so we had to switch to fishing," she said.

"Still, it must be quite difficult for you."

"Duh! Have you seen how high up the island is? Making the round trip is exhausting! It's the most dangerous job on the entire island."

Maybe this was why Shael and the others were so haughty—they were the only ones who could carry out such an important duty, after all.

"As for us, since we can't fly, we mostly take care of the agricultural side of things," Yahad explained. "We also craft tools with the things the mythical beasts offer us."

For instance, they used shed fangs and horns to craft knives, and their claws for farming tools. The island didn't have any mineral resources to speak of, so they had no choice but to rely on pure biopower. All of the inhabitants of the island could use magic, but they had to put up with a pretty firm cap on industrial development. Yahad also told us that they used the sturdiest mythical beasts' hair to craft ropes to help Shael and the other godkin climb back onto the floating island when they were done

fishing.

The female dragonkin—who had hid from us at first—finally trusted us enough to walk around the island even when we were around. Unlike the male dragonkin, they didn’t have dragon heads and overall looked almost exactly like dragonwomen, just with a few more scales on their bodies and, well, more magic stones inside.

“This reminds me...” I muttered to myself.

“What is it, Lady Witch?” Yahad asked, turning around to face me. He had been in the middle of introducing us to the female dragonkin.

“I just remembered a story I read once. It was about a dragonwoman who came down from the sky and married a dragonman. Then, the two of them had a son, who later went on to become a hero. If I remember correctly, I think it was called ‘The Hero Dogreen.’”

“Oh? Well, that sounds like an interesting tale. Could you please tell it to us?”

“Sure.”

I took my copy of *Tales of the Kingdom of Lawbyle* out of my backpack and started reading the story. Intrigued by what was going on, several other villagers came to join us.

“That’s it,” I said when I was done. “I’ve actually met someone who claimed to be a descendant of Dogreen—though I’m not sure if he was telling the truth or not. He said that Dogreen’s mother owned a pendant of a dragon scale.”

I was talking about Dogle, the guildmaster of the port city we had spent a few months in.

To my surprise, the dragonkin started crying. When I asked what was going on, Yahad was the one who answered, “We’ve actually been making charms out of the Great Elder’s scales for many generations.”

He marked a pause, placed the pendant he was wearing in his hand, and continued.

“In the past, there have been a few accidents where people or mythical beasts fell from the floating island. We’re pretty sturdy and we can use magic, so we can technically all

survive the drop. But if somebody falls and doesn't come back, we consider them dead. To think that one of us not only survived but built a family down there, it's..." He trailed off, choking up.

I nodded. "I understand."

"I really hope I'll get to meet her descendants one day," Yahad said.

"I think it's a good idea; he might be interested in learning about his heritage too."

The world sure was a small place, huh? Now that they knew they had relatives on the mainland, the dragonkin seemed more motivated by the idea of moving to the wasteland.

After that, I decided to read them a few more stories about the floating island, in the hopes of dispelling the slightly solemn aura that had settled upon us.

CHAPTER 35

THE PROGRESS OF THE RELOCATION PLAN

“Master, I have brought you the latest report on the relocation plan’s progress,” Beretta said, handing me a document.

“Thanks, Beretta. Let’s see...”

I quickly read through the report to see how things were coming along.

“Mana production is going well, and it looks like we’re almost done with some of the habitats for the mythical beasts,” I commented.

“Yes. Our next objective is to expand the river in the southwestern part of the wasteland to turn it into a man-made spring and level the terrain to plant more vegetation and tree saplings,” Beretta explained.

“What about the future village? How is it coming along?”

“Under Lady Teto’s supervision, we have started preparing the soil to plant crops. However, we can also use the soil in Lady Teto’s body itself, so we can proceed with the next phase whenever you wish, Master.”

After we agreed to house the inhabitants of the floating island, we had spent about a year simply trying to get to know the people better and understand their customs, as well as the mythical beasts’ living conditions. We also tried planting saplings and seeds we had received from Yahad and the others to see if they would grow here; by and large, that had proved a success.

For the second year, we were still mostly focused on getting to know the people of the floating island better, when Beretta came up to me with an idea.

“You think we should terraform the wasteland?”

“That sounds really cool!” Teto chirped from her spot next to me on the sofa.

“Currently, the wasteland is exclusively composed of grasslands, the forest we planted, and deserted land we have not worked on as of yet. However, I believe that if we modify the environment, we will be able to create new biomes.”

Beretta wanted us to use the leyline managing devices to cause earthquakes and other natural phenomena to bring some variety to the landscape. For instance, by creating a depression in the ground, it’d eventually fill up with water and become a small lake. Another one of Beretta’s ideas was to vary up the topography to promote the development of rivers and wetlands. I thought this was a great idea, especially since we were already obliged to house a diverse array of creatures.

“But Teto and the bear golems can move the ground too,” Teto argued.

“Indeed.” Beretta nodded. “However, I believe terraforming the land using the leyline managing device would cost less mana.”

“Beretta’s right; we’re going to do a rough first pass, and you and the bear golems can smooth things out and proceed with the afforestation plan later, Teto.”

For one entire year, we induced earthquakes once per month throughout the entire wasteland. The place soon looked completely different. Where there used to only be flat, arid wastelands stood sunny hills, wide lakes, and lush wetlands.

“Let’s make this place look nice, everyone!”

“Goh!”

When we were satisfied with the overall look of the wasteland, Teto and the bear golems used their Earth Magic to give the final touches to the place. While they did that, the rest of us started carefully moving the plants from the floating island that we had studied the previous year to more suitable locations.

At the beginning of the third year, we decided to take Shael, Yahad, and the others to the wasteland so they could take a look at their new home and what we had prepared for the mythical beasts.

“This is where we’ll build your future village,” I said.

“Yep! It’s your new home!” Teto chirped.

A collective “wow” erupted from the demons as they took in the sight of the expansive green landscape, the clear spring, and the meandering river that coursed through the land.

“So this is what it looks like down here! But are we really allowed to use all of this space for ourselves?” Yahad asked me, his eyes sparkling in excitement.

“Of course. Well, as of right now, the mana is mostly concentrated around the center; you probably won’t be able to use the entire area right away,” I said.

“But if you plant lots of trees, the mana concentration will shoot up in no time!” Teto added.

Yahad and the other dragonkin proceeded to ask us tons of questions about the wasteland and how things worked down here.

“Goh!”

“Hm... What a weird lump of mud. So that’s what the wildlife on the mainland looks like.”

Meanwhile, Shael and the other angels were engaged in a staring contest with the bear golems, confused by their odd appearance. The sight was so comical, I couldn’t stop myself from chuckling.

When we deemed things mostly ready, we installed a transfer gate to the area where we planned on building the demons’ village and allowed them to come and go whenever they wanted. Back on the floating island, they had very limited space to plant crops, and, with how strong demons were, they’d be done with farming in no time and would spend the rest of their time singing, crafting tools, and practicing martial arts. However, now, they had all the space in the world to plant crops, so they naturally started spending more time working on their farms. Not only that, but they even helped the attendant dolls transplant plants as a way to repay us for giving them a place to live. They also spent a lot of time in the forest collecting things like fruit, tree nuts, medicinal herbs, and, most importantly, timber, a rare commodity on the floating island.

And then the fourth year rolled around.

“This way, everyone!”

“Meow!”

At last, we could start letting some of the mythical beasts into the wasteland. We decided to start with the cat-siths and the other small creatures. I had put Yuicia and Kuro in charge of that task, and the two of them led hundreds of creatures through the transfer gate and into the wasteland.

At first, the mythical beasts were a little wary of the new environment—especially since most of them had never been anywhere that big before—and they all carefully surveyed the area under our amused gazes. Thankfully, it didn’t take long for the cu-sith to start digging burrows near the fallen trees or for the ratatoskrs to make themselves at home in the World Trees, diligently gathering tree nuts to hide in their dreys. The cat-siths and the carbuncles spent most of their time in the forest hunting mice, insects, and small birds. Back on the floating island, they’d had to suppress their wild instincts and weren’t allowed to hunt, but here, they could satisfy their primal urges without restraint. And, well, let’s say they weren’t the only ones, judging by how many of our new demon neighbors were *expecting* all of a sudden. Soon, most of the people from the floating island had moved to the wasteland, and we had made a lot of progress relocating the mythical beasts to the environments we’d created specifically for them. Some of them, such as the gaurens and aries—mythical beasts that looked respectively like oxen and rams—as well as the griffons, had settled near the demons’ village.

Another year passed.

“Lady Witch, Lady Witch, look at them! They’re so tiny and cute!” Teto chirped.

“They really are.”

The smaller mythical beasts had started multiplying. Teto and I gazed at the newly born creatures from afar, unable to stop ourselves from smiling at their cuteness.

“I see. So the mythical beasts have started bearing young. What great news. We had run out of space on the floating island, so they couldn’t reproduce here. I am glad they finally get to have families of their own,” the Great Elder had said when I told him the news.

There had been a smile on his face, but I had caught the glimmer of sadness in his eyes when he mentioned that the mythical beasts weren’t allowed to reproduce on the

floating island. Mythical beasts fed on mana when they were young, and, unfortunately, godkin and dragonkin required large quantities of mana to survive. This meant that both the demons and the mythical beasts had to self-regulate their populations to ensure there would be enough mana—and room—for everyone. But neither of these things was a concern in the wasteland.

Of course, it wasn't all smooth sailing. Our main concern at the moment was the local mana concentration; with both the mythical beasts and the demons giving birth left and right, it was getting dangerously low.

"We can't have any more people or mythical beasts move in for now," I told Beretta.
"We'll resume the relocation project once things have stabilized."

"Understood, Master. May I remind you that you also need to create a transfer gate wide enough for the larger mythical beasts to make the journey?"

"I know... In the end, I'm going to have to use mana no matter what, huh?"

I let out a sigh and started calculating how much mana I'd need. Transfer gates worked in pairs, so I'd have to make at least two of them. During these five years, I had diligently kept on eating my one strange fruit a day, and my mana pool had grown to about 500,000 MP. Since I needed one million MP to create a pair of regular-sized transfer gates, I was probably looking at around five million for a pair of medium-sized gates and fifteen million for a pair of large gates.

I let out another sigh. "Guess I need to focus on saving up my mana for now. But I need it for so many other things, it's kind of a pain having to store it *just* for transfer gates."

"This project is costing you quite a lot of mana, Master," Beretta commented.

Things were going fine for the most part, but this mana issue was giving me a massive headache.

Thankfully, Yuicia and Teto chose that moment to barge into the room.

"We're back, Lady Witch! We bring lots of yummy fishies and salt!" Teto chirped.

"Welcome back, you two. How was your trip to the floating island?" I asked.

Yuicia was the one who answered this time. "Everyone was very happy with the things

we brought them."

"Goh!"

The transfer gate was still seeing a lot of use, as the remaining inhabitants of the floating island used it to come tend to the crops and work on their future homes, and the maids occasionally traveled to the island to exchange goods with the people there. Today, Teto and Yuicia had volunteered to bring the goods to the island, and they had taken the bear golems along so they could help transport the items. We supplied the people of the floating island with fresh produce the maids had grown in our fields as well as processed foods, metals I made using my Creation Magic, et cetera. The demons were particularly fond of sugar and jam, as they very rarely got to enjoy sweet treats on the island. They also kept the jars and used them as tableware and flower vases.

We weren't bartering with them to get anything major out of it—it was more to give them a taste of what they'd be able to make in the wasteland. At first, Yahad had offered to pay us back with shed mythical creature fangs and nails, but I couldn't accept such rare and precious items in exchange for *jam*. This also made me realize something very important: demons had no idea of the value of mainland goods. They wouldn't last a single day in a regular city. As such, our bartering with them was also an opportunity to warm them up to the outside world's mercantile ways.

Slowly but steadily, more and more demons started moving into the wasteland. I didn't want to *force* anyone to come, so I simply kept on sending them food and materials until they made the first move. I was afraid that, if I pushed them too much, some of them would hold grudges against us, which would definitely become a problem in the future. Therefore, I tried to slowly and carefully merge our cultures together in the hopes of making them feel at home in the wasteland. But even then, some inhabitants of the island were still very, *very* reluctant to leave.

CHAPTER 36

THE IMMIGRATION FACTION AND THE CONSERVATIVE FACTION

We had no particular issue convincing most of the mythical beasts to move into the wasteland... but some of the older ones categorically refused the idea. From the looks of it, it seemed that they didn't want to leave the Great Elder's side.

"I suppose I do not have a choice; if these creatures want to spend the rest of their lives with me, then we shall embrace a gentle passing together," the dragon muttered with a smile on his face. But there was no hiding the melancholy in his voice.

The island was only able to float thanks to the ancient dragon's mana that was powering the cavorite at its center. But after twelve hundred years, the Great Elder's soul had become bound to the cavorite, meaning he couldn't leave the island even if he wanted to. And so, if all the inhabitants of the floating island moved back to the mainland, the Great Elder would be left all alone.

This concern was shared by both mythical beasts and demons alike.

"Don't you have any respect?! Did you forget everything the Great Elder did for us? You traitor!" Shael accused Yahad.

"We didn't betray anyone! We're merely respecting the Great Elder's wishes. He *wants* us to move back to the mainland. He *wants* us to reproduce and for our children to have fulfilling lives!"

"Oh, so what? Are you too good for the life on the island now?" Shael retorted.

"I didn't say that! But after learning about all the things on the mainland that don't exist here, about everything we could be making to make our lives easier... I can't just ignore them."

"These are all poisonous lies that wretched witch fed you! She means to corrupt us! You have to fight back!"

Most of the young people of the island—Yahad included—were in favor of relocating to the wasteland. Through open-air lessons organized by the maids and countless conversations with Yuicia, they had learned about the world under the floating island and wanted to see what was out there. Something else that had played a huge part in their decision was all the commodities that they'd have access to on the mainland, from cookies they could share with their children to metals for blacksmithing. Not only that, but one of the first things that blew their minds when they visited the wasteland was the sheer amount of water available. On the floating island, they had to collect rainwater, which meant that they had to ration it out relentlessly, but, in the wasteland, they had access to a large lake and a river. But, most importantly, having the space to cultivate fields was the biggest draw of moving to the wasteland for them. All of that was to say that their view of the world had drastically changed since meeting us.

“I... I’ll never leave the island!” Shael said before storming off, seeing Yahad wouldn’t change his mind.

Shael was part of what I had named the “conservative faction.” She considered our relocation plan a form of cultural invasion and wanted nothing to do with it.

“Lady Witch, you can come out. I know you were listening in on us,” Yahad said.

“So you noticed...” I said sheepishly, coming out of my hiding spot. “Yahad, I’m sorry. Because of us, you and Shael keep fighting.”

Yahad and the other dragonkin—whom I had become quite close with over the last five years—smiled bitterly.

“You did nothing wrong,” Yahad reassured me. “Besides, even if you hadn’t come, perhaps someone else would have... and they might not have been as friendly as you.”

He had a point; there was no telling when humans on the mainland would develop some sort of advanced flight magic that would allow them to come to the floating island. Considering what had happened when the humans found the not-yet-floating island a thousand years ago... it was likely that they’d try hunting the mythical beasts again. As for Yahad, Shael, and the others, they might become slaves or guinea pigs for researchers to conduct their studies on. If things came to that, the inhabitants of the floating island would have no choice but to fight.

"We're very grateful to you, Lady Witch. You've taught us a lot about the world—not just pleasant tales and stories but the harsh truths as well."

"Well, of course. You can't get a good understanding of something just by seeing one side of it. It's important to analyze every single point of view," I said.

"Indeed. And that knowledge will help us tremendously in the future. We thank you, Lady Witch," Yahad said, bowing deeply to me.

After that, he let himself fall to the ground with a loud "thud" and let out a long sigh.

"I get Shael's point, though. I miss the good old days on the island. We didn't have a lot and life wasn't easy, but we had fun. But at the same time, I want to learn more about the world. People are never truly satisfied, are they?" he said with a slight smile.

On the one hand, Yahad and the others had been happy living separated from the rest of the world, but, on the other, now that they knew what was out there, they couldn't help but wonder if they couldn't reach further happiness on the mainland.

I didn't say anything; a comfortable silence settled between us.

Shael the Godkin's Side

"Damn it! Why won't Yahad understand?! That wretched witch is trying to erase our traditions and culture!"

Our peaceful life on the floating island had started changing drastically these past few years. The tools, sugar, and spices that the so-called witch was flooding us with were erasing our culture little by little, almost as if she were mocking our simple lifestyle. And, to add insult to injury, when we tried to give her mythical beast fangs, claws, and fur in exchange for her goods, she straight-up refused! She must've thought she'd have access to those things anyway once the mythical beasts had all moved into the wasteland, so she didn't *need* the ones we offered.

Still, no matter how enticing her goods were, I refused to give up on our traditions; most of us godkin maintained our fishing routes. But, recently, our people had started claiming they didn't need the fish anymore. Instead, they traded them for whatever poison the witch wanted to feed them. With the transfer gate she had installed on the

island, we now had access to a larger area to sow crops in, and we could harvest the fruits and edible plants in her forest. The dragonkin warriors even managed to get their hands on some chickens, which had become extinct on the island several hundred years ago. This only contributed to lowering the value of our fish even more. But the absolute worst part was that some other godkin had given up on our ways and caught their fish in the wasteland's rivers, as it was safer—or so they claimed.

"If this continues, soon there won't be anyone left on the island... The Great Elder will be all alone!"

There were still a few of us who resisted the temptation and stayed on the island, either out of concern for our traditions going extinct or for the Great Elder. But no matter my efforts, I saw my comrades fall one by one to the witch's sweet lies.

"What can I do? What can I do to protect the island? Lady Luriel, please tell me..." I prayed to the idol of the goddess my ancestor used to serve.

The *Preservation* spell that had been cast on it thousands of years ago had since long dissipated, and the idol was missing her arms, legs, and wings. But I didn't have anything else.

Then, to my surprise, a voice answered me.

"I am Lady Luriel's messenger. I shall lend you a hand to prevent any harm from befalling the ones I protect."

It was the angel who had shared my ancestor's body. After my ancestor's passing, the angel had become his descendants' tutelary spirit. Without hesitation, I took the hand he was offering me; instantly, I felt power course through my body.

He had given me the power to fight that wretched witch.

CHAPTER 37

YUICIA'S GROWTH

While Teto and I were busy with the relocation project, Yuicia ran through her daily spell drills in the deserted areas of the wasteland. As a result, her mana pool had grown tremendously despite me not feeding her strange fruits anymore, as she hadn't shown any interest in becoming immortal.

NAME: Chise (Reincarnator)

CLASS: Witch

TITLE: Goddess of the Pioneer Village, A-rank Adventurer, Black Saintess, Carpet Rider, Lady Liriel's Prophet, Friend of the Ancient Dragons

LEVEL: 92

HP: 4,000/4,000

MP: 254,310/517,790

SKILLS: Staff Martial Arts Lv 5, Origin Magic Lv 10, Body Hardening Lv 2, Mixing Lv 6, Mana Regeneration Lv 10, Mana Control Lv 10, Mana Isolation Lv 9, various others...

UNIQUE SKILLS: Creation Magic, Unaging

NAME: Yuicia (Human)

CLASS: Witch Apprentice

TITLE: D-rank Adventurer, Witch's Disciple

LEVEL: 34

MP: 155,200/155,200

SKILLS: Hand-to-hand Combat Lv 4, Water Magic Lv 8, Fire Magic Lv 6, Wind Magic Lv 3, Body Strengthening Lv 6, Mixing Lv 5, Mana Regeneration Lv 4, Mana Control Lv 7, various others...

UNIQUE SKILLS: Slowed Aging

In five years, Yuicia's mana pool had tripled, going from 50,000 MP to just over 150,000. Her skills had also leveled up tremendously. Meanwhile, other than my mana pool's growth, my status remained unchanged, since I hadn't been practicing my magic that much. Besides, I was so high-level I'd need to kill a ton of monsters just to see a tiny bit of growth.

And that morning...

"Miss Chise, can we start?"

"Yup, ready when you are."

The two of us decided to train by having a mock duel.

Yuicia grabbed her new wand and pointed it at me as I readied my old wooden staff. While my maximum mana pool was around 500,000 MP, I had used a good chunk of it in the morning and I only had about half left. On top of that, my staff was nothing special. This meant that not only did I not have all of my MP available to me, but my staff wouldn't help me boost my magic, unlike Yuicia's wand, which amplified the power of Water spells. If we were restricted to only Water Magic for this fight, she'd have a clear edge over me.

"Good luck, Lady Witch! Good luck, Yuicia!" Teto cheered from the side.

"Meow!"

"Master Kuro, it is dangerous; please do not leave my arms," Ai chided the cat-sith.

“Here I go! *Ice Lance!*”

Yuicia initiated the duel by making over a hundred ice spears appear in the air. While to a bystander it might have seemed like we were about to fight to the death, we were actually equipped with devices that converted physical damage into MP loss. So no matter how powerful the spells, neither of us would actually get badly hurt.

As soon as Yuicia cast her spell, the temperature drastically dropped, the earth in front of her shook, and an aura of death permeated the air.

“Your Water Magic is better than mine,” I commented before chanting, “*Multi-Barrier!*”

I successfully blocked her first attack and launched an offensive spell of my own at her. She attempted to block it but didn’t quite succeed, and I landed the first hit. She attempted to mitigate the damage by putting up another barrier, but my spell pierced it like it was nothing, and her MP dropped drastically.

“This is my most powerful spell,” Yuicia said in between pants. “*Ice Age!*”

She used an area spell to completely kill off any of my incoming spells. Massive blocks of ice rained down on us and countless icicles shot up from the ground, a heavy blanket of snow painting the area white. To think that she had done that all by herself... Anyone would be impressed upon seeing such an impressive display of magic.

“Oooh, Teto feels like she’s gonna freeze to death!” Teto’s comment echoed through the cold air.

But Yuicia’s spell hadn’t been enough. I teleported myself behind her, dodging the attack entirely, and touched her shoulder with my staff.

“I... lost,” she panted, letting herself fall to the ground.

I had given her a slight advantage by using my old staff, but at the end of the day, I was still much stronger than her.

“That was good, Yuicia. I don’t have anything to say about your offense, but you need to work on your barriers; they’re too weak. Also, you panicked too much at the end and used all of your mana on an offensive spell, leaving you with nothing to defend yourself,” I said.

"How did you dodge my last attack?" she asked, her brow furrowed. "It was an area spell!"

Ice Age was a spell she had been working on for a while; she had taken the giant block of ice she had conjured to get out of the Sutherland mansion as inspiration and built on it. The spell was supposed to freeze everything it touched, so she was confused as to how I had ended up at her back.

"I used Teleportation Magic," I explained before chanting, "*Short Jump!* Here, just like this."

I took a step forward and cast the spell, teleporting somewhere where she could see me this time. Finding a way to evade area spells altogether was much more efficient than trying to withstand them.

A bitter smile appeared on Yuicia's face. "I'm really no match for you."

"You made a ton of progress in the past five years," I assured her. "But remember to use area spells sparingly; they're not very versatile."

"What do you mean?"

If one wanted to cool down during a hot summer day, there was no point in conjuring a large block of ice; a gentle breeze would be enough. In the same vein, one didn't need to use any fancy magic to extinguish a forest fire—a simple rain spell would do the job just fine.

"It's impressive that you're now able to use large area spells. But, this time, it was overkill. These types of spells really shine during monster stampedes and battles. Other than that, it's too much effort for too little result."

"And don't use that spell in the forest! It'll be bad for the poor plants and animals!" Teto chimed in.

A shudder ran through Yuicia when she realized her spell could completely destroy the forest we had worked on for so long.

"Miss Chise, Miss Teto... Magic really is terrifying."

"It is. Anyway, you've learned the limitations of area spells now. Now, all you need to

do is learn to adjust your spell to better suit the situation. For example, you could try reducing the range of it and increasing its power. Remember when I pierced through your barrier earlier? Having spells that can do that is extremely important."

Area spells were efficient when one had to take on several small monsters, but, against a single strong opponent, it was better to reduce the range of the spell in favor of increasing the damage.

"You could try something like this, for example," I said. "*Ice Zone!*"

Using about half of the mana Yuicia's *Ice Age* had cost her, I materialized several ice pebbles that I then shot towards the ground. Instantly, they expanded into thorny ice shrubs, and a cool wave washed over us.

"It's so beautiful," Yuicia marveled, reaching a hand towards one of the shrubs.

"Don't touch it. Unless you want to lose a finger, that is."

She let out a shriek and hurriedly retrieved her hand.

These bushes had properties that were similar to those of a cursed object; they would pass through the opponent's defenses and infiltrate their body, freezing their key blood vessels and organs while the thorns kept on expanding inside their body. But the best part was that even if you couldn't land a direct hit, the cold air emanating from the bushes would slowly but surely freeze anyone who came in contact with it.

Despite its elegant appearance, it was an extremely lethal spell. I quickly waved my hand to dismiss the spell, as I didn't want anyone getting hurt because of it.

"Your magic really is amazing, Miss Chise. I'm nowhere near your level yet. And I still haven't developed the Unaging skill..." Yuicia said dejectedly.

I had gained the Unaging skill when my mana pool went over 50,000 MP, but Yuicia had triple that and she still hadn't developed it. I wasn't sure why; either the mana threshold varied from individual to individual, or perhaps there were other conditions that she hadn't met yet.

"Yuicia, you used to want to become a court magician, right? What was the reason again?" I asked.

"I wanted to earn a lot of money and become a great mage so my parents wouldn't have to worry about me, wherever they are now."

"What do you think the definition of a 'great mage' is, then? Someone who's good at offensive magic?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't think so. Are you trying to say my reasoning was bad back then?"

Looking at the dejected expression on her face, I realized my question might've been a bit mean.

"I'm not, don't worry. I was just thinking about what a 'great mage' could be. I think, to me, it means someone who uses their power for others."

"Lady Witch does that all the time! You're always helping people in need!" Teto chirped.

"Using my powers for others... That's what we've been doing up until now though, isn't it?" Yuicia asked me, her lips curling into an awkward smile.

Ever since starting the relocation plan, we had often helped the people of the floating island with their problems: making medicine for the children, training with them, teaching them how to craft certain items, helping with the construction of their new village, using magic to heal the wounded mythical beasts, et cetera, et cetera. All of these things didn't call for crazy amounts of mana or particularly advanced spells, but they were great things regardless.

"Well then, your new homework is to come up with a spell that can help others," I told Yuicia.

"A spell that can help others?" she repeated.

I nodded.

Yuicia didn't have a lot of fighting experience, so the toughest monsters she had fought against were C-rank, but if we looked at her combat skills alone, she was definitely much stronger than most adventurers. However, if all she focused on was learning spells to hurt and kill others, people were going to be wary of her, and she might end up all alone in the future. For that reason, I believed she was obliged to put some more

effort into learning helpful spells and technologies to come up with new magic tools that could make people's lives easier.

"You always make things out of magic too, Lady Witch!" Teto commented.

"Well, I have Creation Magic, so it doesn't really count, I suppose."

Whenever I used my magic to create something, I completely skipped the actual creation process and got the end product with little to no effort. Was it unfair of me to ask Yuicia to create something from scratch when she didn't have that ability? Maybe...

Either way, Yuicia was a very hardworking girl, so she immediately started thinking about what she could create. And to her surprise, she realized that she had a knack for inventing spells and magic items. She would diligently go through her basic magic research over and over again until she had mastered it and, thanks to her Slowed Aging skill and large mana pool, she had an abundance of time to commit to her research. Moreover, as her magic abilities themselves were also top-notch, she had no shortage of methods to earn money to fund her projects.

This was a pivotal lesson for Yuicia, as it made her realize what she truly wanted to do with her life in the future.

CHAPTER 38

THE HARVEST FESTIVAL AND THE DUEL

Little by little, demons and mythical beasts started leaving the floating island and moving into the wasteland, where they started their new lives. Of course, there were still a few of them who didn't want to leave, either out of concern for the Great Elder or because they refused to give up on their customs and culture, but we did everything we could to ease their worries.

Some didn't want to move because they were worried about the Great Elder; others said they would miss their home too much; another one told us he couldn't leave behind the tree he had planted when his wife died; someone else said they were too old and would rather wait for death to take them on the island than bother everyone else; et cetera.

I listened to all of their problems and worked on finding compromises that would satisfy them.

“How delightful! This year’s festival seems like it will be quite enjoyable.”

Like every year, the inhabitants of the floating island had organized a harvest festival at the end of autumn. Everyone had returned to the island through the transfer gate, the people bringing their newly born children along, and the mythical beasts their young. We were all gathered in the middle of the village, along with the Great Elder, who had a huge smile on his face.

“How delightful indeed,” he repeated. “I feel much more reassured now, seeing you all doing so well for yourselves.”

“You’re going to have to keep watching over us, Great Elder,” Yahad said teasingly.

“I look forward to seeing all you’ll invent and experience; I’m told Lady Witch still has much in store for all of you.”

The Great Elder grabbed a barrel of alcohol and chugged its contents in one go. It was a new local brew; the demons had started experimenting with moonshine during the

third year of relocation. The taste was still subpar for now, but that was to be expected. Still, they all seemed to enjoy it.

"I'm glad the festival is going without a hitch this year too," I said to Teto as we watched the demons eat and drink to their hearts' content, children's laughter echoing through the night sky.

"The food is even tastier this year!"

Another year had passed without complaint. Yuicia made the rounds, handing sweets to the children.

But then a group of grave-looking demons appeared, and everyone instantly tensed up.

"Shael," I said, greeting the newcomer.

Shael and her cohort had refused to move to the wasteland—or to have anything to do with us, really—which had caused them to grow distant from their peers.

Everyone was staring at them, wondering what kind of trouble they were bringing to this peaceful night.

"Witch! I challenge you to a duel!" Shael declared, pointing her spear at me.

"Shael!" Yahad exclaimed. "What the hell are you doing?! We owe so much to Lady Witch and you—"

"Sure. I accept," I said, cutting him off.

Yahad let out a strangled protest, but I paid him no mind.

"What's your demand if you win?" I asked as I took Flying Jade out of my magic bag.

"I want you to stop harassing us to move back to the mainland and meddling in our affairs. I don't care about the ones who moved out already; I just want you to leave us alone," she said.

"Fine. But if I win, I want you and your group to just *listen* to what I have to say," I said.

"Hmph! I thought you were going to force us to move into that wasteland of yours, but you just want to *talk*? How milquetoast of you!" Shael said with a smile, as if to taunt me.

But as I said before, I didn't want to force anyone to do anything; I just wanted us to have a proper conversation for once. No matter my efforts, she hadn't let me talk to her once in the past five years.

As we prepared for our duel under the worried gazes of the islanders, the Great Elder stepped forward.

"I shall call the start of the duel," he declared. "Get ready." He paused for a couple of seconds before announcing, "Start!"

"I don't want to start a brawl in the middle of the festival. Follow me!" Shael demanded as she spread her wings and took off into the sky.

"Fine by me. *Fly!*" I straddled my staff and went after her.

"We shouldn't bother anyone up here. Let's start!" Shael declared, thrusting her spear at me.

"Sure thing," I said before casting *Multi-Barrier* and blocking her first attack.

Propelled by her momentum, Shael's spear pierced through the first couple of barriers but didn't reach me.

"Get ready for this! *Wind Cutter!*" Shael chanted, circling into my dead angle and shooting wind blades at me.

"I won't let you land a single hit!"

I picked up speed and managed to evade all of the blades, but Shael wasn't about to give up now.

"Stop running away! *Air Compression!*"

She predicted where I would run away next and laid a trap directly in my path.

"And boom!"

When I reached the zone of her spell, the compressed air exploded, releasing a burst of air that broke several of my barriers and threw me off-balance, making me let go of my staff.

I could hear the onlookers scream as I plummeted towards the ground.

“*Apport!*” I chanted.

Immediately, my staff shot back towards me and I caught it with both hands. Shael kept on throwing wind blades at me, but I easily dodged them and climbed back onto my staff.

“Phew, that was scary. A compressed air explosion, huh? Didn’t see that one coming,” I muttered.

“Are you mocking me?! Do you underestimate us godkin? This is a duel! You have to attack me! If you don’t, I’ll kill you!” Shael yelled, thrusting her spear at me again.

“*Psychokinesis!*”

An invisible telekinetic hand swatted at Shael, sending her flying.

“H-Huh?! What’s going on?!?” she exclaimed, looking around to see what had just attacked her.

I used that temporary distraction to cast *Psychokinesis* a second time; the invisible hand seized her body, preventing her from moving.

“M-My body won’t move! Witch! Did you do this?!?”

I swung my hand, moving her around as if to show her that, yes, it was my doing.

“I’ve been fighting with the intent to kill you, yet you’re only playing with me like an insect! Is that what we are to you? Insignificant insects?”

“I’m seriously impressed by the leaps you’re taking to reach those conclusions...”

I wasn’t a big fan of hurting people for no reason, so I had decided to simply use Gravity Magic to restrain her. Besides, Shael’s attacks were so powerful that if I tried to take her head-on, I might’ve ended up being the one getting hurt.

“We won’t do it!” she wailed. “We won’t move out of the island and leave the Great Elder alone! Not if he can’t come with us! His soul and the heart of the island are *one*!”

“I know all that,” I said calmly.

I had realized that at the end of the first year when I attempted to figure out where the mana used to keep the island in the sky came from.

My answer seemed to anger Shael even more. “You knew it?! So you must’ve realized that if we leave, the Great Elder won’t need to sustain the barrier that holds in the island’s mana. If that happens, neither we nor the mythical beasts will be able to see him ever again!”

As demons and certain mythical beasts relied on mana to survive, they weren’t meant to live in low-mana environments. The barrier the Great Elder had erected around the island ensured that not only would the temperature stay bearable for the other residents, but the mana would also be trapped inside. Once it was gone, the island would no longer be able to support demonic life.

“We won’t ever leave the Great Elder alone! I won’t lose to you, witch! Come, guardian angel! Take my body and lend me the strength to kill the godkin’s enemy! Celestial Descent!”

“Wh-What are you—”

Shael forcefully broke free from the invisible telekinetic hand and dashed upwards. With her back to the sun, her wings started sparkling, and I could feel powerful mana emanating from her.

“The angel who lent his powers to my ancestor has chosen to help me defeat you!”

A masculine voice echoed inside my head. “Don’t take it personally, Liriel’s prophet. I have to protect my children.”

“This is my final attack, witch! I will defeat you!”

Gripping her spear tightly, she once again plunged towards me with fierce determination. But this attack was completely different from her previous attempts. She had focused an incredible quantity of mana into the end of her spear; if I made one wrong move, she’d pierce through all of my remaining barriers, and I would be

done for.

“Lady Witch!”

“Miss Chise!”

I heard Teto and Yuicia yell my name in panic, but I simply nodded at them, a calm smile on my face.

“Fall, witch! Haaa!”

“*Psychokinesis! Multi-Barrier!*” I chanted, trying to hinder Shael as I materialized more barriers.

However, she quickly broke free of the restraints by focusing her spare mana into her wings and kept on plunging down. Her spear broke through the barriers one by one, the tip drawing dangerously close.

As the momentum pushed me towards the sea below, I tried to come up with a plan to defeat her.

If I teleport behind her as I did during my duel against Yuicia, I'd win. But...

“I want to avoid her attack from the front and make her listen to me!”

As I focused on creating more and more barriers, I quickly removed the mythril stopper I had set up on my staff and started pouring a ton of mana into the cavorite crystal at the tip of it, making it glow. I didn't use any spell, but the sheer amount of mana I put in there created a repulsive force that deflected Shael's attack. The godkin was sent flying once again, plunging rapidly towards the sea below. Taken by surprise, she accidentally released the mana that she had gathered at the tip of her spear, sending it into the sea. The resultant shock wave threw up tall columns of water.

“Damn it!” she yelled as she plummeted towards the sea.

Her last attack had consumed all of her mana, which canceled the Celestial Descent, leaving her to deal with the aftermath all by herself. I picked up speed, trying desperately to reach her before she fell into the water. Thankfully, she managed to summon her last bit of energy, spreading her wings and stopping herself at the last minute.

"Shael. It's over. You lost. Let's go back," I offered to the panting godkin.

"I haven't lost yet! It's not o—"

"Shael!" I repeated, pouring mana into my voice, which made her stiffen instantly, her face twisting into a frustrated grimace.

She could barely keep herself floating; I had no intention of continuing this fight.

"Let's go back," I offered again, holding out a hand to her as I slowly lowered my staff. If she accepted my help, I could easily take her back to the island.

However...

"You wretched witch!" she yelled, thrusting the end of her spear at me and sending me flying.

By the time I managed to stabilize myself, I was already several meters away from her.

I barely had time to blink when, all of a sudden, a slender stream of water shot up from the sea, piercing through Shael's wings and making feathers fly everywhere.

CHAPTER 39

IN THE SEA SERPENT'S STOMACH

For a split second, all I could do was stare, flabbergasted, as Shael plummeted towards the sea. I quickly snapped back to my senses and dashed towards her, my hand extended in front of me.

“Shael! I’m coming to help you!”

“Don’t! If this is my fate, then so be it!”

Despite her injury, she still had life enough in her to glare at me.

I noticed with dread that a sea serpent had positioned itself right below her, its jaws poised to snap shut as soon as she touched the water. So *that* was what had attacked Shael. The sea serpent must’ve noticed us when Shael’s last attack hit the sea and thought she’d make for a nice snack after sensing how much mana the two of us had used during our duel.

Damn it, I let my guard down and didn’t notice it sneaking up on us.

“So I’m going to die within the belly of a sea serpent, huh?” Shael muttered with a wry chuckle. “Great Elder, I’m sorry. It seems I won’t be able to stay with you after all.”

She closed her eyes, ready to accept her fate. But I wasn’t about to let her become a monster’s meal. I picked up speed and caught up with her at last.

“I accepted that duel just so I could have a conversation with you! You’re not going to run away on me by dying! I won’t let you!”

“Huh?! What are you doing here, witch?!” Shael’s voice wavered in bewilderment as I swept her into my arms.

There was a splash in the water; the next second, the sea serpent’s jaws clamped shut, engulfing us whole. It was pitch-dark inside.

"Phew, made it by a hair's breadth. *Light!*"

We were in the monster's esophagus, my barriers protecting us from getting squished by its walls.

"Ew... I've dissected my fair share of disgusting monsters, but this is on a whole new level," I commented, my nose wrinkling in disgust as a torrent of digestive fluids poured upon us, pushing us farther down the monster's gullet.

"Wh-Wh-Why did you save me?!" Shael asked from my arms, her voice trembling. "If you had just let me die, you could have easily convinced the others to leave the island!"

She had a point; if Shael, who was pretty much the leader of the conservative faction, died, the others would slowly but surely accept relocation to the wasteland.

I shook my head and flicked her forehead, channeling mana into my fingers. The sound echoed through the monster's esophagus as tears welled up in Shael's eyes. She looked at me in disbelief as if she couldn't believe what I'd just done.



"The Great Elder told me that he plans to die with the favorite crystals at the core of the island and be reborn as an egg," I explained.

The ancient dragons were immortals of a sort; though their bodies would age and die, elsewhere, the sum of all their knowledge would be passed down to a new egg. The *catch* was that the dragon's memory and personality would die with the body; the next Ancient Verdigris Dragon would be a completely different being.

Shael's voice choked with sobs as she clung to me, pleading, "Then why won't you just leave us alone?! If all the Great Elder wants is for our people to grow, he doesn't need us to leave the island too! About half of us already moved into your territory; isn't that enough? Don't make us leave him alone..."

I grabbed onto her tightly and said, "Let's focus on getting out of here first. We can continue this conversation afterwards. *Thunder Bolt!*"

Lightning shot from my staff, and a high-voltage current ran through the sea serpent's body. After about ten seconds, the monster's esophagus relaxed and its mouth opened, allowing us to break free.

"The others must be worried sick. Let's head back," I suggested as we stood on the sea serpent's floating carcass. "*Teleport!*"

The next second, the two of us were back on the island, along with the sea serpent's body, which I had brought along with a simple gravity spell.

"It got killed by the aftershock of Shael's spell," I lied. "You should all thank her. Oh, and please dissect the sea serpent when you have a minute."

"Huh? No, I—" Shael started protesting.

But the others didn't hear her as they immediately started cheering. "Whoa! You're amazing, Shael!"

"Our duel ended in a draw. I need to tend to Shael's injuries, so I'll be heading home," I declared. "Teto, help the others with the sea serpent, will you?"

"Roger!"

"Huh?! Let me go, witch! Put me down!" Shael protested, struggling in my grasp.

However, her wings were still injured, so no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't escape. Ignoring her complaints, I walked through the transfer gate and headed to a spare bedroom in the mansion, where I gently set her down on the bed.

"*Heal!*" I chanted. "That's your injuries taken care of, but be careful not to overexert yourself."

Suspicion colored her tone as she remarked, "This bed is... quite soft. You're trying to corrupt me with one of your tricks again, aren't you?"

A wry smile curled on my lips. "I'll ask the others to bring us food from the festival later, so let's get some rest for now," I said, ignoring her question. "I'm pooped."

It was just the two of us in the room. An awkward silence settled in; neither of us knew what to say.

After a few minutes, though, it seemed that Shael couldn't take it anymore. "Why won't you leave us alone?" she asked me again.

I decided to be straightforward. "Because there's something I want too."

"I knew it!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "What is it? Total control over us and the mythical beasts? Or maybe it's the Great Elder's corpse? After all, if he dies along with the cavorite crystals, his body will remain. That's what you're after, isn't it? You greedy, wretched witch!"

That response would've earned her a swift reprimand if Teto or Beretta were present, but I decided to simply ignore it.

"What I want is the Great Elder's mana," I said.

"His mana..."

"He has enough mana to allow all of you to live on the island without any issue; if only I could have access to it, it'd make my life much easier."

From my calculations, I had surmised that the Great Elder possessed around three million MP, or about the same amount as a fully grown World Tree. Even if he didn't have enough energy to release his mana into the air like he used to, his mere existence would already do wonders for the world's regeneration. There was no way I'd allow

him to die.

"Hold on for a minute! What are you scheming?" Shael asked me, her eyes narrowed into slits.

"I want to move the floating island here," I said matter-of-factly.

I took one of my managing devices for the wasteland out of my magic bag and showed a map of the area to Shael. Zooming in on the southern region where the demons had begun constructing their village, I pointed out a massive hollow above it.

"We dug this crater so it'd be the same size as the bottom of the floating island. My plan is to teleport the floating island right into the hole and have the Great Elder move into the wasteland along with you guys," I explained.

Shael was looking at me with wide, confused eyes.

While the Great Elder couldn't move the floating island all by himself, it seemed that, with a little help, it wouldn't be impossible—or so he and Beretta had told us.

"But, well, the island might shake a lot during the process, right? So we thought it'd be better to have all of the inhabitants leave first so they wouldn't be at risk."

I had actually started installing fully charged mana crystals all around the island, as moving it was going to cost a ton of the stuff.

"Once we have the island integrated into the wasteland, we intend to sever the links between the Great Elder's soul and the cavorite," I concluded. "It might take us years, but we are committed to getting him his freedom back."

"You... You're willing to go to such lengths for us and I... I..." Shael stammered, hanging her head.

I wrapped my arms around her. "I'm sorry. I should've told you earlier, but I still wasn't sure the plan would work; I didn't want you getting your hopes up for no reason," I told her.

It had taken me several years to calculate the exact coordinates of the floating island and the amount of mana we'd need to teleport it all the way to the wasteland, so I'd decided to keep everything a secret until I was fully sure it'd work.

"I'll do it," Shael said. "If it makes it easier for you to carry out your plan, then I'll move into your territory, and I'll tell the others too. When are you going to proceed with your plan?"

"We can start whenever. I'm actually thinking it'd be a perfect way to end the harvest festival. Don't you agree?" I said with a sly smile.

For the first time since I had met her, Shael's face relaxed, and a gleam of mischief that matched my own lit up her eyes.

CHAPTER 40

THE GREAT MOVE

Under the pretext of having an important announcement to make, Shael gathered all the members of the conservative faction to the wasteland. Meanwhile, we took care of the remaining demons and mythical beasts.

When there was no one left on the island, we started preparing to teleport it into the hollow we had dug in the wasteland.

“Maids! Are you all ready to begin the operation?”

“Yes, Miss Beretta!”

All of the attendant dolls had evolved into mechanoids over the past five years. If I had to give an explanation for that sudden turn of events, I’d say it was due to them mingling with the demons from the island: perhaps human relations were the fastest way for one to develop a soul.

Right now, they were all standing on strategic points around the hollow in the wasteland, ready to start the relocation. We planned on having them use Gravity Magic to correct for any potential complications, like the island changing course or shedding debris.

Meanwhile, Yuicia, Shael, and Yahad were making sure no one wandered away or tried going back to the island during the moving process.

“Everyone! We’re going to start cleaning up the aftermath of the festival. For your safety, please stay here in the village square!” Yuicia lied.

Shael was handling her fellow conservatives. “The witch has something to tell us; you don’t want to miss it! Hey, you there! Don’t even think about going back to the island!”

“Hey, look,” someone told their peers. “The mythical beasts are all here too. What is Lady Witch planning?”

No one had any idea what was going on except for us; the demons stood in the square, mixed expressions of anticipation and worry on their faces.

Teto, the Great Elder, and I were the only ones left on the island, along with the old mythical beasts who still refused to leave the dragon's side. Unlike earlier, it was quite calm and peaceful.

"I used Mana Perception to do one last check; I couldn't detect anyone else on the island. I closed the transfer gate too, so no one will be able to come during the move," I said.

"All we have to do is help you move your house now, Mister Grandpa Dragon!" Teto chirped.

"You didn't have to do all of that, Lady Witch. I'm an old thing; you could've just left me behind," the Great Elder said. "You two are very kind." Despite having helped us figure out the details of our plan, he still looked incredulous that we were actually planning on going through with it. "Not to mention how much mana and energy this is going to cost you," he added.

"What else did you want me to do? The islanders want you by their side. I had to listen to them," I said as I went to stand in front of the Great Elder, grasping my staff with both hands.

"Lady Witch, Teto will support you!"

"Thanks, Teto. All right, let's do this!"

I drove my staff into the earth, channeling my mana through it. As I did, the mana crystals I had carefully positioned around the island began to shimmer and activate one by one. Together, they wove a colossal, spherical magic circle that encompassed everything—the surface of the island, the bedrock below, and the air above. The circle started glowing as all of its components activated like interlocking gears, and a torrent of mana surrounded the island.

"I've spent ages refining my Mana Control just to pull this off, but hey, who would have guessed—*this is really hard!*" I said between gritted teeth.

"You can do it, Lady Witch!" Teto cheered me on.

That's right; Yuicia wasn't the only one who had been working on her magic these past few years. Beretta and I had used most of our spare time preparing for this. But despite Teto supporting me from behind, I had a hard time directing the mana that flew through the circle, and the whole thing was about to come undone. It wouldn't be the end of the world if it didn't work, as I had designed the magic circle with safety precautions so no one would be able to activate it accidentally if we had to give up and try again... but that'd mean I'd have to recharge a set of mana crystals, which would take me three more years at the very least. My body was nearing its limit, and I was contemplating releasing my staff when the Great Elder intervened and gently put the tip of his claw atop it.

"You're going through all this trouble for my sake; it's only right that I give you a hand."

His powerful mana coursed through my staff, instantly reinforcing the magic circle and stabilizing the parts that were about to come undone.

"Thank you, Great Elder!" I said.

"That was amazing!" Teto exclaimed. "How did you do that?"

The old dragon laughed. "Living for as long as I have has its advantages. I have dabbled in ritual magic before, you see."

"Ritual magic" covered the entire discipline of jointly casting a single spell. Usually, having someone join midcast was incredibly difficult, but he did it like it was nothing.

"Oh well, I'm not about to complain," I muttered. "We're doing this!"

The magic circle started glowing brighter and brighter until, finally, the island vanished completely, leaving only a trail of glimmering mana in its wake.

Yuicia's Side

I stood anxiously in the middle of the village square, surveying the sky and preparing myself to use my magic or to activate the barrier device Miss Chise had given me in case anything went wrong.

"Meow!"

“Oh, Kuro! You came to watch the island too?”

The cat-sith let out another meow before jumping onto my back and making its way up to my shoulder. The two of us were gazing at the sky in silence when all of a sudden, a shiny, bluish-white light emerged into the sky a little farther north. It expanded into a sphere, and I could distinguish the outline of the floating island inside it. Soon, the light disappeared and only the island was left, hovering right above the hollow, while the scattered mana whipped up a gust of wind that made my robes flutter.

“So pretty... It looks like a flower of light has bloomed in the sky!” someone commented.

“Hey, hold on... Isn’t that our island?!”

“Wait, so the Great Elder is there too?!”

Slowly, the floating island lowered into the hollow. The sudden teleportation caused some of the bedrock at the bottom to crumble away, but Miss Beretta and the others made sure none of it reached us.

“G-Great Elder!” Miss Shael exclaimed, soaring into the night sky and flying towards the island.

“Ah, Miss Shael, don’t! It’s still dangerous!” I hurriedly said, but it was too late. “Ugh... Fly!”

I straddled the broom Miss Chise had given me and went after her.

Wind Magic really wasn’t my forte, but after a lot of practice, I’d somehow managed to learn how to fly on a broom just like Miss Chise, although I couldn’t really do any of the complex moves she did. Still, I pushed through and made it to the island right after Shael.

“Phew, I’m exhausted, Teto. I’m never doing that ever again,” I heard Miss Chise sigh as she joined Miss Teto on the ground and leaned against her.

“It’s all done now, Lady Witch! You’re gonna be able to get lots of rest.”

“Lady Witch, Lady Guardian. Thank you for bringing me here,” the Great Elder told them.

A mischievous smile curled on Miss Chise's lips. "Thank us later; we still haven't severed the ties between your soul and the cavorite, after all. When that's done, I'm counting on you to help with the regeneration of the wasteland, okay?"

The Great Elder guffawed. "Very well! You have my word; your land and mine are one, and I shall do my part to share and preserve it."

Just like that, the floating island was no more; everyone, including the Great Elder, was now an inhabitant of the wasteland. The demons and the mythical beasts had already started lining up to greet the Great Elder, so Kuro and I decided to regroup with Miss Teto and Miss Chise.

"Shhh! Lady Witch is tired, so she's sleeping," Teto chided us when we got closer.

Miss Chise was leaning against her, seemingly in a deep slumber.

"I just want to look at her sleeping face, and then we'll be off," I promised.

Kuro meowed as if to confirm my words.

I knew a few apocryphal tales and bits of folklore about communities saved from catastrophe with similar feats of large-scale teleportation, but it was my first time seeing it; I finally understood just how impressive that grade of magic was.

Gazing at Miss Chise's peaceful sleeping face, I couldn't help but think about how innocent and cute she looked, compared to her usual stern self.

CHAPTER 41

LITTLE CHAT IN THE DREAM ORACLE SPACE

One month had gone by since we had moved the floating island into the wasteland, and things were finally starting to calm down. Since we now had more people than ever living here, I decided to build a church with my Creation Magic, along with statues of the goddesses that I'd based on their appearances in my dream oracles. Shael immediately volunteered to look after the church.

"Witch! Leave the grounds to me. As a descendant of Lady Luriel's prophet, I'm the most qualified person for the job!"

We didn't have any holy scriptures to display in the church, but the demons were satisfied with simply worshipping the statues and leaving crops as offerings. It seemed that, to a lot of them, the church had become a place for relaxation. I had also built a small shrine for the Great Elder, and the demons often went to pray there too.

There was, however, a slight issue with the church: as I had never met Leriel, the Goddess of the Skies, and Loriel, the Goddess of the Underworld, before, I ended up basing their statues on the ones I usually saw in other churches, which meant that they didn't look as good as the other three. It was unfortunate, but the difference in quality was slightly comical.

That night, I found myself in a familiar black space, along with Teto.

"A dream oracle?" I asked.

"We're gonna see the goddesses again?!" Teto asked me excitedly. "Teto is so happy!"

"Good evening, Chise, Teto. Thank you for everything you did for the people of the floating island."

Looking up, we saw Liriel descending from above, Lariel and Luriel on either side.

"Thank you so much, Chise!" Luriel said. "I was starting to get worried about the island and its people, but I couldn't afford to spend all of my resources on it and leave the rest of my territory with nothing. I'm so glad you found them a new home!"

She reached her arms towards me, and I braced myself for an incoming hug, taking a step back, but Lariel stopped her before she could reach me.

"Good grief, Luriel, why are you always so touchy-feely?" She sighed, pulling the other goddess back by tugging at her clothes. "This is *exactly* why Leriel and Loriel always keep their distance from you."

"But cute girls are meant to be hugged!" Luriel argued with a pout.

"Didn't you have something important to tell her, Luriel?" Liriel, always the serious one, interrupted her sisters.

Her remark piqued my curiosity; what did Luriel want to talk to me about? I actually had a question for her, now that I'd had the chance to think about it.

"Luriel, are you the one who gave Shael's guardian angel the idea to have her use Celestial Descent?" I asked.

"My, why do you think I had anything to do with it?" she retorted.

The guardian angel had lent Shael his powers after hearing her prayers. However, his words had left me a little puzzled.

"Don't take it personally, Liriel's prophet. I have to protect my children."

"He said that he had to 'protect his children,' but Shael defeating me wouldn't have 'protected' the godkin at all—quite the opposite, actually. This got me thinking, and I came to the conclusion that he didn't mean to protect Shael and the others from me but from *themselves*. He allowed her to fight with me with all of her might so that she would realize my strength and agree to talk to me," I explained.

And I had a sneaking suspicion that Luriel was the one who had given the guardian angel that idea.

"Looks like I've been found out," she said with a chuckle, not looking ashamed in the slightest.

I couldn't help but let out a sigh at how casual she was being about the whole thing. But then, her smile faded, and a more serious expression appeared on her face.

"If I hadn't done anything, you might've eventually convinced the members of the conservative faction to move to the wasteland, but they would've resented you for it. And that would have definitely led to a less than desirable situation in the future," she said.

She had a point; if the conservatives had followed us to the wasteland unwillingly, they might've rebelled against us in the future or even left the wasteland. That was why she had made us battle to our utmost limits, so Shael could throw all of her frustrations at me.

"Once again, thank you for letting the islanders move into the wasteland," she continued. "And thank you for listening to Shael and the others' worries. Now I don't need to keep that barrier up in the sky anymore; you took a huge load off of my shoulders. You even managed to convince the Ancient Verdigris Dragon to hold on to life for a while longer."

"I couldn't just leave and do nothing after the Great Elder asked me to help them. Besides, I'm not done yet; his soul is still linked to the cavorite crystals," I said, lowering the brim of my witch hat to hide my reddening face.

"Teto didn't get to do a lot this time; everything was too complicated!" Teto whined, a pout on her lips.

Liriel reassured her with a smile, "Thanks to you two, the regeneration of the wasteland is going amazingly. Things might be a bit difficult for a while, as demons consume a lot of mana, but soon enough mana production will outpace their consumption and we'll be able to drop the barrier."

Despite Teto not playing any major role this time around, Liriel still acknowledged all of the efforts she had made to help me refurbish the wasteland.

"And besides, you two even turned that sad-looking wasteland into a beautifully diverse landscape. You really did well; the two of you deserve to relax and do whatever you'd like from now on," Liriel continued.

"That's what I've been doing this entire time, though," I argued.

"Lady Witch is always having lots of fun every day!" Teto added.

I pretty much did whatever I wanted and lived a very carefree life, but judging by Liriel's words, it must not have seemed like it to the goddesses.

On our days off, I went to Lawbyle, disguising myself with transformation magic, to buy art from the young—well, he wasn't so young anymore now—artist who painted my favorite pictures and to look at the new creations of that now-famous workshop I had purchased a set of tableware from before.

Speaking of Lawbyle, about a year after we had left, I had learned that the king had been incarcerated and that the country had changed from a monarchy to a parliamentary government. The nobility remained quite powerful, though, so the parliament was mostly composed of nobles, along with a few guild representatives, like the commerce guild or the adventurer's guild. Oh, and they had removed us from their wanted list too, so that was good.

"Anyway, how about you tell us about the recent changes in the wasteland?" Lariel asked me when it seemed that Liriel and Luriel were done thanking me.

Liriel made a table and a tea set appear out of thin air before taking a seat.

"Let us have a little tea party to celebrate all of your achievements, Chise, Teto," Liriel said. "I agree with Lariel; I'd love to hear about what has happened these past few years."

"I don't mind telling you," I replied, sitting at the table.

Teto took a seat next to me and chirped, "There have been lots of changes!"

And so, we started telling them about everything that had left an impression on us: the mythical beasts' babies, all the different clothes Beretta had made for me, the books I had bought recently, Yuicia's and my research into transformation magic based on our close study of the Beastchange and Dragonchange skills, all of the stories the Great Elder had told us... You get the picture. It was all rather trivial, but Liriel and the others seemed very interested.

I finally realized that ever since the demons and the mythical beasts had moved into the wasteland, I had been working a lot harder than before to make sure everyone was happy. Perhaps Liriel was right and Teto and I ought to take it easy for the foreseeable

future.

CHAPTER 42

THE ANCIENT DRAGON'S ROAR AND THE DEPARTURE

The grotto where the Great Elder lived had a tunnel that led to the center of the (previously) floating island. That day, Teto, Yuicia, and I had set off to explore said tunnel and make sure it was serviceable, as we would need to come here often to sever the ties that linked the Great Elder's soul to the cavorite crystals.

"Lady Witch, is this good?" Teto asked me as she hung a magic lantern.

"Yeah, it's perfect. This tunnel seems pretty sturdy, so all we need to do is add some light sources along the way."

"S-So this path leads to the cavorite crystals..." Yuicia gulped audibly. "Why did you take me along? I'm not qualified to be here..."

"Well, that's what the Great Elder wants," I replied cheerfully.

After a bout of walking, we reached a large, spherical room; a single massive chunk of cavorite floated in its center.

"It looks surreal," Yuicia breathed in amazement. "So that's cavorite..."

As he didn't need to make the island float anymore, the Great Elder wasn't actively supplying the cavorite with mana. Still, due to the connection between his soul and the crystal, it was constantly sucking up a bit of his mana, causing it to emit a soft green glow. Now, I was pretty sure this massive chunk of cavorite hadn't been this size at first; it had probably been formed by the resonance of thousands of small cavorite crystals when the Great Elder made the island float for the first time so they would have enough energy to maintain its levitation.

"Miss Chise, is it just me, or does the gem at the tip of your staff look exactly like cavorite?" Yuicia asked me with a frown.

"Hm? Oh, I didn't tell you, did I? It is."

"Huh?!" Her cry of disbelief echoed through the grotto. "Hold on a minute; that's why it's so powerful, right? And yet it's just a tiny chunk compared to *that*! Isn't a concentration this huge dangerous?!"

Teto had stopped paying attention to our conversation and was trying to build a path all the way to the crystal when all of a sudden...

"Lady Wiiitch, I can't get any closer!" she whined.

"Really?" I asked.

Yuicia and I tried entering the room too, but just like Teto, we were pushed back by some sort of mysterious force. Meanwhile, Teto was having fun bouncing off the invisible barrier, throwing herself at it over and over.

"Lady Witch, this is really fun!" she chirped.

I paid her no mind as I said, "This must be caused by the cavorite's repulsive force."

"Repulsive force?" Yuicia repeated, her head tilted to the side.

I nodded. "To put it simply, it's like there is a big barrier all around the cavorite that doesn't let anyone in."

This was a huge oversimplification, but oh well.

"Then we'll never be able to release the Great Elder's soul!" Yuicia said, starting to panic.

I had a sudden realization. "Oh. I get it now—why the Great Elder sent you with us."

"Huh? Me? What do you mean?" she asked, her eyes widening comically.

As I owned a cavorite staff, I was the only person in the entire wasteland who could neutralize the barrier. However, it would be impossible for me to sever the ties linking the Great Elder's soul *and* keep the barrier down at the same time. This meant that the next best candidates were Teto and Beretta, as they each had tons of mana and were used to this type of work. But the Great Elder had specifically chosen Yuicia for the

task.

"You're the only one who can do it," I told her. "Please, Yuicia."

"N-No! I can't! There's no way!"

"Shhh, calm down. It's all right; you can take as long as you need. When you're done, you'll finally understand why the Great Elder chose you."

I let my mana course through my staff and used it to neutralize the barrier.

"A-All right..." Yuicia said nervously. "I'll try... *Fly!*"

I flashed her a warm smile. "You can do it."

"Do your best, Yuicia!" Teto chirped.

She floated towards the cavorite while Teto and I cheered her on. I focused some mana into my eyes to see what she was working with: countless mana "pipes" connected the crystal to the Great Elder's soul, steadily pumping the dragon's mana.

"How should I cut them?" Yuicia muttered to herself.

The mana links didn't have a tangible form, so it wasn't like she could cut them with a regular sword or anything of the sort. She tried manipulating her mana into a thin, sharp blade.

"Let's see... Ugh, it's so hard."

Her mana blade wasn't weak by any means; it could easily cut through most materials. However, the links had an incredibly high mana density, and Yuicia ended up having to spend over 100,000 MP to sever a single one.

"Miss Chise, I've reached my limits," she panted.

"You did good, Yuicia. Let's go back and tell the Great Elder about it."

And so we did just that. The Great Elder simply smiled and told us to keep going like this until all the ties were severed. I was a bit worried when I heard that; it took Yuicia almost all of her mana to cut a single one, and there were still *hundreds*. I really wished

I could help her out, but someone needed to keep the barrier down. Besides, I was afraid that if I tried to dismiss the barrier for good, I might damage the cavorite and, in turn, the Great Elder's soul.

Yuicia made slow progress, cutting about one mana link a week. She was always completely drained at the end of it, and during the first year she confessed to me that she had thought about giving up several times, but she didn't want to betray the islanders' hopes. By the third year, she wasn't struggling as much; perhaps she had started getting used to the task. Her mana pool expanded with every passing day, and at some point during the fifth year, she cultivated enough MP to cut two mana links at a time.

Finally, in the spring of the tenth year, as I welcomed my sixty-second birthday and Yuicia her thirty-second, the last link was severed.

"I'm all done!" she announced.

As soon as the words left her mouth, the huge cavorite crystal fell to the ground and scattered in thousands of little pieces.

"Oh no! What a waste..." Yuicia said, a dejected look on her face.

"A crystal this size is incredibly dangerous," I said. "It's for the best."

We didn't have a chance to continue this conversation though, as a loud roar came from above us.

"Lady Witch, Mister Grandpa Dragon is happy!"

"Let's go, Yuicia."

"Yes!"

The three of us ran up the stairs as fast as we could. When we emerged from the grotto, we saw the Great Elder flying around in the sky above us. For a while, we didn't say anything, simply gazing at him. He had been bound to the cavorite for so long; who knew when he'd last been able to spread his wings like this?

After a few minutes, he came to land in front of us.

“Lady Witch, Lady Guardian, Lady Disciple. Thank you so much for freeing me from the cavorite.”

“No need to thank me. Yuicia is the one who did everything,” I said, pushing her forward.

“Please allow me to thank you for a second time, Lady Witch’s disciple—no, Witch Yuicia.”

“A-Ah, no need to thank me!” Yuicia hurriedly said. “Besides, while severing the mana links was very tiring, it also helped me train my Mana Control a lot.”

The Great Elder’s lips curled into a smile. “One day, you will be just like Lady Witch,” he told Yuicia. “I wanted to give you a little push in that direction; that’s why I chose you.”

When he said that Yuicia would be “just like me,” he probably meant that she’d develop the Unaging skill. During these past ten years, Yuicia’s mana pool had grown tremendously, and her Mana Control had improved a lot too. I had no doubt that if she kept at it, she would become an immortal witch just like me.

“Well then, please excuse me; I need to shake off a few centuries of rust,” the Great Elder said, spreading his wings and soaring into the sky. When he was done, he would most likely go tell the good news to the former inhabitants of the floating island.

Yuicia turned around.

After fifteen years of being my apprentice and five years living together, she had grown up into a beautiful young woman, and despite her being over thirty years old, she didn’t look a day over twenty.

“Miss Chise, Miss Teto,” she started, determination shining in her eyes. “I’ve made up my mind: I want to become a great witch, someone who can really help people. And to achieve that goal, I think it’d be best if I traveled the world.”

I nodded. “That sounds like a good idea. I can’t say I’m surprised, though; you’ve looked like you’ve been wanting to leave for a while now.”

“You were fidgeting around all the time!” Teto added.

Anyone could've told what she wanted to do just by looking at her; it wasn't just Teto and I.

"Meow!"

"Huh? Kuro! Oh, and Tora, you're here too!" Yuicia said as the familiar cat-sith and its mate joined us, almost as if to prove my point. "But why?"

"I apologize for my brazenness, but we brought them here," Beretta, who had just arrived along with the other maids, answered.

"I see," Yuicia said before letting out a pained cry as the cat-siths started jumping on her. "It hurts! Kuro, Tora, it *hurts!*"

It seemed that, just like us, Beretta and the cat-siths had guessed Yuicia would choose this moment to announce her departure to us.

"Master Kuro and Lady Tora said they would like to travel with you," Beretta informed her.

"Really? I planned on going alone. Will you two really travel with me?" she asked the two cat-siths, who meowed excitedly.

These two really had taken a liking to Yuicia.

"And they're not the only ones," I said with an enigmatic smile.

Right as the words left my lips, a silhouette carrying a large bag packed to the brim on her back approached us.

"Uh, M-Miss Ai? What's that?" Yuicia asked, pointing at the maid's backpack.

Ai gave her a graceful bow, which was impressive considering her bag must've weighed a ton.

"I have decided to travel with you to assess the situation in the outside world and tell my sisters all about it. Rest assured; I have already asked Master and Miss Beretta for permission," Ai said.

"Huh?! No one told me about this!" Yuicia exclaimed in shock.

She clearly hadn't been expecting so many volunteers to travel with her. I wasn't too surprised by their decision, though—especially on Ai's part; ever since Beretta assigned her as Yuicia's guide back when she had first arrived in the wasteland, she had thought of herself as Yuicia's personal servant. I was positive she would follow her everywhere she went.

"If you allow me to come with you, I will take care of all of the cleaning, cooking, and laundry," Ai told Yuicia.

"R-Really?"

"Besides, I will also assist you with your research, if you so wish."

"Uh..." Yuicia groaned.

Her determination to travel alone was slowly waning in the face of Ai's offer.

"And I will make new clothes for you whenever you like," Ai added, dealing the final blow to Yuicia's resolve.

"I'm looking forward to traveling with you," she replied.

In the last ten years, she'd grown accustomed to the incredible comfort of the clothes Beretta and the others created; she could never go back to normal garments again.

"As payment, I only require that you supply me with 50,000 MP a day. If you accept, then I shall officially become your personal servant," Ai said.

"S-Sure. You won't be able to stay awake for long if I don't charge you regularly anyway," Yuicia replied. "Ah, but..."

"Meow!"

"I'm also going to have to feed Kuro and Tora. This means I'll only have half of my mana left after I'm done with all three of you..."

Yuicia's shoulders slumped when she realized she might have bitten off a bit more than she could chew by letting a demon and two mythical beasts travel with her. Still, she put a hand on Ai's back and let some of her mana course through her, effectively sealing their new "contract."

"I gave Ai everything you could potentially need, but I have two final farewell gifts for you," I said, rummaging through my magic bag and fishing out two bags I had made especially for Yuicia.

I had enchanted them so that she and Ai would be the only ones able to use them and so that time would pass slower inside.

"Also, here's a World Tree seed. If you find somewhere you want to call home, you should plant it there," I said, handing her the seed.

"It'll help recharge Ai's and the cat-sith's mana!" Teto chimed in.

"And here's a robe and a pointy hat I had Beretta and the others make for you. I put a few different enchantments on them for your comfort."

"It's the same as Lady Witch's but in a different color!"

"I also have a mana crystal necklace for you; each crystal can store about 100,000 MP, so you should charge them whenever they're empty."

"Teto really likes it when Lady Witch recharges her mana, so I'm sure the crystals like it too!"

"And here's..."

Beretta cleared her throat, interrupting Teto's and my explanation of all the things I had made for Yuicia. "Master, Lady Witch. Lady Yuicia seems to be feeling a little overwhelmed."

We had spent around twenty years with Yuicia by our side; seeing her leave felt rather bittersweet—just like with Selene back in the day.

And then, at last:

"Ride on my back; I will drop you off wherever you want. Unless you are more comfortable using Lady Witch's Teleportation Magic, of course," the Great Elder offered when we told him Yuicia was about to leave.

"Thank you so much, Great Elder! I'll take you up on that offer."

Yuicia and Ai climbed onto the dragon's back; Kuro perched on Yuicia's shoulder while Ai carried Tora in her arms.

"Are you ready?" the Great Elder asked them.

"Yes! Master, Miss Teto, I promise I'll become a great witch!"

"I know you will. Don't push yourself too much, though!" I said. "And if you ever feel the need, come on back. You can always count on us. Remember that!"

"Teto is looking forward to seeing you again!"

The three of us waved at each other until the Great Elder took off, shooting through the sky so fast we lost sight of them in a matter of seconds.



"And just like that, they're gone," I remarked.

"Teto's a bit sad."

The three of us had spent so long together; it was a bit painful to see her go.

"She's called me 'Miss Chise' this entire time, even after becoming my disciple, but she called me 'Master' today," I said with a sad smile. "I never even taught her how to unlock Unaging, yet she still considers me her teacher."

"You taught her a lot of other things, though!" Teto interjected.

I looked up at the sky and wiped my eyes with my sleeve before turning around to face Beretta.

"Master, I have a suggestion," she said.

"A suggestion? What is it?"

"With Ai's departure, we maids will have an even larger workload to take on. Besides, we have already been feeling somewhat understaffed ever since the demons and mythical beasts moved into the wasteland and our responsibilities increased. Therefore, I believe this is the perfect time to create more attendant dolls. I suggest going with twenty at first, but I believe it would be ideal to have a complement of a hundred maids in the long term."

I nodded. "Sure. I'm still a little sad about Yuicia and Ai's departure, but at least more attendant dolls mean this place will be even more animated," I said, a smile spreading across my lips.

"A smile suits you a lot better than tears, Lady Witch!" Teto piped up.

Yuicia had left.

While I was sad, I had a feeling that, with her earnestness and her ambition, she would find a way to become immortal and return to us in the future.

EXTRA STORY

THIS TIME, THE WITCH VISITS HER DISCIPLE

It had been about two months since Yuicia had dropped off the cat-siths in the wasteland for mating season, and it was now time for them to go home. About half of them had decided to stay with their mates in the wasteland, and I had decided to bring the other half, plus a few curious cat-siths who wanted to explore the outside world, back to Yuicia myself.

“Are you all ready?” I asked.

A collective meow filled the air as the cat-siths replied.

I used a quick illusion spell to hide their little fairy wings, and we were off.

“Lady Witch, Teto is super-duper excited to see Yuicia again!”

“I will accompany you to see Lady Yuicia, Master,” Beretta said as she joined us.

It seemed that she wanted to go see her fellow mechanoid, Ai, who had left with Yuicia a few hundred years ago.

“All righty then, let’s go. *Teleport!*”

I wrapped the three of us along with the cat-siths in mana and teleported us to an empty field right outside the city where Yuicia had founded her school.

“It would’ve been easier if I could’ve teleported us directly inside, but it seems it’s well warded.”

The entire area—city included—was protected by defensive magics, making it impregnable to all outside attacks and teleportation. Well, *almost* all—with my mana pool, I could easily force my way through the barriers, but that would deactivate them forever and cause a huge uproar, which wasn’t my goal. Landing outside of the city and making my way in on foot was a much safer bet.

"Yuicia's school, huh? It's been a while since we last came here."

The magic school was composed of several towers, with a huge World Tree standing behind it. The city spread out in a fan-shaped pattern centered around the tree, and there were tall mountains in the distance. A long time ago, Yuicia had decided to settle down at the foot of the mountain, building a house and planting the World Tree seed I had given her. Later on, other mages had found their way to this place and Yuicia's house had slowly turned into a magic school, as most of them had been interested in taking lessons from her. Fast forward a couple hundred years, and it had become a full-blown city of scholars, independent from any kingdom or nation.

As soon as we landed, the cat-siths ran past us and made a beeline for the city.

"That was fast," I said, blinking in surprise. "Well, I guess we can let them go on their merry way now."

"Is that really okay, Lady Witch?" Teto asked.

"They are used to roaming around the city, so it will most likely be all right," Beretta replied.

There was enough mana in this town from the World Tree and all of the mages around that the cat-siths wouldn't go hungry, so letting them run around wasn't a problem. And if they felt like having a little snack, they could always head to the forest a little farther away to hunt birds and mice or pretend to be stray cats and go beg for food from people in the surrounding towns.

The three of us started making our way to the city, a smile on our faces as we watched the cat-siths run around. Inside, we found spacious streets lined with tall buildings, mages riding broomsticks and staves zooming above our heads. Taking in the sights, we eventually arrived at the magic school, where we were stopped by the guard at the gates.

"Um, excuse me, girlie?" the guard called out to me. "Do you have an appointment? Unfortunately, I can't let you go see Miss Yuicia if you don't."

He was nice and polite but wouldn't let us go through.

"I don't, but can you just tell her that Chise is here to see her?"

"Sorry, girlie, but Miss Yuicia is very busy and she doesn't have time to see anyone without an appointment, even nobles and royalty."

Since this was an independent city, one's rank didn't matter here. The guard seemed quite used to royals and nobles trying to force their way in by flaunting their titles, so he very politely told me in advance that that wouldn't work.

"Besides, Miss Yuicia is waiting for a very special guest today. She has told us to turn away all visitors."

So she was expecting someone more important than me to visit, huh? It was probably work-related, then. I was a bit disappointed, but I mostly felt proud of what my little disciple had accomplished.

"I see. That's a shame. I'll come back another time."

"It's too bad we won't get to see Kuro and Yuicia." Teto pouted.

We had done what we came here to do, so we could just head back home and schedule a meeting with Yuicia at a later date.

"Master! Wait for me, Master!"

I had turned around and was starting to make my way back into the city when, all of a sudden, I heard someone land behind us with their broom and Yuicia's voice calling for me.

"Yuicia! What are you doing here? Aren't you expecting an important guest?"

"Do you really think there is anyone more important than you?! Why are you going home?" she asked.

The guard looked back and forth between Yuicia and me, the truth of our relationship slowly dawning on him.

"P-Please accept my apologies!" he said, his face red as a tomato and cold sweat running down his body as he bowed at a ninety-degree angle. "I hadn't realized you were Miss Yuicia's guest!"

Yuicia let out a sigh. "Don't apologize. It's my fault," she said. "I should've given you a

more accurate description of what she looks like.”

The guard, an apologetic look on his face, proceeded with the formalities to let me enter the school.

“Thanks,” I said. “And I’m sorry; my looks must have confused you.”

With those words, I quickly used a little transformation spell to turn myself into a beautiful, more mature-looking woman. While I was technically stuck in the body of a twelve-year-old for the rest of my life, I could still use magic to change my appearance at will.



"I should've used transformation magic before coming here," I said.

I heard the guard let out an astonished "Wh-Whoa..."

My little demonstration done, I turned myself back into my usual self. For some reason, the guard looked slightly disappointed as the four of us made our way through the gates.

"Still, how did you know we had come to see you?" I asked.

"Your timing was perfect!" Teto added.

As we were strolling through the school, a group of cat-siths appeared and came to walk beside Yuicia.

"The cat-siths told me," she replied. "If I had been a few seconds later, you would've been gone!"

Cat-siths could understand human language, so perhaps one of them had overheard our conversation with the guard and gone to get Yuicia.

The four of us made our way through the school, students and teachers greeting us on the way until we reached Yuicia's house right behind the building.

"Welcome back, Master. And welcome, Lady Chise, Lady Teto, Miss Beretta," Ai greeted us when we entered.

"Long time no see, Ai," Beretta said.

The two of them proceeded to stare at each other in complete silence for a few seconds.

"Um... Miss Beretta and Miss Ai are glaring at each other. Is that normal?" Yuicia asked me in a hushed voice, a concerned look on her face.

"They're probably just talking telepathically," I said.

Mechanoids could exchange vast quantities of information with each other with a single look. I decided to let them be and changed the topic. "Yuicia, we'd like to go see Kuro and Tora. Can we?"

"We haven't seen them in sooo long!" Teto whined.

"Sure. They're behind the house. Let's go say hi," Yuicia said, a tinge of melancholy in her voice as she led us to them.

The World Tree seed we had given her when she left all those years ago had grown enormous, and it seemed that a lot of the cat-siths liked to relax and hang out under it.

As we made our way there, two little cat-siths, a black one and a tabby one, trotted towards us, bumping their heads against Teto's hands and mine with happy meows. We crouched down to pet them, and they purred in contentment as they started sucking our mana.

When they were satisfied, they led us a bit farther into Yuicia's backyard, stopping in front of two small tombstones.

"Hey, Kuro, Tora. It's been a while." I greeted them softly as I knelt on the ground and brought my hands together.

"It's been so long! Did you miss us?" Teto asked.

They didn't answer, of course; they had already passed away a long time ago, along with a lot of other cat-siths. For a while, the only noise in the backyard was the sound of the World Tree leaves swaying in the wind.

"Master, Miss Teto, I'm sure Kuro and Tora must be happy. They have so many children and grandchildren," Yuicia said to cheer us up.

The black cat-sith who had led us to the tombstones jumped onto her shoulder and started purring as she scratched its chin.

"How many centuries has it been since Kuro and Tora died?" Yuicia asked, her voice cracking slightly. "I thought they'd stay with me forever... Even after all these years, I still can't believe they're really gone."

Cat-siths had rather long life spans, but they unfortunately weren't immortal like me or Yuicia. Picking up on her sadness, the cat-siths that were hanging around the World Tree swarmed towards her, jumping on her back and rubbing their bodies against her legs.

"A-Ah, come on guys, it hurts," she protested.

I couldn't help but chuckle. "They really like you."

"It looks heavy, though," Teto noted, watching Yuicia slowly disappear under a mountain of meowing cats.

"Master, Miss Teto, stop laughing and help me!"

Still chuckling, the two of us started gently picking up the cats to free Yuicia.

"Come on now, everyone, you're hurting Yuicia," I chided the cat-siths.

"There's too many of you here," Teto said as we flung the cats in the air one at a time.

Their little fairy wings started fluttering, and all of them made it to the ground safely. They were pretty grumpy about how roughly we had treated them, though, meowing in dissatisfaction. The ones who could communicate telepathically with humans protested directly in our minds, asking, "What are you doing, meow?! We were just trying to help, meow!"

The solemn atmosphere from earlier was totally gone now, and a wry smile appeared on my lips.

"Thank you for helping me, Master, Miss Teto," Yuicia said.

"Good grief, we can't even pay our respects to Kuro and Tora in peace," I said, but there was no anger in my voice.

Teto chimed in, "It was fun though!"

The cat-siths seemed to take that as an invitation to come back, but this time, they didn't target just Yuicia. Soon, the three of us were covered in cats.

"They always do this when I come to say hi to Kuro and Tora, and I always end up laughing," Yuicia chuckled.

"I'm sure Kuro would much rather see you laugh than look sad," I said.

"If you cry, you get punched in the face with cats!" Teto quipped.

No matter how long of a life span cat-siths had compared to other creatures, there would always come a day when we'd have to say goodbye to them. Kuro might have been the first one to go, but it definitely hadn't been the last. But every time Yuicia looked down, Kuro's descendants would instantly come to her to try to distract her and make her smile again.

Watching my disciple all grown-up, I could finally say it: Yuicia had become a great witch.

AFTERWORD

To new readers and old readers, hello. This is Aloha Zachou.

I'd like to give my biggest thanks to everyone who picked this book up, my editor I-san, Tetubuta-sama for the lovely illustrations he drew for the series, and everyone online who looked at my work before it was published as a book.

A manga adaptation of this series by Shin Haruhara-sama is currently streaming in *Gangan ONLINE*; Chise and Teto's interactions are absolutely adorable, so I highly suggest you go give it a try.

This volume starts with the twenty-sixth chapter of the fourth part of the web novel and covers the fifth part. I have rearranged the chapters so the story would flow more smoothly. As a result, this volume ended up even longer than the previous one. I can't help it—I just always end up adding to the story. I usually plan for chapters to be between three thousand and five thousand characters, but whenever I feel like something is missing or when I have a new idea, I can't help but add it. I also take the feedback I get on the web novel into account. Before I knew it, this volume had become longer than all of the previous ones.

I'd like to say I will be more careful about that in the future, but my main goal has always been to write a story I was happy with and not to make any compromises, so it'll most definitely happen again.

The Wasteland of Nothingness has become a lot livelier in this volume; I wonder what kind of relationship Chise will develop with the demons and the mythical beasts, not to mention all of the friends she will be making in the outside world as well? I hope you're looking forward to their next adventure as much as I am.

Please keep treating me—Aloha Zachou—well from now on too.

Lastly, I'd like to thank every reader who picked this book up once more.

BONUS SHORT STORY

OVERCOMING PHOBIAS WITH YUMMY FOOD

One day, shortly after Yuicia moved in with us, I sent Teto to run some errands.

“I’m home, Lady Witch!” she announced when she was back. “There were a bunch of really fresh-looking fish at the port, so I bought some!”

“Welcome back Teto... Wait, what’s *that*?” I asked, pointing at an item in her bag.

“It looked yummy so I bought it!” she replied, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

It was at that moment that Yuicia entered the room.

“Ah, welcome back, Miss Teto! Are those the ingredients for tonight’s dinner? Can I—Aaah!” Yuicia peered into Teto’s bag and let out a high-pitched scream that woke Kuro from its nap. The little cat-sith jumped off the sofa with a worried meow as it rushed towards us.

“Teto said it looked yummy, so she bought it... The octopus,” I said.

Yuicia shook her head from left to right violently. “No way! Absolutely no way!” she exclaimed. “Th-That thing... It’s not made for humans to eat!”

“I-Is that so?” I asked.

This reminded me that, back on Earth, certain cultures called octopuses “devil fish” and refused to eat them. I had presumed people in this world might be more open-minded—they *did* consume monsters, after all. However, judging by Yuicia’s reaction, I might have been mistaken.

“Um... When I was small, my dad caught an octopus once,” she started. “But then, it wrapped its slimy tentacles around me, and its suckers stuck to my skin. I’ve been terrified of them since...” She hung her head and tried to make herself as small as possible, as if to apologize for her reaction.

"I see."

So this was *personal*, huh?

Teto turned towards me, a sad look on her face. "It's such a shame Yuicia doesn't like octopus! Lady Witch, we should have a takoyaki party! I wanna have some yummy, crispy, gooey takoyaki!" she whined, tugging on my sleeve.

A wry smile curled on my lips at her childish attitude. Meanwhile, Yuicia was staring at us with a serious expression as she audibly gulped her saliva. "Miss Chise, what's a 'takoyaki party?'" she asked. "Miss Teto used the words 'crispy' and 'gooey...' That sounds really tasty."

"It's when people gather and make a bunch of takoyaki—grilled balls of batter filled with octopus—to eat together," I explained. "I'm going to cook some right now, do you wanna try one when I'm done?"

After a few seconds, Yuicia nodded timidly. She still looked a bit apprehensive, but her curiosity had won the internal battle within her mind.

All right then, takoyaki for dinner it is, I mused as I started preparing the octopi. Waiting for a moment when Yuicia wasn't looking, I quietly conjured a takoyaki pan using my Creation Magic. After a few minutes, it was dinnertime. I poured some takoyaki mixture into the pan, and a sizzling sound filled the air.

"Whoa! So that's takoyaki!" Yuicia exclaimed next to me. "They're all round, it's amazing! And they look so yummy!"

Her fear of octopuses had gone straight out of the window as she waited for the takoyaki to firm up on the outside. She and Teto wore the same expression of giddy anticipation.

"All righty, all we have to do is add some sauce and flaked bonito on top and it's ready," I said.

"I'll try one, then," Yuicia said, bringing a newly dressed takoyaki to her mouth. Instantly, her eyes shot wide open. "It's so hot! Ah, but the outside is crispy and the inside is so soft! It's delicious! And the chewiness of the octopus adds such a nice touch!"

She took another takoyaki, blew on it so she wouldn't burn herself this time, and popped it in her mouth. She repeated the process a few more times, and I offered to let her try making some takoyaki herself.

"Aaah, I broke them..." she said dejectedly.

"Don't worry; they don't always turn out perfectly round. It happens," I reassured her.

Teto and I happily ate Yuicia's imperfect takoyaki. After that, we took turns grilling the little octopus balls and ate until our bellies were on the verge of bursting.

From that day onward, we started cooking more and more octopus-based dishes, like fried calamari and octopus carpaccio, and we even added some to our paellas.

Yuicia successfully overcame her phobia.



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Making Magic: The Sweet Life of a Witch Who Knows an Infinite MP Loophole Volume
5

by Aloha Zachou

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