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# The Invincible Little Lady

# **THE INVINCIBLE LITTLE LADY**

**–Douyara Watashi No Karada Wa Kanzen Muteki No You Desu Ne–**

**- VOLUME 2 -**

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**[ J-NOVEL CLUB ]**

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*The*  
**Invincible**  
*Little Lady*

# Characters



It was a very quiet place. At the center of the garden was a fancy table with two women seated on the chairs around it. One of the women looked to be around the same age as my mother, while the other appeared to be a girl roughly my age.

# CHAPTER 1

## SECOND YEAR AT THE ACADEMY

### 1. MY SECOND YEAR

After a tumultuous first year at the academy, I started my second year of studies by turning over a new leaf. I, Mary Regalia—now eleven years old—was presently in the middle of putting on the personally designed uniform Tutte had handed me.

Starting today, I would be studying not at the Solos class, but at the Aleyios class instead. As such, I'd needed to alter my uniform's design, and while I was at it, I'd decided to change the uniform from a blazer to a sailor type.

The collar of my white blouse had been changed to a sailor uniform's typical triangular collar, with plain, navy-blue lines on its fringes. I'd placed a ribbon under the collar and over my chest to accentuate the outfit. Beneath the blouse, the uniform featured a corset-type skirt whose top extended to just below my collar, and I made sure the emblem of my new class had been sewn onto the sleeves.

Having finished changing into my uniform, I twirled in place in front of my full-length mirror, confirming everything sat on me just right.

"Yes, it's a perfect fit," I said, satisfied.

"Last year's uniform is already too small for you," Tutte noted as she moved onto her next task.

I've said this before, but people in this world matured faster than I'd imagined. This was actually quite the bother, since my clothes size seemed to grow by the day. Everyone else probably didn't feel that uncomfortable with this, but my memories from life in Japan still haunted me. It made me feel weird, like everyone—myself included—were middle schoolers in primary schooler clothes.

As a bit of a digression, my mother had recommended we put blazer uniforms like the one I'd made last year up for sale in the Regalia duchy's clothing stores. As a result,

nobles with children enrolling in their first year in the academy had started gossiping that a lady who'd worn the uniform had gotten top scores, and many of them bought the uniforms for their daughters. The stores offered to include different class emblems, with each store modifying the uniform in unique ways. In any case, it was selling well.

I sat on the chair in front of the mirror, allowing Tutte to comb my hair.

"You're getting a chance at a fresh start and a new life at the academy, Lady Mary," Tutte said.

"Yes. I'm going to reflect on last year's failings, and this time, I'll do what I was intending to do—I'll be the most unremarkable, faceless nobody in the academy!"

"F-Faceless nobody?" Tutte asked, confused. "I'm not sure I quite understand, but I'll do my best to help you."

After checking my attire and confirming my goals for the coming year, we left the room and got into the carriage that took me to the academy, as always.

Last year, I'd accepted the headmaster's proposal, allowing me to finish my remaining lessons in the Solos class while taking elementary lessons on magic in the Aleyios class. However, after I'd performed the second-order spell Magic Arrow in front of Professor Fried, he decided to cut down on the number of classes I'd need, allowing me to finish my joint coursework comfortably.

The more I learned about magic, the bigger my expectations became. As it turned out, spells in this world would all work the same regardless of who'd cast them. In other words, me having a large amount of mana didn't affect how strong my spells became; my Magic Arrows were the same as anyone else's in terms of effectiveness and power. This meant I didn't need to show any restraint when it came to controlling magic—and seeing as restraining my strength was something I struggled with greatly, this was wonderful news.

What's more, the Aleyios class didn't have any tournaments like the Solos class. Mages didn't really compete with each other. This was because the spells themselves were all the same regardless of the individual, and because the division into orders made for an absolute difference in power. Mages capable of second-order spells could band together, but they'd never be able to overcome a mage wielding third-order spells.

Each order being stronger than the one before it was an absolute law, so if mages were to compete, the one capable of casting better spells would win by default.

Also, unlike the other two classes, where people studied for the sake of their future career paths in the kingdom, there were relatively few people aspiring to become mages, so the Aleyios class had fewer students. As such, the class didn't encourage competition, since they didn't want to needlessly lose what few students they had.

This meant the Aleyios class had no competitions where I could accidentally stand out and expose my powers, and even if I were to cast spells, they wouldn't be any different from the other students'.

*The Aleyios class is basically everything I could have asked for from the academy. But I guess I can only think that way because I've reflected on my failures in the Solos class.*

With that thought in mind, I stared idly out the carriage's window as the academy came into view. Before long, the brickwork gate I'd passed every day last year entered my field of vision, and I felt my anxiety about my new life in the academy swell up.

We stopped at the same parking spot as usual, whereupon Tutte stepped out of the carriage to clear the way for me. After getting out of the carriage, I took a deep breath and looked up at the building.

"By the way, where's the Aleyios lounge again?" I asked.

I'd actually been to the Aleyios lounge before, but because Tutte was always there to help guide me, I'd forgotten how to get there. I felt a bit ashamed of my carelessness, but the thought that I could always rely on Tutte only reinforced my tendencies.

At my question, Tutte, who was standing behind me, walked ahead to guide me to my destination. I followed after her. We entered the large academy building, but as we walked through the halls, a small mass came hurtling toward me.

"Lady Maaaaaary!"

"Oh, Safina. Good day to— Buhwaa!"

As I pinched up my skirt to greet her in a ladylike manner, Safina tackled me. Despite me not taking any damage, she did knock the words out of my mouth. Safina, who was dressed adorably in a uniform that matched mine, rubbed her cheek against my belly

like a lonely, anxious puppy.

As I gently patted Safina's fluffy chestnut hair, Magiluka approached from the same direction Safina had, also clad in a uniform of the same design as ours.

"Oh, Safina, that is most unladylike," she said with an exasperated expression.

"Whoa, big..." I muttered, staring fixedly at a specific part of Magiluka's body as she approached.

"Huh?" she asked.

I looked down at my own chest. I'd gotten confident that I'd developed in that area recently, but now I felt something stab into my ego.

*I didn't consider this...* For more voluptuous people, the uniform we were wearing ended up accentuating certain features.

"Mmm... Ah, Lady Mary, good day to you." Having apparently had her fill, Safina pulled away from me (unaware of how stricken with disappointment I was) and properly greeted me with a grin.

*Oh, gosh, she's so cute...*

That gesture was so girlish and adorable of her that I had to restrain the urge to hug her. By the way, Safina's own assets were relatively modest.

"So, you'll be going to the Aleyios class starting today," Safina said. "It'll be lonely without you in Solos."

As she pouted, I gently patted Safina on the head and recalled how I'd told my friends from the Solos class about my transfer. When I finished breaking the news, everyone seemed oddly convinced of my explanation.

"I think that might be for the best."

"I guess our class was too limiting for you."

"I think we'll all live longer this way."

But while everyone else seemed to accept and understand, Safina had taken the news the hardest and was saddened the most. But the others took her to a corner, and after a conversation I wasn't privy to, she begrudgingly accepted my transfer to the Aleyios class. I had no idea what they told her, though...

"It really is a pity," Sacher said, walking in with his hands behind his head. "It's like Lady Mary ran off with the win."

Irked by his rude comment ruining the atmosphere, I kicked him gently in the shin to silence him.

"It's not like we're not going to see each other anymore," I said, ignoring Sacher as he knelt and writhed in pain. "I mean, we're seeing each other right now, right? Whenever we have time, we can all meet up. It's not a problem," I explained jovially, so as to cheer Safina up.

Magiluka regarded Sacher with an exasperated glance and then joined in my attempt to lift Safina's spirits. "Besides, second-year Solos students start learning magic, so you'll be sharing lessons with us," she said.

"That's right... Ah, I have to get going. I have class," Safina said and got to her feet. She smiled, bowed, and then turned on her heels and hurried over to the Solos lounge. Magiluka saw her off with an expression of tired relief.

"Wait, shouldn't you be going too?" Magiluka asked coolly as she turned her eyes to Sacher.

"I'm going!" he said, tearing up a bit. "But is it just me, or have you guys been treating me like trash recently?"

He got up, the pain in his leg apparently dying down.

"That's not important," I said, shooing Sacher away with a wave of my hand. "Just make sure no stupid cretins try to mess with Safina, would you?" Since Safina was so prone to loneliness, I figured she needed someone to keep an eye on her, so I was tasking him with her protection.

"Sure!" He grinned, seemingly forgetting his complaint from a moment ago. "Sounds like something a knight would do! All right, I'll do it!"

He then ran off in the same direction as Safina.

“Aww...” I said, overcome with emotion as I saw two of my friends go elsewhere.

“Now, Lady Mary, let’s make our way to the Aleyios lounge,” Magiluka said, trying to cheer me up.

I nodded and followed her, trying to change my outlook.

## 2. A BRILLIANT IDEA

My life at the Aleyios class was almost surprisingly peaceful. I didn’t have to spar with the instructor at the arena, nor did I suffer the embarrassment of slipping and breaking any weapons. A perfectly peaceful school life.

Of course, I had drawn some attention to myself simply by virtue of having transferred in from another class, but after I showed my practical skills with magic in class, the rumors surrounding me from the Solos class gradually died down, and everyone started regarding me as an average student.

*Wonderful... This is exactly the kind of school life I wanted!*

On one unassuming day, I cheered silently to myself as I sipped on the tea Tutte had prepared for me in the Aleyios lounge. Much like the other classes’ lounges, the Aleyios one was a spacious room divided by partitions, and it too was furnished with simple wooden chairs and tables as well as sofas.

Magiluka had introduced me to a nice spot in the corner where sunlight filtered into the room, and it became the place I usually sat whenever I had time off. She and I were seated there at a round table with four chairs surrounding it.

“What type of magic are we practicing in tomorrow’s practical class?” I asked as I relished my fragrant tea.

“Fire magic, I believe,” Magiluka replied, enjoying her tea as well.

“Fire magic. I’m looking forward to that,” I said, struggling to maintain a dignified

expression against my urge to smirk complacently.

*I mean, in my past life I couldn't use magic whatsoever. It's a bit different from how I'd been excited at being able to move around in this life—this makes me so excited that I can't help but smile!*

After I'd finished offering excuses for my behavior to no one in particular in my mind, I thought back to the offensive magic training we'd started recently. It was a very fun lesson. I'd held up my hands and shot ice and fire, actually performing all sorts of magic that wouldn't have been possible in my past life. My heart was dancing with excitement, and with my repertoire of spells growing bigger every day, I couldn't help but smile.

"I have to say, you really are living up to expectations, Lady Mary," Magiluka said. "In such a small period of time, you've learned half the spells a first-year does. Everyone is impressed with your learning speed, from the teachers and the instructors to even the first-years and our classmates."

"Wait, for real?" I stared at her, my eyes wide as plates. "That's not good!"

"It isn't?" Magiluka asked quizzically.

"Uh, um, forget I said that. I was just talking to myself." I dodged her question and laughed dryly.

Last year, I'd had so much fun at the academy that I'd almost exposed myself, and this time, I was about to repeat that same mistake. Realizing this, I resolved to restrain myself going forward... although honestly, I was wanting to learn how to use more spells...

"Lady Mary!"

As I repeatedly chanted words of self-restraint in my head, Safina hurried into the lounge, snapping me out of my meditation. The maxims I'd adorned my heart with dissipated like fog as I watched her hurry in, with Sacher following behind her in a disinterested gait. That made all the other Aleyios students in the lounge stare at us.

*I can't blame them for being curious. You don't see Solos students in this lounge too often, and Safina and Sacher are pretty famous at the academy.*

Both of them were students who'd used magic during their first year tournament, which had made them well known among the Aleyios students. Magiluka too had drawn a lot of attention to herself last year, since she needed to be a strong student to live up to her family's expectations. All of these famous students gathering in one place was sure to draw people's interest.

This was actually somewhat of a problem for me. Whenever the four of us gathered, we'd be scrutinized by the stares of curious onlookers, making it difficult to relax.

"Isn't there a good place we can meet in...?" I whispered to myself.

"What do you mean?" Safina asked curiously.

"I mean, we stand out quite a bit, don't you think? Everyone's staring. I was wondering if there isn't a place where we can meet up to talk quietly."

"Yes, being stared at by people from another class is stressful..." Safina nodded in agreement.

"In that case, why don't we ask the teachers to borrow an empty room?" Magiluka suggested.

"Huh? We can do that?!" I asked, accidentally raising my voice, earning us more stares from the students around us. I looked away from them, feeling terribly self-conscious and embarrassed.

"Well, as you can see, our academy is very spacious," Magiluka explained. "I'm sure there's plenty of unused rooms. But, well, we can't exactly ask the teachers to lend us a room without good reason, and we need at least five people to put in the request."

I counted the members of our group, optimistically trying to twist things so we had the right numbers, but Magiluka shot me down at once. I slumped my shoulders, disappointed.

"Why don't we ask the prince, then? We'll have five students if he joins." Sacher, who'd seemed disinterested so far, made that ridiculous suggestion with a smug smile, causing Safina, Magiluka, and me to freeze up at once. "Hmm, but what about our reason for requesting the room? I don't see them giving us a room just so we can chat over tea," the insensitive idiot continued, unaware of our thoughts.

"Of course they won't," Magiluka replied. "Even if we're meeting up for conversation, they'll still demand that we give a good reason."

"Then how about this?" I suggested, my thoughts finally whirring into life and coming up with a somewhat forced but brilliant idea. "If we're involving Sir Reifus, why don't we tell the teachers we want a place where students from the three classes can exchange information?"

"I see," Magiluka said, clapping her hands together. "Yes, there really is no precedent for a place where Solos, Aleyios, and Lalaios students can gather in one place. That might convince the teachers."

"All right, then let's get to it," I said, proceeding to stand up and head for the lounge's exit despite having no idea where to go.

"By the way, who's going to ask His Highness to join us?" Safina whispered behind me, her face pale as she brought up the first and biggest problem.

"Well, obviously it'll be Magil—"

"Why, it'll be Lady Mary," Magiluka said quickly before I could shift the responsibility to her. "She came up with the idea, after all, so she'll take responsibility and convince His Highness. Isn't that right, Lady Mary?"

Magiluka hurriedly got ready to leave and got to her feet.

"Now, I'll go ask the teachers what the formalities are for requesting a room, so I wish you good luck with convincing His Highness."

Having said her piece, Magiluka briskly left the lounge. I was taken aback by how she hadn't left me a single opening to take advantage of, and after a few moments of silence, I laid my hands on the table and hung my head.

"What's wrong?" Sacher, who felt no pressure whatsoever, asked as he approached the entrance to the lounge. "Aren't we going to go talk to the prince?"

Heaving one deep sigh, I pulled myself back together, spurred myself onward, and raised my head.

*You're doing this to get a peaceful place to talk in, Mary!*

Getting the prince involved in this for a selfish reason put a great deal of pressure on me, but I was faintly expecting Reifus to simply consent with a smile. Shaking my head, I took Safina's hand and pulled her along as I stomped away.

\* \* \*

"Yes, I don't mind."

A few minutes later, as we stood before him with a mixture of resolve and anxiety, the prince readily complied.

"I've actually been often puzzled by the fact that there's no space for us to ask students from other classes for their opinions. I would understand if it was just within the Lalaios class, but when it comes to magic or martial arts, asking people who specialize in those fields would be best. If high achievers like you four start gathering somewhere, I'm sure people will join you before long. It's a very appealing idea, I think. It's the kind of idea that suits you, Lady Mary—you're always thinking outside the box, and you're decisive to boot. I'm truly impressed."

As he continued talking on and on, looking thoroughly impressed with me and bringing up all sorts of points I'd never even remotely considered, I felt myself break into a cold sweat.

"N-Not at all... Lord Reifus..." I muttered with a stiff smile.

Everyone around us was reacting with impressed realization at his explanation, and I didn't have the mental presence to deny him at that moment.

*Aaaah, please make it so people stop getting the wrong idea about me again!* I prayed to God behind my stiff smile.

"...and to do that, we'd need a place spacious enough for people to gather in," Reifus concluded.

"N-Now, if I may, I think that since this is the first time such a venture is being attempted... Maybe we should keep it on a small scale...?"

It felt like the idea was veering away from my initial concept, so I tried to correct the course of the prince's thoughts, shrinking back in fear all the while.

"I see. Let's get started on the preparations right away, then," the prince said enthusiastically, unaware of my dread. "Magiluka said she'll handle the submission, yes?"

Sacher followed Reifus, and as I watched the two boys leave, I let out a deep sigh, patting Safina—who had been hiding behind my back the whole time—on the head. She'd done well keeping her nerve around the prince for so long...

### 3. THERE'S ONE IN THERE

"Huh? There aren't any free rooms?" I said as our group, Reifus included, met up with Magiluka in a corridor.

"Apparently not," Magiluka said. "Students used to be allowed to borrow rooms in the old campus building, but it's since been deemed forbidden for use."

"There's an old campus building?" I asked, glancing out the corridor's window.

I looked for the old campus building, but try as I might, I couldn't see it from where we were. The new campus building's central lane led to the clock tower, which stood at the center of the academy, with all the other facilities, such as the arena, training ground, laboratory, and sports ground built around it. Nonetheless, the old campus building was reportedly somewhere on the premises.

"The old campus building is forbidden from use?" Reifus asked. "Is the structure worn out from age or something of the sort?"

"No, nothing like that. It's just..." Magiluka said evasively. Her tone gave me a bad feeling, which made me start thinking that maybe we'd be better off giving up on the idea.

"There's one in there," she explained.

"One of what?" I asked quizzically.

"A ghost," she replied at once.

The prince audibly swallowed, and a very pale Safina and Tutte clung to me fearfully. Meanwhile, my eyes lit up with expectation.

“What, really?! Let’s go check it out!” I said excitedly.

“Huuuh?!” shouted everyone else present.

“What?” Magiluka, who’d expected me to get scared, turned to look at me. “Lady Mary, you’re not shaken by this sort of thing?”

“I mean, it’s a ghost! I’ve always wanted to see a ghost! Please, let’s go look for it!” I pleaded excitedly, my eyes glittering. *I mean, this is a ghost! A ghost!*

In my past life, it was said that only special people could see ghosts, and that ghosts were frightening, inexplicable things whose very existence was uncertain. But in this fantasy world, they were considered a type of undead monster. They were visible to everyone and even defeatable—in other words, they were a type of monster that was par for the course for this world, no different from an animal, so I wasn’t scared of their very being.

“Th-That said, I don’t think having the old campus building barred from use because of a ghost problem is acceptable.” Reifus put the conversation back on track, although he was a bit taken aback by my enthusiasm.

“That much is true,” I agreed. “The professors could simply banish the ghost.”

This world had something called holy magic, and our professors, being veteran magic users, should have been able to do away with any ghost in no time. Reifus was right; it made no sense to shut the old campus building away and just leave it unoccupied.

“So, what do we do?” Sacher said, his expression rife with curiosity. “Do we check it out?”

I nodded in agreement with him, my own expectations rising. Tutte and Safina were, as one might expect, clinging to me with their faces pale with fear, trembling and shaking their heads. The prince, however, regarded my and Sacher’s enthusiasm like he was looking at something heartwarming, only for his expression to then become serious.

“Hmm. If we don’t do something about the old campus building, we won’t be able to

secure a room for ourselves. I say going to check the place out is a fine idea."

With Reifus in agreement, we put the two girls who were against the idea between the rest of us and made our way to the old campus building.

\* \* \*

We arrived at the old campus building, which was a good distance away from the new campus building and completely devoid of people. The building was a modern-looking two-story brickwork structure atop a small hill. The area around it was quite spacious and open, it had plenty of trees planted around its outer circumference, and it was quite sunny. All in all, it seemed like a quiet, atmospheric destination that was isolated from the boisterous noise of the academy.

*This is a good place. I'd love to relax here.*

But while I looked at the building with expectant eyes, Safina and Tutte regarded it with terror, and Magiluka and Reifus seemed anxious. Sacher, meanwhile, let out an enthusiastic "Ooooh," apparently impressed with its size.

At the center of the structure was a set of wooden double doors. We stopped in front of them, looking up at the building again. It didn't look abandoned, and it, in fact, seemed clean and tended to, which honestly drowned out any scary atmosphere the place might have had.

*Then again, we did come here during the daytime,* I noted to myself.

"Th-There, we checked it out! Now let's go back, Lady Mary!" Safina squeaked, looking around skittishly as she grabbed onto my clothes.

"Oh? It's open," Sacher said, pushing the door open and ruthlessly dashing Safina's suggestion.

"That's odd," Magiluka said, approaching the door. "Considering it's off-limits, I'd have thought they'd be keeping the place locked. What is grandfa—ahem, I mean, what is the headmaster thinking?"

*She's right. If students are supposed to be kept out of this building, why isn't it being managed better?*

"If the place is looking like this, maybe the whole ghost thing was fake?" Sacher said, looking like all the wind was taken out of his sails. It seemed that the possibility that his expectations wouldn't be met made him lose interest. He grabbed the doorknob and made to close the half-open door.

"Eeeek!"

But then, Tutte, who was in the back of the group, let out a screech, prompting us to turn around and look at her.

"What's wrong, Tutte?" I asked.

"I-I think I just saw someone..." Tutte pointed a shaking finger toward the window of a room in a distant corner of the building.

We couldn't see what was going on inside from where we were standing, but Tutte, who was behind us, could see it more clearly.

"Let's get out of here, Lady Mary!" Safina implored me.

"Let's go in! Ghosts, ghosts! ♪" I said, my line overlapping with hers.

I pulled the unwilling Safina by the arm, and Sacher pushed the door open and led us inside. The interior was dim, and silence hung over the place. It certainly gave off a scary atmosphere, and overwhelmed by this, I was starting to tense up a bit. I found myself placing my hand over the Legendary Sword (Cringe) I'd brought with me for self-defense.

The entrance hall was built as an atrium, with the second floor visible from the first. A flagstone trail shaped like a cross ran through the interior with the doorway as its base. Sunlight shone in on the stone tiles from the skylight in the ceiling, which was as tall as it had looked from the outside. Even without the lights on, the warm light filtering in dispelled the gloomy atmosphere within the entrance hall—although that didn't extend to the rest of the structure.

"It's pretty spacious, and there are a lot of rooms," I mused as I looked around, walking toward the center.

Safina, who was still clinging to my back, followed close after me, and Tutte was right behind me too.

"Which room did you see the figure in?" I asked my maid.

"Huh?" Tutte asked back. "You're going there, Lady Mary?"

"I mean, we've come this far." I casually turned to face Tutte, trying to encourage her. "We may as well see the ghost. I mean, it's an undead monster. If something happens, I'm sure we'll be able to beat it between the five of us."

Everyone seemed shocked by my statement.

"Lady Mary," Reifus said uncomfortably, "ghosts aren't counted as undead monsters. The undead you speak of are skeletons and zombies, and they have material form. There are no monsters that are formless like ghosts... and I'm afraid to say that as we are, we probably couldn't even touch a ghost, much less defeat it."

Leaning on my knowledge of RPGs, I'd assumed ghosts were undead monsters, the same as the other monsters I knew—creatures that could be touched and taken down. But his explanation made me realize I was wrong. Ghosts were still inexplicable phenomena in this world. And the fact they were visible and harmful to everyone made them even more tricky than in my past life.

*Yeah, I think I can see why everyone's so terrified of the ghost now! Drat, now I'm scared too!*

As late in the game as it may have been, I was starting to become afraid. But it was too late now. Everyone went very pale at once. I followed their gazes, noticing they weren't fixed on me, but rather on the hallway behind me. I fearfully turned around, noticing something at the end of the hall in a dim corner where the sunlight didn't reach.

A figure with a white, hazy outline was clearly staring in our direction. It felt like the spot she was standing in was chillingly cold.

*Ghosts come out during daytime in this world?! Nooo, if it isn't a monster, what is that thing?! I'm scared!*

The figure started disappearing and appearing, moving closer to us each time it flickered back into view. Overcome with panic, I desperately drew my Legendary Sword (Cringe) and held it up.

"Come at me if you dare, you monsteeeer!" I cried out.

"Lady Mary, that isn't a monster!" Tutte said, pulling on my sleeve from behind. "We need to run!"

But then, suddenly, another figure stepped out and stood between us and the ghost.

"Everyone, close your eyes!" the figure said, holding up a staff. "Light!"

I could tell it was a woman's voice. Her voice echoed with power, and as she spoke, a magical light flashed from the tip of her staff. Repelled by the light, the ghost turned and fled.

As we stared in blank amazement, the woman turned around to face us. She lifted the hood hanging over her eyes and regarded us with a smile.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"C-Class Master!" Magiluka said.

*Ah, so this is the Aleyios class master...*

## 4. ANOTHER INCIDENT

Less than an hour after our encounter with the ghost, we walked over to the open café between the new and old campus buildings. I sat around the table with Safina, Tutte, Magiluka, Sacher, and Reifus. Our gazes were fixed on one person.

"Hello," she said. "My apologies for not introducing myself. I'm the Aleyios class master, Alice Ordile."

Instructor Alice took off her hood, revealing her pretty, straight blonde hair, and bowed her head in greeting. She had a roundish face with gentle features, and she wore silver-rimmed glasses over her kind blue eyes. She gave off a quiet impression at first sight, but we'd just seen her single-handedly repel a ghost. Between that and her serving as class master, it was clear she was quite the active individual.

Incidentally, despite both of us being girls, I found my eyes drawn to the two mounds of flesh bulging from her chest that her robe was struggling to contain.



*Do all Aleyios girls grow up to be so busty? If so, when's it my turn?* I glanced down at my own chest, dissatisfied, as I replied, "Oh, um, nice to meet you. I'm—"

"Oh, no need for introductions." She waved her hand dismissively with a sly smile. "I know who you all are. Hee hee, you're all very famous in the academy, after all. Isn't that right, White Princess?"

"At any rate, I was surprised that the ghost was real, but I was even more surprised that you could just ward it off like that," Reifus said, impressed.

"I apologize for being so forward and aggressive in your presence, Your Highness." Instructor Alice bowed her head modestly.

"No, you saved us." Reifus shook his head with a smile. "Was that holy magic?"

"No, Your Highness, it wasn't," Instructor Alice replied. "All I did was use magic to produce light. Ghosts dislike light produced by magic, making it ideal for warding them away."

I could only nod vaguely at Instructor Alice's explanation.

"So, you didn't completely defeat the ghost?" Magiluka asked.

"I'm afraid not," she replied with a shake of her head.

"Can't the professors do something about one ghost?" I chimed in.

"Sadly, none of the professors currently in the academy can use holy magic."

"Huh? Really? Are people who can use holy magic hard to come by?" I asked.

"No, there are many people who can, but it's just that most of them are affiliated with the church, and the academy has history with them. Apparently, one time long ago, the church dispatched someone to teach at the academy, but they got caught up in some sort of incident on campus. Ever since then, the church hasn't cooperated with the academy. I'm not sure how true the story is since it happened twenty years ago, but what's certain is the church has continued to not send any professors to the academy to this day, so there haven't been any chances to teach holy magic here. Thankfully, the lack of holy magic users hasn't been an issue since the ghost doesn't seem inclined to leave the old campus building, so I simply patrol the place periodically to ensure no

one wanders inside out of curiosity. Nothing serious has happened yet.”

I wasn’t able to look Instructor Alice in the eye. I averted my gaze from her bothered expression. *I’m sorry, Instructor. I just did the exact thing you’ve been trying to prevent people from doing...* I apologized to her inwardly.

“Are you an expert on ghosts, Instructor Alice?” I asked. “I mean, you seem to know how to beat them, so I was wondering whether you might be from the church or something.”

“No, I’m not related to the church. I’m just an expert on ghosts...” Instructor Alice said, looking a bit bashful. “Well, to be precise, I’m an expert on undead monsters, so I happen to be better equipped to handle this than the rest.”

*This gentle-looking lady is an expert on the undead? What a surprise!*

I initially thought she’d be a gentle softie with a penchant for cute things, but having heard her explanation, I felt ashamed of myself for making assumptions based on her appearance.

“So, what are we going to do about the ghost... ma’am?” Sacher, who’d remained silent so far, spoke with unfamiliar politeness.

She looked at us, seeming a bit conflicted, and then replied, “The grand master’s instructions are to maintain the status quo. I think the academy is trying to avoid friction with the church by looking for people who are former members of the church but are still capable of using holy magic to handle the issue. But it’s looking like they’re struggling to find someone like that, and until they do, the old campus building is going to remain out of bounds.”

*Holy magic... I wonder if I could use it if someone taught me how. Maybe I could find a teacher? Well, if there were someone like that around, they could just take care of the ghost on their own... I tried to come up with a fast solution to this problem, but naturally the answer didn’t come to me that easily. I sighed.*

*No, actually, wait. I could cast a fourth-order spell without anyone teaching me how to. Right... The Argent Knight would be able to...*

As I held onto that thought, I continued to listen to Instructor Alice’s information until we parted ways with her. She warned us to stay away from the old campus building,

but...

\* \* \*

After saying goodbye to Instructor Alice, we walked back to the new campus building with trudging steps.

"We won't be able to use the old campus building until this incident is resolved," Magiluka said, unwilling to give up. "I'll go to the headmaster and ask him for more details."

With this, Magiluka parted ways with us and headed toward the clock tower.

"I'll go with you too," Reifus said. "I want to know the details of the situation, and that incident with the church Miss Alice mentioned is weighing on my mind." With that said, he followed Magiluka, leaving Tutte with Sacher, Safina, and me (the former so-called Three Pranksters).

"What do we do, Lady Mary?" Safina peered into my face anxiously as I watched the other two leave.

"Well... This is kind of a strange question, but could the Argent Knight use holy magic?"

Safina stared at me blankly for a moment, puzzled as to why I asked that question.

"Well..." Tutte, the only one to understand my intention here, answered from behind me. "The Argent Knight could use all spells up to the fourth order, so I'd assume he could employ some holy magic too?"

"I see. I'd like to read the story where he uses holy magic, then. Maybe it'll give me some kind of hint." I shot a glance at Tutte, pushing things along while remaining vague, which only left the other two more puzzled.

"Th-Then, how about we go to the library?" Safina suggested, seemingly giving up on trying to figure out what I was thinking. "Some of the knight's stories should be stored there."

Sacher nodded, apparently concluding that there was no point thinking about what I'd meant.

*"All right, let's go to the library, then," I said. And let's tidy up this incident as quickly as possible so we can secure that nice place as a hangout spot we can relax in.*

I began walking ahead excitedly.

*"Um, Lady Mary, the library is the other way," Tutte said apologetically.*

I felt my face burning as I went red up to my ears and turned around. Tutte took my hand and led me in the right direction, and I followed her with fast steps.

The next day, we all sat gathered at the corner table of the Aleyios lounge as the other students whispered and stared at us.

*Whoa... We stand out... Everyone's staring...*

Although I was engaged in my conversation with the others, I was still anxious on the inside the whole time. It only made sense that everyone else was staring: we not only had two Solos students in our group, but one of us was a Lalaios student who happened to be the crown prince.

*Goodness, what I wouldn't give for a space where we can talk without being stared at...*

And so, I sat there present in body but not in spirit as everyone reported their findings—or really, as just Magiluka reported her findings. The headmaster had told her pretty much the same story Instructor Alice had told us, and he confirmed that they were seeking someone capable of holy magic.

The prince became curious and asked the headmaster about the matter of the church being uncooperative with the academy, but apparently, the headmaster and the faculty didn't know the details around that, except that there had been an incident between the teacher dispatched by the church and a student.

*"And as it turns out, the student who had that incident with the teacher from the church was a first-year at the time," Reifus said, looking at me awkwardly. "One Ferdid Regalia... In other words, your father, Lady Mary."*

I blinked, stupefied, as all sorts of emotions crossed my mind. *Papa dearest... what in the world did you do...?*

## 5. A FLURRY OF SPECULATIONS

That night, I was enjoying dinner with my parents in our mansion's dining hall, but my mind was still occupied by what I'd learned in the lounge that day. According to what Reifus had told me, the student who'd gotten in trouble with the teacher from the church years ago was actually my father.

Instructor Alice and the headmaster had said that the church was refusing to cooperate with the academy because of that incident, but as the prince pointed out to me, all that happened many years ago, which gave the impression that the headmaster was hiding something by leaving part of the story out. Magiluka had posited that it wasn't so much that the church was being uncooperative, but rather that the academy was being reserved about working with them—and for all the church was concerned, if the academy didn't ask for help, it was no skin off their backs.

With all that said, the only ones who really knew what had happened were those involved in the incident at the time and the headmaster. And so, as my family and I were enjoying some after-meal tea, I resolved to ask my father, Ferdid, about the matter.

"Father, there's something I'd like to ask you," I said, my expression anxious.

"Mm? What is it, Mary?" He regarded me with a smile and brought the cup to his lips.

"I heard something in the academy, a story from when you were a first-year..." I said, feeling a bit too hesitant to touch on the heart of the matter. "Um, they said there was an... incident of some sort between you and a teacher dispatched by the church?"

I felt like I was poking at something best left untouched. I was afraid father might get mad and start blaming the academy.

"An incident in my first year? With a teacher? Was there something like that?" father asked.

Apparently, it was such an old incident that father didn't quite remember. He placed a hand on his chin and gazed up at the ceiling, sifting through his memories. He hummed for a few moments as he tried to place the event, then he finally clapped his hands together, apparently having unearthed the details.

"Oh, that! There was that one time I beat a teacher to submission!" he said gleefully, seemingly happy to have remembered.

*What?! You did what, father?!* I could only regard him with shock. "Wh-Why did you do that?"

"Hmm, why was it again? Right, I think it's because in the detached building— Uhh, I think you call it the old campus building nowadays. Well, back then, I found a good napping spot there. While I was sleeping, someone was making a lot of noise in the building, so I walked up to him and beat him up! Turned out he was a teacher... I think that's how it went."

*You're joking, right? You did what?* His absurd explanation made me go from shock to exasperation. *But if what he's saying is true, that shouldn't be a reason for the headmaster to be so wary of the church like Reifus said. I'd understand if the church was cautious of a student beating up one of their people, but not the academy...*

Enthused by that old story, father started regaling us with more of his combat chronicles. But since I'd already heard those before, I was only half listening.

*Well, even if we can't resolve this issue, I'll just look through the Argent Knight stories I found in the library and use the holy magic written in them. That should solve the problem. I think the spell in those stories was a second-order one, so I should be able to use it.*

I thought back to how the four of us had gone to the library the other day. It'd been a wide room with a modern aesthetic, and it'd been full of cramped bookcases stuffed with books. There'd been even more books piled up in front of the shelves for lack of anywhere else to be placed.

Given how negligently its collection had been stored, it'd been clear the library wasn't being rigorously managed. Most people had no idea where you could find any given book. Although the state of things had left me quite shocked, the four of us had nonetheless split up to look for books about the Argent Knight. A few hours later, we'd found a few volumes, so I'd thanked the others and started skimming through the books.

Fortunately, one of the volumes had included a story of the knight purifying a ghost, and its description had matched something I'd seen in a video game, so I'd figured I

could probably use it. Satisfied, I'd left the library with the other three.

*What next, though? Do I tell the others about father's incident? No, I probably shouldn't. I don't want to shame him like that... I wouldn't want to tarnish my own family name.*

Having decided so, I managed to cut father's stories off and retired to my room. He'd looked quite lonely when I asked to leave.

The following day, we were once again in the Aleyios lounge, exposed to the curious stares of onlookers. I told the others about my father's story while omitting and changing some details to make it more presentable.

"Hmm... I can't imagine Duke Regalia resorting to violence for no reason," Reifus said gravely. "I think something must have happened to get him to act that way."

"Agreed. Maybe it's related to the ghost we're dealing with now." Magiluka nodded.

*Why is it that all my friends are so prone to misunderstandings? I guess it's father's fault this time, for being so naughty...*

I thought back to my dear father's combat chronicles, recalling that most of them had happened for trifling reasons. That was quite embarrassing to me as his daughter, so I decided not to tell the others these details.

"Well, I looked into the rumors about the incident in the palace," Reifus said. "Apparently, back when it happened, there was a ghost problem like now."

"Huh? Really?" I asked with a raised voice—but when I sensed every pair of eyes in the room turn to me, I slapped my hands over my mouth.

"Do you think it's really related to our ghost incident?" Magiluka asked.

"It's too soon to assume they're necessarily related, but something definitely happened back then," Reifus replied, his countenance quite serious.

*Things are starting to go in an annoying direction. It might be best if I just tell them I can use holy magic to solve this.*

It felt bad that I was about to rain on everyone's parade when they seemed so engaged in the mystery, but I decided to go ahead and tell them I had a simple solution to the

problem at hand—not before I heard a voice behind me, however.

“Are all of you here to talk about the old campus building again?”

I turned around and saw a robed figure bow toward us respectfully. It was Instructor Alice.

“If you’re talking about the matter of the ghost, do you mind if I join in? I’m looking for information about solving it too,” she said with a soft smile.

I didn’t object, and the prince nodded in approval. I had Tutte get us another chair, which Instructor Alice sat in as she joined our conversation.

“Actually, I’ve recently noticed there’s a wide-area barrier set up around the old campus building,” she said after we told her what we’d found out earlier. “I believe that it wasn’t set up recently, but rather a long time ago.”

“You think the barrier was set up to keep the ghost contained?” Magiluka asked curiously.

“No, I don’t think it’s that kind of barrier. I think it’s one meant for trapping undead, so it’s possible the ghost was drawn to it.”

“So, if we break the barrier, the ghost won’t have a reason to be drawn to the old campus building?”

“I considered that possibility, but even when I looked throughout the building, I couldn’t find the source of the barrier,” Instructor Alice said. “Such a wide barrier should’ve required some sort of ritual to work, so I assumed I’d find the source right away, but...”

Instructor Alice and Magiluka’s exchange trailed off, giving way for a few seconds of silence.

“Hm... Actually, there is something I’ve been curious about...” Safina, who had kept quiet until now, managed to utter. Her eyes were fixed on Reifus, seemingly asking if she was allowed to voice her opinion. The prince nodded with a smile. Safina wasn’t passing out around him anymore, but she was still too afraid to speak up in his presence.

*I'm glad she's getting used to him. I'm sure she'll get comfortable around him given time, so I'll just watch over her.*

"Why is that kind of barrier set up around the old campus building to begin with?"

"Well, it's a barrier for trapping undead, so it's probably to keep undead—" I gave the obvious reply, but upon realizing its implications, I felt my face go pale.

"So, there might be real undead monsters hiding in that building?" Sacher suggested, outright stating the conclusion I'd come to without any forethought.

The onlookers listening in on us murmured in fear. I made to slap a hand over his mouth to shut him up, but before I could, he fell over the desk, shivering. I looked closer, spotting Magiluka sitting beside him and glaring at him coldly.

*Wow, Magiluka. You work fast.*

"I think we shouldn't jump to conclusions based on groundless speculation," the prince said softly, dropping his voice to a whisper. "I think the best thing we can do is go there again and try to find the site of the ritual."

We all fell silent and nodded—except for Tutte, who went very pale and stiffened up, unable to reject the idea because the prince had brought it up.

## 6. FOUND IT

When we approached the old campus building for the second time, it was illuminated by the glow of sunset. The silence seemed to hint at the terror lurking within the building.

We split up into two groups to carefully investigate the building. The first group consisted of Sacher, Magiluka, and Reifus, and the second one of me, Safina, and Tutte. Of course, the reason behind our groups' compositions was simply that Safina and Tutte refused to be away from me.

Instructor Alice ended up escorting the other group out of concern for Reifus's well-being. My group investigated the first floor while Reifus's investigated the second

floor.

*She taught us the light spell, and if need be, I'll just use holy magic. We'll be fine. There's nothing to be afraid of.*

I reminded myself of this, half aware of how much of a death flag it was, as we entered the old campus building. The interior was as silent and chilly as ever. Since it was sunset, the interior was dim, which only made the place scarier for me. I felt my courage beginning to slip.

*If we'd had to come here in the middle of the night, I'd have just turned around and ran!*

I walked down the hall, grateful that we came to investigate while there was still light out.

*There's nothing in sight that looks like it might be part of a suspicious ritual... I guess we'll have to look in the rooms and not just the corridors.*

I casually opened a nearby door, but just when I was about to peer inside the room, a white, pale face dropped down from the ceiling. It was dimly transparent, with the scenery behind it being faintly visible. Its black, sunken eyes were fixed in my direction, and as it hung upside down, it let out a wheezing breath.

“Aaaaaah!” I screeched out, my thoughts finally catching up with the situation, and hopped back until I hit the wall behind me.

“Lady Mary?!”

“What’s wrong?!”

Tutte and Safina, seeing my terrified retreat, looked at me before their eyes naturally turned to the interior of the room. Upon seeing what was in it, they went very pale and scurried back to the wall too. I pulled my sword out of its scabbard and pointed it at the ghost, using it as my staff.

“L-La! L-L-L-Light!” I chanted the holy magic spell.

A magical light flashed at the tip of the sword, unleashing a glow that spilled into the room. The ghost let out an inexplicable groan and disappeared somewhere.

"Th-That was scary..." I sputtered out.

I'd probably been holding my breath until just now, because I let out a deep sigh. I peered into the room, confirming the danger was gone. I gave another sigh of relief and leaned my back against the wall. But then...

*Crack!*

The moment my back touched the wall, I heard something shatter. Or rather, it was the sound of my offensive magic nullification skill going into effect. The hard sensation of the wall supporting my weight disappeared, and I tumbled back.

"Huh? Aaaah!" I screeched, falling back into the dark space that had revealed itself behind me.

"Lady Mary!"

My hand fumbled through the air as I fell to the ground, but at the last second someone grabbed onto me.

"Phew... Ah, I'm sorry! I shouldn't have used just one hand!" Safina called out feebly as she lost balance and began to tumble down with me.

"Lady Mary! Lady Safina!" As Safina began falling down, Tutte grabbed onto her arm too. "Ugh, you're heavy...!"

"Don't call me heavy!" Safina and I snapped at her at once.

Our chiding made Tutte's grip loosen in surprise, thanks to which all three of us fell down into the dark. As we tumbled down what ended up being a flight of stairs behind us, I held onto the other two's bodies, shielding them from the shock of falling.

I opened my eyes. The stairs weren't too steep, and though it was dark, it wasn't so dark that I couldn't see at all. I looked around, keeping my thoughts sharp so as to grasp the situation.

*I think that was... a hidden door? And it seems like it had some kind of illusion spell to keep it from being noticed by the senses. It must have been pretty advanced if no one noticed the door for so long. The illusion must have coincidentally been categorized as an offensive spell, considering how me touching the door temporarily rendered the spell*

*ineffective. There was probably also a barrier spell to serve as a wall, but I accidentally broke it...*

I was able to roughly grasp the situation as the other two who lay with me at the bottom of the staircase stirred sluggishly.

“L-Lady Mary, are you all right?!” Tutte asked me.

“I’m fine, don’t worry. Not a scratch on me,” I said.

My physical attack nullification skill had kept me from taking any damage. Tutte was still momentarily concerned in spite of knowing this, but she calmed down and got to her feet once I reassured her I was fine. I helped Safina get to her feet and then stood up myself.

“By the way, Tutte, did you say something about me being heavy earlier?” I brought up the matter again. As a young lady, I couldn’t overlook it.

Seeing my cold glare, Tutte broke into a cold sweat and looked away from me, fleeing from my eyes. “Wh-Why, I wonder what that was back there, Lady Mary! Was that some kind of secret door? I-I’ll go call the others!” And with that said, Tutte busily hurried up the stairs we had just fallen down.

Seeing her leave, Safina looked around anxiously. “She’s right... What is this place? Does this staircase connect to the basement?”

“For the time being, we probably shouldn’t go any further in until the others get here. All right, come on now, let’s go up.”

Electing to let sleeping dogs lie for now, I pushed Safina up the stairs, pretending I didn’t see the door at the back of the room.

\* \* \*

“A hidden staircase, here...? I didn’t notice it at all...” Instructor Alice said.

After Tutte led the other group to the staircase, Instructor Alice inspected the wall curiously. The spell’s effectiveness was restored in the time it took them to arrive, and it now looked like nothing but a section of the wall.

"I'm surprised you even found it," Sacher said. "That's Lady Mary for you."

"Really, how did you discover it?" Instructor Alice asked. "None of us had any idea there was something like this here."

"Oh, um, it was just a coincidence..." I said with a stiff smile. "Really, just a lucky coincidence. I had no intention of doing this, I promise you. I was just lucky. Oho ho ho."

I laughed the matter off, stressing that it was just a coincidence and intentionally not touching on how I found it. Perhaps noticing how evasive my answer was, Sacher didn't pursue the line of questioning further. Instead, he held up his hand against the wall. His fingertips slipped into the wall. Or at least, that's what it looked like.

*I guess I completely crushed the barrier spell. Well, I probably shouldn't mention there was a barrier spell to begin with, or they might ask what'd happened to it.*

"We'd have discovered this right away if we'd had a blueprint of the old school building," Magiluka said bitterly. "But with so much reconstruction and remodeling of this campus building over the years coupled with sloppy management, no one can say where anything was. And now it causes us trouble like this..."

Reifus comforted her empathetically while Sacher retracted his hand.

"So, what do we do? Call the teachers?" Sacher asked no one in particular.

"If possible, I'd like to check this basement," Instructor Alice said. "I've got my preparations for dealing with the barrier complete, and if I rely too much on my grand master, it'll end up hurting my dignity as class master."

Instructor Alice heaved up a leather bag on her back and faced the wall.

"But who made this secret passage?" Safina asked, bringing up a point that broke everyone's suspense and paused our preparation to explore the passage.

"Based on what Lady Mary said, the staircase leading down was properly reinforced and stable, so I can only assume it was a normal part of this building," Reifus said. "But if that's the case, who decided to hide it like this...?"

Safina, who hadn't directed her question at Reifus directly, immediately started

bowing her head over and over in panicked thanks. The prince simply smiled at her, looking a bit embarrassed by her skittish attitude.

"I can't imagine a student managing to outfit the building with such advanced magic. Was it one of the academy's teachers, maybe..." Magiluka said a bit evasively, perhaps aware of how forced her reasoning seemed.

"What about the teacher dispatched from the church?" Sacher said, remembering that matter. "Lady Mary said Duke Regalia had had an argument with him in the old campus building. Maybe it has something to do with that?"

Reifus and Magiluka gave Sacher surprised looks.

*It's weird how someone who never seems to think at all has a way of talking so confidently at the most important times,* I thought to myself in exasperation as I stared at Sacher, who was looking around in surprise at everyone's reactions.

"You might be right," Instructor Alice said before proceeding to drop a bombshell on us. "The old campus building was being managed by a teacher dispatched from the church at the time. Anyway, I'll check what's down there. You six stay here. We can't risk something happening to you."

Once again heaving up her leather bag, Instructor Alice ended our conversation and decided to act.

*Is it just me, or is she acting like she's in a hurry to go down there?* I thought to myself as I looked at Instructor Alice.

But I simply concluded that her position as class master spurred her to try to solve this problem as soon as possible, and I decided not to overthink it. And as that thought crossed my mind, Instructor Alice faced the wall and started investigating it. After a few minutes, she seemed to find something. She chanted an incantation under her breath, and the illusory wall disappeared, revealing the underground passage behind it.

"Once you know where the entrance is, undoing the spell is simple," she explained before unflinchingly descending down the stairs.

## 7. “THAT’S WHAT I’D EXPECT OF THE WHITE PRINCESS”?

“So what do we do? Do we follow her?” Magiluka asked, her concern plainly visible on her face, a few minutes after Instructor Alice had left.

“What’s the point of going down there? We won’t be any help,” I replied.

“No, well, it’s just that I’d like to inspect the place for future reference,” Magiluka admitted, revealing her intellectual curiosity.

“Yes, I agree,” Reifus said. “After coming this far, letting someone else handle this doesn’t sit well with me. We might be able to help her with something.”

Despite my initial lack of eagerness to explore the underground passage, I couldn’t deny the prince’s words, so I nodded and followed the rest of the group down the stairs. I had Tutte stay behind so she’d be able to call the teachers in case something happened.

We proceeded down the stairs with Sacher leading the group, followed by Magiluka, Reifus, Safina, and me at the back. Before long, the door at the back of the room came dimly into view.

“Huh? It won’t open.” Sacher had stopped in front of the door. He’d tried pushing it, pulling it, and turning the knob, but the door wouldn’t open.

“Is it locked? But why would it be locked?” Magiluka walked by Sacher’s side, examining the handle as we watched on. But then, I shivered. A strange feeling overcame me, like something was touching my hair, toying with it from behind me.

“Stop that, Tutte. You shouldn’t toy with my hair,” I spoke out to my maid, who was always behind me, with my eyes still fixed on the door.

Hearing me, Safina turned around, but then swiftly looked at me, startled.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Safina?” I asked, noticing Safina was standing silent and stiff.

But even as I spoke, I felt my maid touch my hair softly.

“Now, Tutte, that’s enough of that. Besides, didn’t I tell you to call the teach... ers...?”

It was then that I realized.

*Right, I had Tutte stay behind so she could call the teachers. Then who's behind me?*

I didn't want to consider the possibilities, and as I turned around, my fears were affirmed—I found the ghost from earlier reaching out and touching my hair.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!” I screamed in surprise and jumped back.

Everyone else jumped aside upon hearing my scream, and fortunately—or perhaps unfortunately—I ended up bumping into Sacher, who was still struggling to open the locked door. I accidentally bashed him with my back.

The moment my hand touched the door, I once again felt like a spell had just been canceled out. Sacher and I slipped through the wooden door, falling on the ground behind it.

“Ugh... Get off. You’re heavy...” Sacher groaned, pinned under me.

“Excuse you?!” I blustered, glaring daggers at him.

“Pardon me. That was a lie. You’re very light.” Sacher corrected himself with a very polite tone, and I got off him, my mood slightly improved.

I looked around the new room. It was made of stone and looked very much like a basement. It was spacious and had a surprisingly tall ceiling. Near the door we were standing next to was a staircase built into the wall, the top of which offered a view of the room.

The floor at the center of the room had a complex and very suspicious-looking magic circle on it. Standing on the outer circumference of the circle was Instructor Alice, who directed a very surprised gaze at us.

“I thought I locked the door and put a simple barrier spell at the entrance, but you got through so easily...” she said with surprise as she saw me walk down the stairs. “Did you foresee this might happen and prepare the things you’d need to get through a barrier ahead of time?”

“Uh, huh?” I replied reflexively, not understanding what she meant.

"Heh heh heh, I see." Instructor Alice shrugged, a pained smile on her lips. "I thought I'd gone about my plan well, but I guess I was no match for you after all, White Princess." Apparently, she'd taken my utterance as an affirmation. "So, when did you figure it out?"

"Huh? When did I figure it out? To begin with, I..."

*To begin with, I don't understand what you're talking about...*

I stared at her vacantly, utterly nonplussed in my response to the situation, to which she took a step back, looking quite shocked.

"Wow... That's what I'd expect of the White Princess," she said, all of this somehow making sense to her.

As we spoke, the rest of the group hurried down the stairs and regrouped with us. Their gazes moved between Instructor Alice and me, unsure of what to make of the situation.

Instructor Alice went from looking overwhelmed to complete elation. She puffed up her chest and spoke grandly.

"But you're too late! I've completed the final stages of the ritual. At long last, I've realized my goal!"

*Like I said, I have no idea what you're on about...*

"What's going on here, Lady Mary?" Reifus asked me gently, growing suspicious of Instructor Alice's behavior.

"You should probably ask her and not me, Sir Reifus," I said.

Since I didn't have a clue what was going on, I directed him to ask Instructor Alice, who presently seemed quite pleased with herself.

"Oh?" Instructor Alice eyed me curiously. "You're letting me stall for time by explaining things? Well, aren't you confident? Or is this part of your plan too?"

As she looked at me, the light reflected against Instructor Alice's glasses, granting them a sharp glare. Unable to grasp the situation, I could only stare at her, stunned.

“Then I’ll show you my summoning magic!”

Instructor Alice turned around with a flap of her robe and spread out her arms over the magic circle, which began shining. She began chanting something that sounded very ominous.

*Huh? Wait, isn’t this magic circle meant to trap undead? Though, come to think of it, I haven’t seen any undead here. What’s going on?*

We could only watch Instructor Alice wordlessly, none of us having the first idea what she was doing.

“Undead summoning spell, activate! Summon Undead Warrior!” Instructor Alice chanted the words of power.

As she did, the magic circle at the center of the room flashed, and something crawled out of the middle of the symbol on the floor. The physique of the creature that stood up there left us all stunned in fear. It was a hulking figure, standing over two meters tall. Its flesh was decaying, and it was clad in old armor.

“Graaaah!” it howled from a lipless mouth lined with exposed teeth. The flesh around its mouth seemed to have been peeled off, and its jaws were open so wide I had to ask myself if they were dislocated. This decaying warrior stood up in the middle of the circle, showing off its formerly human form. It carried a terribly chipped sword and a cracked metallic shield. Its sunken eyelids lacked eyeballs, and in their place, some kind of red light glinted, fixed in our direction.

“Y-You summoned an undead?!” Magiluka, who grasped the situation faster than the rest of us, exclaimed in panic.

She stepped up in front of Reifus, guarding him. Sacher did the same, and since the prince was talking to me earlier, right beside me, the two of them also stood like they were protecting me.

“Heh heh heh... I did it!” Instructor Alice called out gleefully, in stark contrast to our tense nervousness. “I finally did it, grandfather! I have achieved your wish!”

“Instructor Alice, do you have any idea what you just did?!” Magiluka demanded.

“Oh, yes, I understand perfectly, Miss Magiluka,” the instructor replied with a confident

smile.

"So, this room was made to facilitate undead summoning?" Reifus asked. "It seems to me you knew this place existed beforehand."

"Yes, I did, Your Highness." She curtsied to the prince politely.

It took me a moment to make heads or tails of all these sudden twists and turns.

*Hmm. So, this isn't a place meant to capture the undead, but to summon them instead? But why is there something like this here to begin with?*

None of this made any sense, and some part of me wanted to give up on trying to understand the situation.

*Instructor Alice said something about having achieved a wish. What did she mean by...*

"Grandfather...?" The word spilled from my lips.

Instructor Alice immediately heard my whisper and responded.

"Correct. I thought you'd come up with the answer, White Princess. Yes, the one who told me about this place, who made this place, was my grandfather. The one you call the instructor dispatched by the church!"

Instructor Alice began monologuing about something I had no idea about, and while I was actually quite surprised, seeing everyone listen so attentively made me want to not seem stupid by voicing my lack of understanding, so I simply kept my mouth shut and maintained a calm facade. Yeah, I care about appearances, what of it?

And so, the situation continued moving along, with me not having the first idea what was going on.

## 8. EVERYTHING'S SETTLED

"You're related to the teacher that was involved in that incident?" Magiluka asked.

"Oh, don't call it an incident," Instructor Alice replied coldly. "It makes it sound like such a fuss. My grandfather never intended to make it into a major affair. He only acted to make his ideals a reality."

"'Ideals'?" Reifus asked, glaring at the undead standing in the magic circle. "This ritual is part of your ideals?"

"Yes. Or rather, it's a means to making those ideals happen, Your Highness," she said, a confident smile playing on her lips, spreading out her arms with a flap of her robe. "It's all in the name of our ideals! For a life where we can laugh triumphantly, surrounded by the undead!"

Overcome with excitement, Instructor Alice raised her voice loud enough to make it reverberate through the basement. Our thoughts ground to a halt as any sense of tension we may have felt instantly evaporated.

"Huh? What did you just say?" Magiluka, who came to her senses first, asked her with an expression of disbelief.

"Heh heh heh! My grandfather's— No, my wish is to live a perfect life, surrounded by lovely undead!" Instructor Alice said excitedly, but her saying it again didn't make it easier for us to understand.

*Ahh... I guess she did say undead are her field of expertise. I can't believe she wants to live surrounded by these nasty, grotesque corpses though...* The thought of her family getting involved with the academy to make that kind of thing happen gave me a headache.

"My grandfather's wish was to have the undead as his servants. But since he was part of the church, he tragically had to keep purifying them. Holding a necromantic ritual in the church is absurd, after all. So, when my grandfather was assigned to this academy, he decided to use it to make his wish come true!"

Instructor Alice continued to excitedly exposit her story despite no one asking her to do so. "First, to make an excuse to secure the vast space and the manpower necessary to make this circle, he recruited students with antisocial or apocalyptic beliefs, as well as those with interest in the undead and the occult. People began saying my grandfather had formed a cult, but my grandfather's ideals weren't deterred by such a trivial slight!"

*So, he misled the school about his objectives and organized a cult? Isn't it kind of on him that the school ended up on alert about his activities? It's not like they could have just ignored someone forming a weird religious movement on campus.*

"And just as my grandfather was on the cusp of completing the ritual, just as his passion was on the verge of overflowing and he stood at the threshold of euphoria, *that man* got in his way," Instructor Alice said, pointing at me with a glare. "Ferdid Regalia! Him showing up ruined the plan! His timing was just too good. My grandfather told me of how, when the teachers came in after hearing the racket, he had just barely been able to hide the ritual chamber. Looking back on it now, the headmaster had likely used that man as an assassin to stop my grandfather. Grandfather never suspected a new student would get in his way, after all...!"

*No, it was all a coincidence,* I sighed to myself as I silently corrected her lopsided conjecture. *Father only beat him up because he was noisy and woke father up from a nap. And those teachers probably showed up to look for him because he was skipping class...*

We continued to watch Instructor Alice monologue about her supposedly grandiose yet somehow very vague and unimpressive goal. "And sure enough," she continued, "another member of House Regalia has come to meddle in my grandfather's designs. Learning from my grandfather's regrets, I pretended to be an ally of yours so I could keep an eye on you. And thanks to that, I found my way to the ritual chamber!"

"Back then and now, the ghosts appeared because of this magic circle, yes?" Magiluka asked.

"Yes. The magic formula used for this circle contained many people's mana. That fact as well as its relation to the undead makes it draw in ghosts. But the only ones capable of actually using this circle are those with my grandfather's blood running in their veins. After he left the school, the magic circle became inactive. Then, when I came to the old campus building to look for it, the circle activated when I entered its vicinity even though I couldn't find its exact location. That ended up drawing in the ghosts, and that was how I knew this building must be where the circle was."

"What if the undead you summon here end up getting outside and hurting the students? Don't you think it would be horrible?" Reifus asked her.

Instructor Alice regarded him with surprised eyes. "What are you talking about?" she

asked incredulously as she walked into the circle. “Why would these adorable lovelies ever hurt a sou—”

She approached the undead warrior, but just as she was about to touch it, it bashed her hard with its shield. With a loud ringing sound, she went flying back and hit the wall. We could only watch it all happen with stunned expressions. She crumbled to the ground, twitching, but a few seconds later, she sat up abruptly.

“Oooh, you shy thing, you!” she exclaimed at the undead warrior.

*...Yeah, she's bonkers.*

Even though being bashed in the face with a shield had left her silver-rimmed glasses cracked, Instructor Alice regarded the undead warrior with a flushed expression.

“Graaaaaaaaah!” the undead warrior roared.

*Maybe having a living thing approach it has caused it to fully awaken. Earlier it was simply standing still, but now it's clearly bracing itself for battle.*

“It’s coming at us!” Sacher said, drawing his sword and standing in front of the rest of us. “What do we do? Run?”

“We can’t let that thing leave this place,” Reifus said tensely. “We have to keep it pinned down here until the teachers show up.”

Sacher and Magiluka fell silent, their expressions mixed. This wasn’t a ghost, so both physical and magic attacks were effective against this undead warrior. But still, they weren’t confident this was an opponent we could match.

“I’ll do something about it,” I said, stepping up to the plate. “The rest of you, stall it for me. And Sir Reifus, please stay back.”

They didn’t seem surprised about me saying that. In fact, they looked very relieved.

*I'm not sure what you're expecting out of me...*

A bit confused, I swung my sword toward the hulking undead creature shambling toward us.

“Sir Sacher, use your defensive magic!”

“You got it!”

Sacher charged forward, his sword swung aloft. The spell I was about to use was meant for fixed targets, so having the undead warrior move around would make things tricky. To that end, I needed it stalled.

“Magiluka, please cast a defensive reinforcement spell on him.” I gave my next instruction.

“Leave it to me!” she replied.

As Sacher closed in on the undead warrior, the creature swung its rusted sword down on him. But between his own defensive magic and Magiluka reinforcing his defenses, Sacher was able to deflect the strike with his sword. The loud sound of the impact rang out, and everyone present tensed up.

Perhaps the undead warrior didn’t think its attack would be blocked, or maybe it just wasn’t capable of flexible thinking, because it kept pushing its blade down against Sacher’s. And so, with the undead locked in place, I called out to Safina.

“Safina! Get its legs!”

“Y-Yes!” she replied.

Despite her fear, she swiftly closed the distance and used her acceleration magic to deliver two swift, consecutive slashes to the same spot.

“Iai, consecutive slash!”

Her slashes cut the decayed flesh of the undead’s leg, severing it from below the thigh. It was only then that I realized belatedly that since they’d become second-years, they’d started carrying real blades. In any case, with its leg missing, the undead lurched where it stood and then crumbled sideways.

Fighting with everyone was encouraging, and thanks to that, I was able to keep my cool despite how tense the situation made me. Although, maybe my maintaining my composure was because I was mostly watching the fighting play out.

But not anymore. I stepped forward toward Sacher's and Safina's backs and called out with a voice that echoed through the basement, "Second-order holy magic! Embraced by this light, thou shalt be returned to ashes!"

I didn't mean those words; all I was doing was quoting the Argent Knight's words from one of the stories I'd read. Last time I'd tried it, I'd ended up activating the spell, and I was concerned the spell wouldn't work unless I said the line in full.

*Really, I wouldn't say something like this unless I had to!*

"Turn Undead!" I chanted the words of power and swung my hands at the undead.

A magic circle formed around the crumbled undead, and a geyser of light shot up from the ground.

"Gaaaaaaah!" The undead's howls echoed through the basement as the light washed over it.

"It's all over," I said quietly, lowering my hands.

I cringed inwardly at having to say those pretentious lines, but it'd worked. The undead crumbled into sand and disappeared. By the time the pillar of light had disappeared, there was nothing left on the floor. It was hard to believe such a large mass had occupied the spot just moments ago.

Silence settled over the room.

"Aaaah..." Instructor Alice hung her head dramatically. "What did you do to my darling Julian?!"

*Why did you give that gross zombie such a cute name?*

"W-Wow..." Sacher mumbled.

"Was that... holy magic?!" Magiluka said, a shiver in her voice.

"Lady Mary, that was incredible!" Safina wrapped her hands around me, calling out loudly enough to drown out the other two's soft words of amazement.

"It was nothing special," I said. "It's just second-order magic."

I stressed this fact so there would be no silly misunderstandings.

"What are you saying, Lady Mary?! This is a huge deal!" Magiluka raised her voice, objecting to my modesty.

"Huh?"

"Learning holy magic is incredibly difficult! It's said that it takes years to learn how to handle second-order holy magic! And you learned it so quickly, and entirely on your own!"

As Magiluka rattled on and on, I felt all the blood drain from my face.

*Oh no. I think I messed up again.*

I was so occupied with it being a relatively low-order spell that I didn't consider that mastering it might actually take a lot of time. I never considered that me learning it so quickly would be seen as unusual. And with that, I went from being calm and indifferent to sweating bullets.

*No, wait, this will be fine. It's just me and them here. I'll just ask them to keep quiet about it, and no one will get any silly ideas—*

But just as that brilliant idea crossed my mind...

"L-Lady Mary..."

I heard my maid, who wasn't supposed to be in this room, from behind me. I turned my head with a creaking sound. I saw Tutte, grimacing as she stood next to the door I'd broken, and next to her were the grand masters, their expressions the very image of shock.

*I'm done foooooor!* My silent scream echoed in the chambers of my heart.

## 9. BUT I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING

A few days after the undead incident, the teachers finished dismantling the magic

circle, which put an end to the ghost problem. Due to her involvement with the incident, Instructor Alice was sent to be disciplined and was relieved of her position as class master. Due to the sudden nature of the matter, Magiluka ended up serving as temporary class master. No one in the Aleyios class objected, and everyone returned to their studies as always.

As for me...

"And then, Lady Mary stepped up, all lovely and dignified, and stood in the undead warrior's way!"

Seated at a white table on the second floor of the old campus building where she was absentmindedly regaling a group of other young ladies with the story of what had happened was Safina.

"Aaaah!" the other girls all squealed excitedly.

I watched this with a bitter smile as I sipped on the tea Tutte served me.

*Aha ha ha... Just give me a break, I'm begging you...*

I'd lost count of how many times Safina had recounted the events of the ghost incident by now. There was a reason she became so talkative—it was because I'd resolved the incident in the same fashion as the Argent Knight, whom she admired.

"And then, Lady Mary spoke, noble and proud, just like the Argent Knight himself! She said, 'Embraced by this light, thou shalt be returned to ashes!'" Safina then struck the same pose that I had back then.

"Aaaah!" the other girls all squealed again.

*Aha ha ha... Honestly, please, just give me a break...*

"And as the undead vanished, she quietly said it—the Argent Knight's signature phrase..."

"Aaaaaah!"

Perhaps imagining the sight of me doing that, Safina and the other girls all stared up at the ceiling.

"That's so lovely... and so becoming of Lady Mary! She swept the Solos tournament last year and took first place, and this year in the Aleyios class she's mastered magic in such a short period of time!"

"And not just any magic, but holy magic! All on her own! I can see why the rumors say she's this academy's greatest magical genius!"

"She naturally takes after the Argent Knight, and that's why they call her the White Princess... but we ought to call her the Argent Princess instead!"

As the other young ladies all rained praise on me, I could only smile stiffly and give vague, noncommittal replies.

*This is... really, really bad. I thought that word wouldn't get out because only the teachers had seen what I'd done, but I was wrong. I didn't realize I'd had a blabbermouth right beside me!*

Safina's talkative streak wasn't limited to the old campus building lounge, and it became a topic of discussion across the Solos class. Worse yet, Magiluka had also started excitedly spreading the story to other people. There was no stopping it.

*Come to think of it, Magiluka was a secret Argent Knight fan too...*

I sighed to myself as I remembered this. I glanced at the modern-style wooden window of the building as sunlight filtered through the glass pane. Reflected in it was my face, full of what I could only describe as resignation.

The bell chimed, marking the end of lunch break. The other girls wistfully bid me adieu and got to their feet. I watched them off with a smile, and once everyone but me and Safina had left, I let out another deep sigh.

*The saying goes that gossip dies down fast, so I guess the rumors will die down before long. I just have to be patient and put up with it until then. I just need to lay low until everyone forgets about this...*

This situation wasn't anything new to me, so I was able to switch gears. I looked around the building, relishing the knowledge that if nothing else, my actions were able to win us the right to use this place.

After the incident at the old campus building had been resolved, the prince pointed

out the teachers' sloppy management of the place. And so, in order to improve the situation, it was decided that half of the old campus building's management was to be entrusted to a student representative.

The class masters convened to discuss the matter, and the result was that the prince had been nominated to take on the new role. As such, Reifus was in the adjacent room with Magiluka, Sacher, and the other class masters, where they assessed requests from students who wished to use rooms in this building.

Surprisingly, their room was only a door away from the room I relaxed in, which was open to use for all the students. It was like that was the workroom while this was a break room.

*I'm not lifting a finger for anything anymore. Once classes end, I'll be relaxing here with a cup of tea, having snacks with the others, and making the most of my time at the academy. An uneventful good life! No incidents or messes, please and thank you!*

I threw a tantrum in my thoughts at no one in particular.

\* \* \*

"We have a problem," Magiluka said as she entered from the other room.

I immediately felt my resolve to do nothing crumble away.

"What's the matter?" I asked reluctantly. I'd just sworn I wouldn't do anything, but I couldn't ignore the fact my friend needed help. I could only hope we wouldn't get caught up in any weird incidents again.

"We asked students who used the old campus building in the past to submit requests to use rooms here, but they insist that they shouldn't have to do that," Magiluka said, her shoulders drooping as she plopped down into a chair.

"With how badly managed things used to be, no one had any idea who was using which room," Reifus said as he walked in from behind Magiluka with a troubled expression. "I'd like to take this chance to start everything over from scratch, but it's not working out."

"Well, you're trying to change the way the academy works, so some pushback is to be expected," I said like it was none of my business as I sipped on my tea. "You should talk

it out and resolve the issue.”

“You’re right. I’ll try.”

Seeing the prince regard me with a smile and speak in such a dependable manner made me feel guilty, like I’d just done something I shouldn’t have.

*No, stop it. That’s no good. I have to lay low. Stay calm.*

I looked away from Reifus, my eyes settling on Magiluka instead. She was hunched over the table despondently. My resolve was cracking; I felt like I had to help her.

The following day, the situation changed suddenly. The students who’d objected to the new system banded together, deciding to occupy the old campus building and shut themselves in.

*Oh, cheese and crackers! That’s my relaxation spot!* I silently seethed as I watched them set up barricades around the old campus building.

“We’re all members of a group made by our upperclassmen! Why should we need to submit a written application to use this building after all this time?! Why does our right to use this place have to be assessed?! This is an insult!”

“That’s right! We firmly object to this!”

*These are the kinds of silly complaints the culprits are making...? Really, they just have to resubmit their request, so why are they making such a fuss over it? They could take all the energy they’re wasting on this and use it to submit the application!*

I sighed, holding a hand over my forehead nervously. It occurred to me that I’d been sighing very often lately.

Magiluka and the other class masters were on the scene, trying to persuade the students to give up, but they were just talking over each other, with the holed-in students simply repeating that they oppose the decision.

“I think I should get involved in the talks after all...” Reifus said tensely.

“No, Sir Reifus, they don’t deserve your time and attention,” I said. “What they’re doing is terrorism. Nothing short of terrorism. And we do not yield to terrorists.”

Listening to their fruitless exchange made me outraged, and I could tell I was absolutely simmering with annoyance.

"This isn't just our point of view! All of the academy's students agree! We will not back down! We will not yield! We will fight for our rights!"

"That's right!"

"You're fools who make light of our freedoms as students and yield to authority! Maybe you should wash off that bigotry! Water!"

One overly enthusiastic student fired a water spell at Magiluka. She screeched as she avoided the splash of water. The spell couldn't have hurt her since all it would have done was make her wet, but trying to avoid it made her stumble and fall on her backside.

Some of the students laughed mockingly, calling her improper and pathetic. I felt my anger boil over. If it had just been a heated discussion, I would never have interfered. However, once spells started flying around—even if they weren't damaging ones—I couldn't stay put, even less so once they'd started mocking my friend.

"Lady Mary?" the prince looked at me with concern, noticing the change in my demeanor.

"Stay here, Sir Reifus. I'm going to get rid of those terrorists," I said quietly and glanced at Safina and Sacher, who sat nearby. "Let's go, you two. Tutte, you stay here with Sir Reifus."

"Yes." Tutte bowed deeply to me. "Do take care, Lady Mary."

"A-All right... What are we doing though?" Sacher asked me, looking a bit overwhelmed.

"Lady Mary, I'm scared..." Safina mumbled sheepishly.

"We're resorting to force! ♪" I said with a bright smile.

And so, the protestors shutting themselves off in the building clashed with the managing party led by me. Or, at least, that's what would have happened, but...

"I said, let's discuss this in a civil manner!"

Magiluka tried to take control of the situation, albeit with a stiff smile and a vein bulging in her forehead. While she was trying to handle this like an adult, I walked past her, intent on dealing with this in a more childish manner. As I stepped up to face them, the loud group of protestors fell quiet at once.

"I'll only say this once," I told them coldly. "Cease this foolish behavior and leave the old campus building."

Upon seeing me, the group started whispering.

"Is that the White Princess?"

"You mean, the one they say might be a descendant of the Argent Knight?"

"Should we be picking a fight with the genius mage who destroyed an undead with one spell?"

*Wait, are the rumors getting out of hand? Where are they getting that I'm a descendant of the Argent Knight?! House Regalia has nothing to do with that legend!* I complained silently.

"A-And what if we don't listen... ma'am?" the leader of the group said with stiff politeness, his enthusiasm curbed.

I regarded him with a brilliant smile and gave my answer. "We'll resort to force! ♪"

"We're sorry!" the group all called out at once and started scrambling away.

*Hey, why are you this terrified of me? I'm a lady, you know!*

As they dismantled the barricades they'd set up, my smile stiffened, and I started quaking angrily. Everyone around me had started whispering things like "Just what you'd expect from the White Princess!" "No wonder she's the prince's right hand!" and "Nothing good will come from picking fights with her," but my maidenly sensibilities were so outraged by the group's terror that I didn't notice those comments.

And so it was that that silly outrage came to a close. Me stepping in to interfere concluded the protests, but not only were the rumors not dying down, I was becoming

a symbol of awe in the academy.

## 10. SOMETHING IS OFF

With the problems revolving the old campus building resolved, the new system for using the rooms was working smoothly, and I was enjoying a quiet moment in the lounge.

“Aaah, what a wonderful laid-back life! ♪ Nothing like a cup of tea after class to calm me down! ♪”

“Quite riiight! ♪”

Safina and I were sitting opposite each other at a table, enjoying the tea Tutte had served us. We then heard a knock on the door, and Tutte hurried over to the door to greet our guest.

“Lady Mary, there’s a person here asking to submit an application.”

“...Very well, let them in,” I said, placing my cup back on its saucer.

Tutte opened the door, and a tense-looking Solos student entered the room and stood at attention.

“E-Excuse me...” the boy said, walking as stiffly as a windup toy to my table. “I-I-I, umm, I’d like to submit an application, please...”

“Yes, let me look it over,” I said, accepting the paper from his shivering hands.

*How did things get like this? I know that after the protest, everyone started submitting their applications one by one...*

I thought back to what had happened a few days ago.

\* \* \*

It had all started when the prince and Magiluka entered the room, tiredly examining an application.

"We have another problem," Magiluka said languidly, falling prostrate over my table.

"What is it this time?" I asked.

Magiluka said nothing, simply flapping a few sheets of paper in my direction. I picked up a sheet and examined it, only for a wrinkle to form in my brow.

"This handwriting is so bad," I said.

The paper was lined with closely packed, sloppy letters that looked more like a scribble than text. On top of that, the sentences were so long-winded that I had no idea what the person who wrote this was trying to say.

"What is this?" I asked the prince, given that Magiluka seemed too exhausted to answer.

"Well, this is supposed to be an application form," Reifus said with a sardonic smile as he took a seat.

"This is an application?" I looked at the scribbled up text again.

*This is completely illegible!*

I checked another sheet of paper, but this time, the explanation was too concise to make sense of what the person was saying. It wasn't even clear what they were requesting.

Either way, every application form was incoherent in different ways, and there was never enough information to figure out what they wanted. And since I was used to Japan and its meticulously written medical forms and certificates, I was overcome with a desire to tear those forms up.

"Don't we have some kind of template for an application form? This is too abstract."

"I don't know what a template is, but there's no stipulated way to write the application, no," the prince said. "This is what I meant when I said the management was sloppy. I guess things like this are why the teachers don't want to manage this, aha ha..." He punctuated his lamentations with a dry laughter.

I looked between him and Magiluka, who was lying listlessly on the table, and groaned

as I cradled my forehead with a hand. “I propose we come up with a consistent example of how to write an application so that submissions that follow it will give us all the information we need,” I said.

“But how do we go about doing that?” Reifus asked.

I had Tutte bring me a pen and paper, and she quickly went and brought them to my table. At the top of the page, I wrote the words “Application Request” as a title, and then added lines for the requester’s or group’s name, the contents of the request, and the names of other people involved with the request.

“There, like this. Can we make it so they don’t write anything besides what’s listed here?”

*Creating templates like this was common sense in my past life. I didn’t know that people in this world have never even had the idea to make documents you can fill out.* Until now, I’d had my parents and Tutte handle any paperwork for me, so I had no idea that documents weren’t created using forms.

Reifus examined the example document I wrote. Magiluka, who’d come to at some point, leaned in to look too.

“This is good,” the prince said. “It should be easy to manage and check the requests this way. I’m surprised you were able to come up with such a thorough solution for what I’ve had in mind. I knew I could count on you, Lady Mary.”

“You’re quite right, Your Highness,” Magiluka said. “Let’s start having this document be the basis for our applications and officially announce that we won’t accept any requests that don’t follow this pattern.”

They both perked up and got to work immediately. They got out of their seats despite having only just settled into them and returned to the adjacent room.

*I’m glad I could help my friends. All’s well that ends well.*

Satisfied with having been of aid to the two of them, I returned to my leisurely teatime.

But things weren’t over quite yet. The following day, students came to me one by one asking to see the new form. Apparently, Reifus had told other people about my new form. Of course, at this point, I’d seen this happen enough times for it to not come as

a surprise anymore.

The prince had probably directed them to me so that I would correct their applications when there were any mistakes, lacking descriptions, or overall errors in the form. That much made sense. But I wasn't prepared to deal with those people. A lot of them were stubborn oafs from the Solos class who couldn't and wouldn't fill the form out properly. I couldn't mask my surprise at how they were utterly incapable of doing it right. I have to confess that after such people had gone multiple tries attempting to fill out the form, they'd start throwing tantrums, at which point I would be on the verge of snapping and shouting at them.

In fact, I actually did end up exploding at them a few times.

I wanted to keep myself as uninvolved with the situation as possible, but this was my idea, and if the prince were to have seen this terrible state of affairs, he would have started thinking I was incompetent—and *that* would have tarnished my pride as Duke Regalia's daughter.

And so, I called on Sacher and Safina, using the threat of resorting to force to get the upset students to quiet down and properly fill out the form under our supervision. After this, I went a few times and presented the filled out forms to the prince.

\* \* \*

*Oh. Is that the reason?*

“Hm...” I glanced at one male student who was shaking nervously.

“I-Is anything wrong with my application?!” he twitched and exclaimed with a shaking voice.

“Well, you didn’t fill out this line,” I said, pointing at a blank part of the page.

“I-I’m sorry! Please don’t punish me!”

*Punish him...? I can’t believe me saying I’ll resort to force produced those kinds of rumors...*

“No one’s going to punish you over forgetting to fill out a line. Just do it the right way this time. You don’t need to stress out like that.” I cocked my head in a friendly manner,

trying to soothe him.

"Lady Mary, your icy smirk is just having the opposite effect..." Tutte rudely whispered into my ear from her spot behind me.

"I-I'll fix it, right away! E-Excuse me!"

The student took the form from my hands absurdly cautiously, like he was accepting an important diploma, and scampered out of the room. I saw him off with a stiff smile.

*This is weird... Something's off. From where I'm standing, something definitely feels off!*

"You've really become this academy's shadowy ruler, Lady Mary," Sacher commented outrageously in a way sure to cause misunderstandings. He'd watched the whole thing unfold while standing by the window lazing around under the sunlight.

"Oh? Am I now?" I turned my so-called icy smirk over to him.

"F-Forget I said anything. I'm sorry," Sacher apologized, caving under the pressure of my implicit threat.

"That was lovely, Lady Mary," Safina chimed in with entranced eyes. "If you're the academy's ruler, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth!"

Meanwhile, time continued to pass by, and something totally unexpected happened in my circle of friends just around the time it was really hitting me that I was about to become a third-year in the academy.

"It's been decided that I will officially become the Aleyios class master starting next year." Magiluka said this when we were having tea at the lounge as always, like she'd just remembered to tell me about it.

"My, that's wonderful news. Congratulations," I said, unsurprised.

She was the acting class master for the Aleyios class already, and given that the academy had third-years serve as class masters, Magiluka being asked to serve as one felt like a forgone conclusion.

"And I was appointed the class master for the Lalaios class," Reifus said.

"Really? Congratulations to you too, Sir Reifus," I said.

This wasn't much of a surprise either. The prince had quite the reputation in the Lalaios class, and his accomplishments made him worthy of being appointed class master. He'd been serving as the intermediary between the three classes recently, he'd resolved issues between classes, and he'd grown deeply entwined with the academy's operations.

I was sure it wasn't much, but I had leaned on my memories from my past life to advise him about changes to the academy.

*Huh? Wait a second. Does this mean I'll have two class masters in my friend group starting next year?*

That thought came across as very troublesome, but I chose to ignore the grim premonition.

"Oh, me too, me too!" Sacher raised his hand happily.

"Oh, is that right? Well congratu— Wait, what?!"

My polite words trailed off into a surprised exclamation, and I rudely raised my voice. Realizing I was in front of the prince, I covered my mouth with my hands and tried to smooth things over.

"Huh? Sir Sacher, you... What? 'Me too'? You, a class master?"

My mind had been so jumbled up by this that I found myself speaking in fragmented questions, not really enabling much in the way of conversation.

"That's right. I'm going to be the Solos class master next year!" Sacher said smugly, somehow picking up on what I'd meant.

I sank into my seat, feeling a spell of vertigo set in.

*What's Solos thinking, appointing him as a class master...? The class is going to fall apart. Even Safina, with all her issues, would have been a better choice.*

As I hung my head and mumbled, Safina seemed to have caught on to my doubts and explained.

"Well, you see... It's Solos tradition to have the strongest warrior serve as class master."

*I see. He's stupid, but no one can match him in a fight.* Realizing this, I raised my head and looked at him with a lukewarm gaze.

"So, this means that next year, we'll have three class masters here," the prince said cheerfully. "With this, we'll be able to make more reforms and solve more issues."

His statement made me realize that this was, indeed, the worst possible scenario for me.

*If all the class masters will be gathered here... That'll mean this won't be a lounge anymore. It'll be a... What was it again? Right! A student council! But this spot was supposed to be somewhere we can relax!*

I maintained a smile the whole time, not wanting to throw cold water on everyone's enthusiasm, but deep down, I was panicking and breaking into a cold sweat.

*God, please make it so next year is a quiet one! And I'd appreciate it if you made it so if anything happens, I don't ever have to hear about it.*

And so, I greeted my third year in the academy.

# CHAPTER 2

## THIRD YEAR AT THE ACADEMY, PART 1

### 1. MY THIRD YEAR

I, Mary Regalia, now twelve years old, was entering my third year at the academy. With this being my third year, I'd gotten used to things at the academy, so many of the formalities went by smoothly. I was in the Aleyios class this year too, so I would be continuing my studies of magic.

"Yes, the size is just right." I twirled in front of my full-length mirror, confirming my uniform fit me properly. It was the same design as my second-year uniform, but with my sizes different, the uniform was giving off a bit of a different feel. My physique was starting to change into a young woman's body—some parts were sticking out while others were curving in. When I was sickly in my past life, I'd always been very scrawny and bony, so seeing that my chest was growing in volume put an oddly satisfied smile on my face.

Speaking of uniform design, I designed male uniforms for Sacher and Reifus, which were now consistent in appearance with my own. The prince had seen that Magiluka and Safina were wearing the same outfit as me, so he'd asked if we minded if he and Sacher wore matching outfits too. Designing an outfit for a member of royalty was nerve-racking, but once I was done with the design, Reifus ordered his personal tailor shop to make it and deliver it to Sacher too.

"Lady Mary, it's time to leave," Tutte said behind me.

I nodded and made for the entrance hall. "My third year is a go! Here's to a peaceful year for once." I declared my resolve as I got into the carriage.

"I do hope so, Lady Mary," Tutte agreed as she sat in the seat in front of me.

"Yeah, I know. Since I made a mess of my second year, it feels too late for that. But if I don't make any waves this year, it could cancel things out!" I pumped my fists. "So I just need to try my hardest! This year, I won't be making any waves, not even a single

splash!"

"W-Waves, you say..." Tutte mumbled. "Considering you're so pretty and snow-white, I don't think you'll be able to do it..."

Sadly, I didn't hear the second half of her sentence. Upon arriving at the academy, I went to the Aleyios lounge with Tutte behind me and settled into an empty seat. I watched Magiluka, who was guiding the new first-years as the class master, with warm eyes. And as I did, I tried to mask my presence.

I imagined myself as a rock. A completely immovable rock, just sitting there.

A few minutes later, I breathed in, then started taking in lungfuls of air, which ended up making me draw attention from everyone in the room.

"Lady Mary, you shouldn't hold your breath like that..." Tutte told me.

"Phoo, haah! You're right, I just... ended up forgetting to breathe..."

"What in the world were you doing?" Magiluka showed up in front of me, her arms crossed as she looked at me in disbelief.

"Aha ha, Magi... luka..." I regarded her with dry laughter, but then my thoughts ground to a halt. She probably hadn't meant anything by it, but with her arms crossed like that, her forearms pressed against her chest, revealing it had grown even larger.

My pride at seeing myself in the mirror that morning dashed, I got to my feet wordlessly and stared right at her.

"Huh?" Magiluka exclaimed as I pulled her hands forward, uncrossing them.

A smile played over my lips as I unflinchingly groped her chest with both hands.



“What?!” My voice overlapped with Magiluka; she cried out in surprise, while I raised my voice in amazement at the sensation.

“What are you doing?!” she screeched at me, crossing her hands over her chest to shield herself.

“You got even bigger?!” I stared at my shaking hands in shock as she stepped away from me.

*I fondled her chest last year as a sort of half joke, but she's definitely gotten bigger this year.*

“Lady Mary, what about not making waves?” Tutte whispered into my ear.

“Ah!” I came to, realizing every pair of eyes in the room was fixed on me. Namely, all the first-years who were looking to Magiluka for guidance were watching.

“Ahem.” I cleared my throat and took a seat in my chair nonchalantly, pretending nothing had happened. But as I did, the first-years started whispering.

“That’s the White Princess?”

“They say she won the martial arts tournament and she’s a genius who can master any spell.”

*Ahhh! I wish I could punish myself from five minutes ago for having to be petty!*

I proceeded to just sit still with a stiff smile on my face until the crowd around me dispersed.

\* \* \*

A few days later, I went to the lounge in the old campus building after class. I settled into my usual seat, where Tutte served me tea.

“I think I’m managing to avoid making any waves, aren’t I?” I asked in desperation.

“Oh, not even a little. All the new students admire you,” my maid replied, mercilessly delivering the grim reality of my situation.

I glared at her for a moment as I sipped my tea. “I mean, I can’t help it! Magic is just too much fun!” I put my cup down and wiped my eyes with my fingers, pretending to weep.

Starting with our third year, we started learning different spells that weren’t just offensive magic. Of those new types of spells, the one that excited me the most was floating magic. When I was told that it was possible to fly using magic, I felt my excitement reach new peaks. I learned the spell in record time and used it to float up.

Before I knew it, it was already too late. Although everyone else was struggling to use the spell, I’d already mastered it to the point of being able to float and move freely in midair. The new students, who would look in on our lessons, all regarded me with sparkling, admiring eyes.

Incidentally, Magiluka mastered the spell soon after I did, but as it turned out, she was afraid of heights. Once she would reach certain altitudes, all the color would drain from her face, and she would force herself to land. Since she kept landing and taking off again while I would remain afloat, I’d ended up standing out more.

“Lady Mary, are you really trying not to make waves?” Tutte asked me with a sigh as she filled my cup.

“...You’re right. I’ll show more restraint.” I hung my head, unable to find a retort.

But just then, I heard shrill cheering from outside the window. I got to my feet, approached the window, and peered outside. Underneath us were a group of young ladies and boys surrounding Sacher and Reifus, who were swinging practice swords about.

“They’re growing up too,” I said.

This year, the prince had implemented a few new systems in the school. One of them was that for the sake of cultivating one’s character, students from any class were free to form an environment where they could teach students from other classes.

Or, put more simply, school clubs.

*Yes, I might have mentioned school clubs as an idea to him. Sorry about that.*

There were already a few such groups established in the old campus building. For

example, the fencing team practicing outside the window were mostly made up of Solos students, but there were also Aleyios and Lalaios students who were interested in learning some basics.

That said, the young ladies over there most certainly hadn't come to train.

*I guess watching two cute guys practice fencing would draw their attention,* I thought to myself as I watched the prince swing his sword about happily.

Just as I had matured, so too did Sacher and Reifus. They were growing into more masculine physiques. They were already taller than us to the point where I had to raise my head to look them in the eye. They were at the halfway point between being boys and being men, and it gave them a sort of androgynous handsomeness. Reifus in particular drew attention from the young ladies with his natural dignified charm.

As I watched them, lost in thought, their practice ended, and I spotted Magiluka handing the prince a towel. Reifus suddenly looked up, and, upon spotting me, flashed an eloquent smile and raised his hand to wave.

Needless to say, it made all the young ladies immediately turn their eyes to me.

Overwhelmed by the pressure of that moment, I returned a twitching smile and waved back. I then stiffened in place until he looked away from me.

"Uuuugh, I thought that being in a group of students that stand out would make me less conspicuous, but it's not working!" I complained.

"Yes, it seems everyone turns to look at your every move," Tutte said. "I don't think it's intentional, but it seems everyone has a tendency of placing you in the center of things."

"But why?"

"Well, it's because you're very knowledgeable and solve problems. They see you as reliable. Haven't you noticed?"

"I mean, it's true that I use my memories from my past life to offer people advice. And I guess I did sic Safina and Sacher on people who wouldn't listen to us... Ugh, drat, that's what did it, isn't it?!" I sank back into my chair languidly.

"But everything does seem peaceful for the time being. I'm sure things will go by without incident this time," Tutte said.

"Tutte, stop it! You're jinxing it!" I got back on my feet and made to slide a hand over her mouth.

But before I could do it, I heard a knock on the door. Perfect timing.

*I've got a bad feeling!* I screamed in my heart, cradling my head nervously, as Tutte hurried over to open the door.

## 2. WHY DID IT TURN OUT LIKE THIS?

While I made a very displeased expression, Tutte answered the door and spoke to someone there.

"Lady Mary, it seems someone here is looking for the class masters."

"...Right. They're outside right now, so have them come in and wait," I told Tutte. "And you, please go call Sir Reifus."

"Very well." Tutte bowed respectfully and ushered the guest inside.

At the same time, the prince's attendant I'd given my latter instruction to left the room, as if she were taking the guest's place in the hall.

*I gave that instruction like it's nothing, but am I really allowed to ask one of the prince's maids for something? I suppose it's fine since the prince did say to call for her if something happens...*

"E-Excuse me..." A tense voice pulled me out of my thoughts.

The person who'd walked into the room wasn't a noble, but a commoner student. She was shivering all over as she stood at attention, like someone had cast a restraining spell on her.

"Please, this way," Tutte said as she escorted the girl to my table and motioned her to

take a seat.

"You don't have to be so nervous," I said. "Or am I that scary?"

"N-No! Not at all! I just... I can't believe I get to talk to *the* Lady Mary, is all. You're not scary at all! If anything, I'm enchanted by your looks!"

"R-Really...?"

I'd only said it as a joke to ease her tension, but she'd denied my suggestion with such intensity it was a bit overwhelming. I then heard another knock on the door. Assuming this was Reifus and the others, I ushered them to come in, and the prince opened the door.

"Hello. Pardon me for keeping you waiting."

"N-No, not at all," I said, while the other girl was too nervous to speak.

The prince smiled gently and approached the student.

"I-It's an honor to meet you, Your Highness!" The girl got to her feet and squeaked. "I, um, I came here today to consult the class masters!" She bowed as politely as the maids.

Seeing this, Magiluka, who was hanging back, realized something. "Oh? Aren't you Miss Finnel?"

"Hm? Magiluka, you know her?" Reifus asked. "She's a Lalaios student."

"Yes, Your Highness. She's part of the Magic Pharmaceutical Research Group established this year."

Magic pharmacy was a field usually only taught in Aleyios, but this club-like group established by Magiluka was a space for students outside our class to learn about it and discuss it. It made sense, then, that a commoner from Lalaios would know Magiluka.

"Let's hear you out in the other room, then," the prince said. "Sacher, Magiluka, come with us."

“Yes.” The two of them bowed.

They took Finnel, who was still very skittish, to the class masters’ room. Seeing them off, I lifted my teacup and sipped on it.

*I hope there aren’t any problems. Let there be no problems!* I prayed.

About fifteen minutes later, the three of them left the room and walked over, having finished their talk. Apparently, Finnel had left through the exit inside their room.

“We have a problem.” Magiluka said the one thing I didn’t want to hear.

I immediately started to think of ways to escape, but Magiluka, unaware of my intentions, sat opposite me and began recounting what Finnel had told them.

“There’s a chance some of the Aleyios students are engaging in illegal trafficking of magical reagents,” she said.

“What do you mean?” I asked, taken aback by the sound of the word “illegal.”

“Lady Mary, do you know what mandrakes are?” Magiluka asked me.

“You mean the herbs that scream when you uproot them?” I asked. “They say their scream can kill anyone who hears them. Apparently they’re very expensive?”

I drew on my knowledge of fantasy games from my past life and brought the generic description of the plant.

“Impressive, Lady Mary,” Magiluka said, looking surprised. “You’re knowledgeable about magical reagents too. But the part about their scream being lethal is a misconception. Their cries *can* make weakhearted people and people with extremely low mana faint, however.”

“Really?” I nodded at her correction. “So, why are we talking about mandrakes?”

“Well, they’re very rare herbs, and since they’re used as base ingredients for potions, they must be handled with care. Due to their abilities, those without the proper qualifications aren’t allowed to cultivate them.”

“Don’t tell me we have students cultivating them in the academy,” I interjected, sensing

where things were going.

Magiluka nodded, unoffended by me cutting her off. "Finnel and the other Lalaios students are cultivating other herbs in a nearby field, but after learning about mandrakes in the Magic Pharmaceutical Research Group, they realized some of the plants being grown there might actually be mandrakes."

*Unqualified students would cultivate plants like this in secret, and they probably figured if they did it by hiding in a group of oblivious Lalaios students, they'd be able to avoid getting caught. They probably didn't imagine Lalaios students would end up learning the same thing they'd learned in the Aleyios class.*

"But you said they might be mandrakes. There's no proof, right?" I asked.

"Yes, we haven't seen it personally. But when the Lalaios students pointed it out, the Aleyios students told them to keep their noses out of another class's business and drove them away."

"I guess the segregation between classes isn't completely gone yet... It's a pity," Reifus, who listened in on our exchange, whispered morosely.

"Either way, we'll be heading out to confirm if it's true," Reifus said. "I'm sure that with three class masters, the students won't be able to tell us to stay out of another class's business or whatever other nonsense they might come up with."

He got to his feet, seemingly pulling himself together, and Magiluka and Sacher followed suit. Safina also got to her feet, and I was the only one left seated.

*What? Don't look at me like that. Ugh, I wish I could say this has nothing to do with me, but I can't after hearing her out...*

Resigning myself to my fate, I got to my feet silently and heaved a sigh.

*Please, please, please, let nothing happen, let nothing happen, let absolutely nothing happen!* I prayed nonstop in my heart as we made our way to the field.

\* \* \*

The place in question was a spacious area not far from the old campus building, which was occupied entirely by fields meant for cultivating all sorts of plants. As we walked

along the road leading to it, the students working the fields all looked at us. Since we all wore similar uniforms, they recognized us as the group of class masters.

*Grr, I wish Safina and I wouldn't get lumped together with them!*

We walked along a footpath paved between the fields, and as we approached the field we were told about, a group of male students moved around in a hurry and threw shifty glances in our direction.

*Whoa, talk about sus. It's like they're holding up a sign saying that they're doing something they don't want us to see.*

As I glanced back at them suspiciously, our group, led by Reifus, reached the field in question. A group of male students hurried over to us.

"Wh-Why, if it isn't the prince. What brings you here, Your Highness?" one of them said.

The way they stood in our way made it clear they didn't want us to come any closer.

"Are you operating all on your own?" Reifus asked. "Isn't there a teacher supervising you?"

"N-No... there isn't," the student said, clearly tense.

"So, the activities here are run entirely by students, then," Reifus continued in a relaxed tone. "Did you submit an application to us?"

"W-We haven't. Our activities here have been ongoing for a long time," the student said, his voice trailing off at the end.

"Then we ask that you submit an application posthaste," Reifus said with a smile. "And while we're here, we can observe your activities."

"Huh?!" The student raised his head in shock.

The prince walked by him with an aura that didn't allow any argument and made for the field.

"But, Your Highness, you shouldn't! The soil, it's dirty!" The boys moved in to stop the prince.

Magiluka paid them no heed, however, as she began inspecting what had been planted in the fields. A few minutes later, her expression turned severe.

"This is strange," she whispered into the prince's ear—I'd somehow made out her voice regardless. "All of the plants here are all perfectly normal reagents. I didn't find anything that's remotely close to a mandrake."

I looked around curiously. As I was beginning to wonder if Finnel had gotten the wrong idea somehow, I looked to the boys, who all seemed to be sneaking glances in one direction—the adjacent field, which was unplowed and wasn't in use.

*Or maybe they did something to make it seem like it's not in use...*

The incident with Instructor Alice last year had taught me about the idea of employing magic to block perception. Through learning of it, I trained myself to be able to see slight distortions in the air in spots where such magic had been cast—now I wouldn't fall through fake walls anymore.

As I focused my gaze on the field, I noticed the air around it was slightly distorted. Upon learning of our arrival, they'd probably cast that spell over their field and introduced the adjacent, fake field as theirs.

*It's laughable that they think they can fool the prince like this. I think we ought to rake them over the coals for this!*

Thankfully, the students were so focused on the three class masters that they ended up being indifferent to my and Safina's presence. I sneakily walked over to the adjacent field and stood in front of it; incidentally, Safina and my maid had followed me without question, which left me impressed with them.

"My apologies for cutting into your conversation, but do you happen to have anything to do with this field?" I asked the students loudly.

They turned around to look at me in shock.

"Safina, keep them from coming any closer to me," I whispered promptly.

"Understood." Safina stepped up in front of me, guarding me. Tutte stepped away from the field just in case.

“Wh-What is it, Lady Mary?” A student approached me with a stiff smile and an ominous aura. “We have nothing to do with that field. Please step away from that. You wouldn’t want to dirty your clothes.”

“Oh, you don’t have anything to do with this field?” I asked with a thin smile. “I guess whatever I do here is no problem of yours, then. I mean, this is just an empty field. ♪”

“E-Erm, what?”

The students exchanged confused stares, unsure of what I was getting at. I flashed them my business smile—the one Tutte had once described as an icy smirk—and raised my right hand to shoulder length.

“Fire. Ball. ♪” I whispered in delight. I’d spoken slowly but clearly, and a ball of flames invoked by my words manifested in my right palm.

“Ah, wait!” The boys went pale and made to jump over to the field I was standing in. But the moment they did, Safina crouched into her iai stance, forcing them to stop in their tracks.

With my business smile on my lips, I casually tossed the fireball I’d created into the field behind me, and the field burst into flames with a roar.

“Nooooo! Our twenty years of work!” the boys called out.

What should have been empty soil caught fire, and as an invisible something burned, the illusion fell apart, revealing flaming herbs. Magiluka approached the field with quick steps, immediately catching on to my actions, and checked the plants.

“That’s a flowering mandrake!” she called out. “You used illusion magic to hide it, didn’t you?!”

*Well, let’s leave it at that. Time to extinguish the flames.*

I turned around, preparing to cast a water spell to put out the fire I’d caused, only to find myself staring at a giant plant which wasn’t visible moments ago.

“Huh?”

“Lady Mary, get away!”

Magiluka's voice overlapped with my surprised utterance as the plants in front of me swelled up and then burst spectacularly.

All that was left in the wake of that one explosive moment were the ruptured remains of the plant—and me, standing there covered head to toe in its juices.



*...This is the pits.*

I stood frozen in place as juices dripped from my hair.

“Are you all right, Lady Mary?!” The prince hurried over to me, which jump-started my paused thoughts.

“I-I’m fine, Sir Reifus.” I moved away from him so the juices didn’t end up splashing on him and waved a hand dismissively with a strained smile.

“I see... Thank goodness,” he said.

I then felt someone grab my arm and pull me closer. My eyes opened wide as I found the prince’s handsome features staring right into my face.

*Wh-Whoa, too close! You’re in my bubble!*

“This is terrible,” he lamented. “Your beautiful hair is soiled. Allow me to wipe it clean.” Reifus wrapped his arm around my waist as I stood there surprised.

“H-Huh?!” *Uh, w-waiiiit! What’s going on here?!* Before I knew it, the prince had his arms around me, and my face was very close to his. “S-Sir Reifus, you’re gonna get yourself dirty!” I said hurriedly.

“If it’ll make your beautiful features clean again, I will gladly accept that.”

*He just said that with a smile! Ugh, and now my heart’s beating fast! I can’t let myself feel this way just because he’s matured nicely, darn it! Pull yourself together, Mary!*

Completely panicking from these sudden developments, I stiffened in place and couldn’t do much to resist. From the corner of my eye, I could see Safina and Magiluka covering their flushed faces and holding back squeals.

*No good! I can’t rely on other girls for help here!*

“S-Sir Reifus, everyone’s looking...” I said uncomfortably.

“I don’t mind,” Reifus replied. “On the contrary, we should show ourselves off for everyone to see.”

*What is this guy saying?!*

“Oh, those beautiful, glistening eyes. Let me gaze into them more...” He shifted my drenched forelocks, gazing into my eyes with his emerald ones, drawing me in.

*What do I do? Do I push him away? But I can't do that to a prince, that's lèse-majesté! How do I get out of this?!*

With a cute guy drawing in on me, I was panicking too hard to come up with a rational decision, so the conclusion I came to in the end was...

“Le...” I stuttered.

“Le’?”

“Levitation!”

...to flee by flying away.

I levitated up, way above the campus building, and once I confirmed I was far enough away from the ground, I finally breathed out in relief.

“Aaah, that was a surprise. I don’t think he can follow me up here... What’s gotten into him?!”

After calming myself down for a while, I checked what was going on beneath me. Apparently, things became a bit of a mess, with Safina and Sacher suppressing the male students. As for the prince, he was wallowing in self-loathing, his beet red face visible even from afar.

“I, uh, hope I don’t get charged with lèse-majesté for shaming the prince...”

With that concern tormenting me, I slowly wobbled through the air while lowering my altitude, until I spotted Magiluka and Tutte motioning for me to come over. A bit perplexed wondering what they’d do that for, I landed next to them with a bit of dread.

*D-Don’t tell me I’m actually going to get executed over that. If anything, it’s the prince’s fault for going all crazy!*

With my heart beating fast, I told myself excuses as I landed before them.

"I got her!" Magiluka called out.

With that shout as her signal, Tutte threw a large cloth on me before I could register what was going on. She covered me up in the cloth tightly and threw her arms around me.

*Wh-What's going on? Did I just get captured?*

With my field of vision blocked by the cloth, I recalled how I saw criminals on TV have their heads covered when they were led away by officers. With that image in mind, Tutte and Magiluka led me off somewhere.

### 3. IT'S GETTING DOUBLY EFFECTIVE AS WE SPEAK!

I walked in the dark for a while before the two girls leading me stopped in their tracks.

"U-Um, listen... I didn't have a choice," I said, my voice cracking from stress and panic. "It was all too sudden, and I had no idea what to do..." I was pressing my fingertips together under the cloth in a show of diffidence.

"There's no one in the area. You can take it off now," Magiluka replied, perhaps not having heard my excuses.

The cloth over my head was yanked off, and I could see familiar scenery ahead of me—the entrance hall to the old campus building.

"U-Uh..." I tried to speak, but wasn't sure what I wanted to say. As I trailed off, Magiluka—still wary of anyone else being in the area—led me to our usual spot, the lounge on the second floor.

"Phew... I think we're safe."

Magiluka closed the door as we entered the room and breathed out in relief. I stood stock still in the middle of the room without a single clue as to what was going on.

"Are you all right, Lady Mary?" Tutte approached me with concern and stared at me fixedly.

"Y-Yes, I'm fine," I said.

"Hmm... It seems its effect on members of the same sex is weaker," Magiluka commented as she observed our exchange, saying something that felt very important.

"Same sex'? 'Effect'?" I turned to look at Magiluka.

"D-Don't make that cute gesture at me, please." Magiluka averted her eyes from me and waved her hands in front of her eyes in a flustered manner. "It's making my heart throb..."

On closer inspection, she had a blush on her cheeks. "What happened to me?" I asked.

Having confirmed there was nothing visibly wrong with me, Tutte brought a towel that was sitting in the room and started wiping off my dripping hair. The way she was conducting herself didn't seem to be any different than usual.

"You don't have any difficulty being around her, Tutte?" Magiluka asked.

"I always watch and admire Lady Mary's beauty and grace, so this isn't much different for me," Tutte replied as she wiped my hair, but that didn't clarify things for me.

"Wh-What's going on? Why won't you explain?" I asked.

Once Tutte was done cleaning my hair, she urged me to take a seat. Magiluka sat opposite me after dragging her chair a bit further away from me.

*Why is she moving away from me like that? Is it because I got splashed by that plant's juices... Oh, don't tell me!* With that realization, I came to the worst possible conclusion. "I stink right now, don't I?" I asked, sniffing my arm only to find there wasn't any kind of stench rising from me.

Still, it wasn't unheard of that the person in question wasn't aware of their body odor, so I couldn't rest on my laurels yet.

"No, you don't stink," Magiluka replied. "I'd say your situation right now is significantly trickier than mere stench."

"What do you mean?"

"The plant that ruptured and had its contents splatter on you was a subspecies of mandrake that very rarely occurs in mandrake colonies. These plants spend many years maturing and producing their juices, which have the effect of drawing out a person's charm."

"Huh?" I let out an unladylike utterance, unable to follow Magiluka's explanation.

"It takes many years to cultivate this type of mandrake, and it's extremely sensitive and prone to rupturing at the smallest stimulation. That makes it very difficult to grow. This is just me speculating, but I think that that mandrake formed by accident, and generations of that group spent time growing it. But when you attacked the field with magic..."

"It ruptured..." I mumbled.

I thought back to the male students' dumbfounded, terrified expressions.

*Well, you reap what you sow, both figuratively and literally this time.*

"Not only was that plant very rare, there's only a small amount of juices one can harvest from each one, and the juice sells for quite a sum. The liquid is usually mixed into perfume so that its effects don't become very pronounced, but you got doused in it from head to toe..."

"W-Wait!" I called out. "Are you saying that Sir Reifus coming on to me like that was—"

"Yes, I believe that was the charm effect's fault." Magiluka nodded.

*Why did I get that status ailment? Don't my skills nullify things like that? Oh, but... all it did was improve my natural charm, so it didn't have any negative effects on my body. Since it wasn't harmful, it worked normally... Gosh, what a convenient skill.*

I hung my head languidly, finally making sense of the situation.

"Still, I've never heard of the effect of this plant being this intense," Magiluka said. "At most, it makes members of the opposite sex feel attracted... Oh, but I guess it's not often naturally attractive people rely on this kind of magical drug."

Magiluka then appended that it normally shouldn't make one attractive to members

of the same sex, looking pensive as she tried to keep her gaze averted from me. But there was something that worried me even more than just what the effect was.

“How long until it wears off?” I asked.

“Normally, it should only last for ten, maybe twenty minutes,” Magiluka said, humming pensively. “The fact it’s persisting implies it varies by the individual though.”

I stared at her, dumbfounded. *What am I supposed to do?! I'm in the middle of the academy! How am I supposed to get back home and not go through a place with lots of men? Actually, I'm not even sure I can go home like this! At worst, I'll have to fly to run away.*

But the problem with floating magic was that while it let me gain altitude, it was slow in terms of horizontal movement. Flight magic was much faster, but it was higher than second-order magic, so I couldn’t use it in front of other people.

“Anyway, I’ll go attend the Magic Pharmaceutical Research Group’s meeting and ask them for advice. I think they’re still operating here in the old campus building.”

“I-I’ll come with you—” I said, rising from the chair.

“No, Lady Mary, you stay here. What if you end up charming the whole group?”

“R-Right...” I deflated and settled back into my seat, realizing that not all members of the group were necessarily girls.

Seeing this, Magiluka left Tutte to watch over me and made to leave the room. I waved goodbye to her, and once she left, I heaved a big sigh.

“Why did it turn out like this? All I want is a peaceful academic life...”

“Are you sure you’re not under the protection of the god of trouble?” she asked me.

“If I am, I wish I could nullify that protection,” I complained, awaiting the time of judgment.

I could only hope the plant’s effect would wear off while I waited. Some time after that, Sacher and the prince returned after dealing with the aftermath of the incident at the fields. They remained in the adjacent room just to be on the safe side.

Left with nothing to do but pass the time, I sat opposite Safina and had teatime. Apparently, the teachers came to handle the matter of the field. Since the mandrakes were so valuable, they decided not to dispose of them, but rather cultivate the plants themselves in an official capacity.

"So, Safina, how am I right now?" I asked.

"Very pretty," she replied, panting heavily from her nose and looking primed to lunge at me. "My heart's beating fast. I can hardly restrain the urge to hug you."

"R-Really..." I replied dryly, ordering the enthusiastic puppy to stay. "Well, you keep that urge restrained, please."

I sighed again. It seemed members of the same sex could restrain themselves somewhat, but even in this case, those with low self-discipline were more susceptible.

"But I have to say, you really aren't fazed by this, Tutte," I said, genuinely impressed. "I'm awestruck. You really are my maid."

"Th-Thank you."

As I directed a brilliant smile toward her, Tutte seemed to jolt, the teapot in her hands shaking a little. I pretended not to see that.

*I'm sorry. I'll be quiet and won't do anything to make my charm any worse, so keep it up, Tutte!*

I hung my head so I wouldn't look at anyone and tried to make myself as small and inconspicuous as possible. A few minutes later, though...

"Aaaah, I think I almost died!" I shouted.

"Lady Mary, you were holding your breath all this time?!"

Since making myself as invisible as possible meant keeping the sound of my breathing down, I'd ended up unconsciously holding my breath. After doing that for too long, I'd ended up gasping for air.

"What are you doing?" I heard a critical voice ask from the direction of the door.

I looked in the door's direction, only to find Magiluka standing there and staring at me with dubious eyes.

"Magiluka!" I looked up expectantly and smiled.

"Nngh!" Magiluka's cheeks turned rosy as she slapped a hand over her mouth and looked the other way.

*Ugh, sorry! I'll just hide under a cloth, okay?!* I hung my head like a dog that had gotten scolded.

Picking up a large towel that had been laid nearby, I desperately threw it over my head and tried to curl up.



"Stop it! Stop doing things that arouse the urge to protect you!" Magiluka shouted.

Safina and Tutte also looked away and started mumbling to themselves, like they were trying to keep themselves restrained. The door then swung open, and the prince peered into the room, surprised by Magiluka's yelp.

"What's wrong?! Did something— Aah!"

"Prince, no!" Sacher reflexively moved in, pulled him back, and shut the door.

"Th-That was close..." I could hear the boys say on the other side of the door, which made me feel terrible, like I was some kind of trouble everyone had to tiptoe around.

"It feels like the effect is getting stronger over time instead of waning," Magiluka said.  
"I think everyone's idea was correct."

"What do you mean?" I asked, holding back tears with my head under the blanket.

"There was a theory published about that subspecies of mandrake that stated that the effectiveness and length of its effects depended on a person's natural charm and mana reserves. That would mean the charm is so powerful in your case because you're naturally charming and have a great deal of mana."

"R-Really?" I asked.

"But really, how high would her charm and mana have to be for it to be this intense...?" Safina muttered.

*Oh no, that question'll make me break into a cold sweat. If this charm thing lasts for too long, people will find out about my mana capacity...!*

"Isn't there some way to get rid of the effect instantly?" I asked.

"I can't come up with anything that'd do it on the spot," Magiluka said pensively. "I'll ask the group's members tomorrow."

"So the problem right now is that you need to get out of the academy and return home," Safina noted, to which we all fell silent for a moment.

"We just have to make it so I stay out of sight, right?" I said. "Then maybe if I'm wearing

something that covers me completely, nobody will see directly?"

"Yes, if we can make it so your charm won't draw people's attention anymore, that would be ideal." Magiluka nodded.

"Then there's only one option," I brought up a suggestion.

And an hour later, we acted on it.

"Yes, perfect!" I said, standing with my hands on my waist in front of the lounge's mirror.

What I was doing was too shameful for a noble lady, but given the situation, I pushed that anxiety away. Because right now, I was...

"That is some impressive white full plate mail," Magiluka whispered, exasperated.

Yes, my reflection in the mirror was that of a figure covered entirely by full plate armor—armored and unrecognizable as me.

## 4. STILL ONGOING!

"When you said you'll send Tutte home to pick something up, I certainly didn't expect this. What's with this fancy suit of armor?" As Magiluka examined my armored appearance, she didn't show any signs of her flustered confusion from earlier.

*Good, looks like the charm effect isn't working,* I confirmed to myself.

"The year before last, my father gave this to me for my birthday. He was excited when he'd heard I'd had my own sword made, so he'd wanted me to have armor to match."

"A full set of armor for your birthday?" Safina asked, seeming like she had mixed feelings on the matter.

*A justified question. What kind of parent gets their daughter armor for her birthday? I was shocked when he gave it to me.*

"Father asked Deodora to make me a suit of armor of similar quality to my sword, and for whatever reason, she decided this kind of fancy, full-body armor would fit."

"It looks like something the Argent Knight in the stories might wear," Magiluka said.  
"Deodora really put a lot of work into it."

"She said she was very proud of how it came out," I replied with a sigh.

The suit of armor I was wearing was very fancy looking. Without knowing the secret behind what my sword was made out of, my father had asked for the armor to be made of the same material. Deodora thus gathered all the ivory ore she could get in the country and used it to make ninety percent of this armor. The rest of the little details were made with other materials (that were still harder than mithril).

The outcome was this suit of shining white armor. It was currently absorbing my mana, making it even harder and more reliable than most armor. Since ivory ore was light and easy to process, each part had been designed meticulously to the point of artistry, and even I couldn't deny that it made it look like a suit of legendary armor.

*I've had this locked up in my closet ever since I got it, and I never thought I'd end up airing it out like this.*

"I think this works," I said. "Tutte, please call Sir Reifus and Sacher over."

"Yes, Lady Mary." Tutte, who stood by the door leading to the other room, bowed and then knocked on the door to call the boys in.

The prince and Sacher peered inside warily, then stared at me silently for a few moments. Just as I was starting to suspect that the armor wasn't working, their expressions softened. I felt relief wash over me.

"Is that you, Lady Mary?" the prince asked me.

"Yes, it is me, Mary," I said with a very clinky, clangy curtsy.

"Hmm. I guess that since we can't tell who you are, it prevents us from becoming captivated." He nodded, patting down his chest.

"Pfft!" Sacher cracked up. "What's with that armor, Lady Mary! What, a legendary sword wasn't enough, so you decided to put on legendary armor too? You're wearing

a full-body legendary hero set!"

I drew in on him, my Legendary Armor (Cringe) clinking with each step. No one could see it, but I was wearing my icy grin as I brought a hand to my helmet.

"My apologies, Sir Reifus, could you look the other way for a moment?"

"Hm? Yes, all right," the prince said.

"Say, everyone, have you ever seen Sacher seriously trying to woo a girl?" I asked viciously.

Realizing my intent, the other girls hummed pensively.

"Come to think of it, I don't think I've ever seen Sacher act romantically," Safina noted, placing a finger on her chin. "I can't really imagine what that would be like."

"Heh heh heh, that's a fine idea. ♪" Magiluka said, placing a hand over her mouth with an impish smile. "Let's see how Sacher comes on to a lady, shall we?"

Listening to us, Sacher went very pale and then pressed his hands on my helm, trying to keep it on my head while I made to take it off.

"Okay, I'm sorry! I won't say it anymore!" he said, bowing his head time and again. "Just don't! If you humiliate me like that, I'll die from shame!"

I placed my hands on my waist and looked down on him victoriously.

"Now then, since it looks like it's working, I'll head back home. Everyone, good day to you." I bowed elegantly and cheerfully left the room.

Everyone saw me off with mixed expressions.

"See, normally I wouldn't be caught dead in this embarrassing armor," I told Tutte. "But when I consider that no one knows it's me, it makes me feel much better. Maybe I have a thing for changing my appearance?"

I walked brazenly through the academy halls with a suit of white armor, my maid following gracefully behind me. Seeing this, the other students looked at me with shock and pulled away from me, but I paid them no heed as I made my way to my

carriage.

*I mean, they don't know it's me!*

I got into the carriage, and as we set off on the way home, Tutte spoke up, way too late. "Incidentally, Lady Mary, you do realize everyone knew it was you because I was following you, yes?"

"Oh, no, you're right!" My scream echoed through the carriage.

\* \* \*

My first problem upon coming home was my father. I feared that if my father were to find me like this, he'd immediately go complain to the academy. Thankfully, he was out on work that day and wouldn't be home for some time, so that issue solved itself.

For the time being, I took off my armor and had Tutte make sure that no male servants approached me. I could only hope that the effects of the plant would fade by tomorrow morning.

"Dinner is ready, Lady Mary."

As I hung my head in my room, Tutte showed up to call me for a meal. I replied vaguely and left the room. Although my father was often busy, he would always come home for dinner, and so I had dinner with both my parents every night. Today, however, it turned out I was having dinner with just my mother, which was an exciting change of pace.

When I entered the dining hall, I found my mother, Aries, already seated at the dinner table, and hurried over to my own seat.

"Hee hee, there's no need to hurry," mother chuckled with a soft expression.

She was a beautiful woman, enough so to make me stop in my tracks and admire her for a moment.

*If mother were in the same charm state as me, she'd definitely attract even people of the same sex.*

Convinced of my assessment and nodding to myself, I took a seat and began eating. I smiled unmindfully and told her about my time at the academy... forgetting that some

things run in the family and blind to the fact that a few of the female servants had brought their hands to their mouths and had to leave the room.

I only realized the issue when we were chatting after dinner, as mother sat closer to me with an odd glint in her eye. "Oh, my adorable little Mary," she said, brushing away a strand of my silver hair and gazing at me lovingly. "You're somehow cuter than usual today. I wish I could close you up in my jewelry box."

"M-Mother?"

There was something oddly coquettish about her demeanor that would leave any man helpless. But I realized something was terribly wrong, and I wasn't in any position to admire how she looked.

"Are you having fun at the academy, Mary?" she asked me.

"Y-Yes, mother..." I mumbled.

"That's good to hear. The other ladies tell me about your exploits in our tea parties, and I'm always proud of you," mother said, still toying with my hair.

Although I'd initially felt like I was in terrible danger, I gradually became taken aback by her words. *They talk about my exploits...? There are more people spreading bad rumors about me behind my back?*

"I hope you continue helping and supporting His Highness," she said.

"I-I will, mother..." I gave a vague reply.

I wasn't sure what she was getting at, but I was too occupied with trying to think of a way to escape my current state of crisis.

"Lady Mary, your bath is ready." Sensing my predicament, Tutte spoke up at just the right time.

"Ah, y-yes, I'll be right over!" I grinned at my maid. I didn't miss the way she had to avert her gaze from me, though. "W-Well, mother, may I be excused?"

At my question, my mother wistfully let go of my hair, allowing me to flee the dining hall.

*Aaaah! When is this stupid charm effect going to go awaaaaay?!*

As I complained about being cursed with something other people might be envious of, I submerged myself in the bath, knowing it probably wouldn't help me much, and spent twice as long scrubbing my body.

Sure enough, the next day, the charm state hadn't worn off. Forced to go to school in a full suit of armor, I bravely boarded the carriage, clinking all the while.

"Let's give up on waiting for the effect to go away on its own," I said resolutely, clenching my gauntleted fists. "I need to take matters into my own hands and solve this!"

"Yes, Lady Mary, that's the spirit!" Tutte cheered me on.

"I'm counting on you, Magiluka! She'll find a way to fix this!" I declared, deciding to shove the task of fixing this situation into someone else's hands.

"L-Lady Maaaary..." Tutte glared at me reproachfully.

## 5. ARMORED LITTLE LADY

"Good day to you, Magiluka." As I arrived at the academy and entered the Aleyios lounge, I greeted Magiluka, who was sitting at a sofa and reading a complicated-looking book, with a lady's curtsy.

"G-Good day, Lady Mary..." Magiluka greeted me back with a confused expression.

"What's wrong?" I asked, placing a finger on my chin as I curiously noticed her confusion. My every movement was accompanied by clinking.

"It's just that seeing you make all these maidenly gestures in a suit of armor isn't so much uncomfortable as it is just plain scary."

"I mean, I can understand that, but these gestures are like a habit for me by now." I brought a hand to my mouth and laughed. "I can't just change them at a drop of a hat."

As I spoke, Tutte pulled back a chair for me, and I settled into it elegantly.

*I suppose walking around in armor... doesn't really suit me. I know that, but I don't really have much of a choice.*

Thanks to my education since infancy, I had ladylike behavior ingrained into my every gesture. I wished I could act in a more knightly manner when I had the armor on, but I'd never actually seen how knights behave in the flesh.

“...Since you showed up to classes in armor, I’m assuming the effect hasn’t worn off,” Magiluka sighed. “Yesterday, I explained it to my grandfather—the headmaster, that is—so the teachers should understand. You probably won’t get in trouble for walking around the academy like this.”

“Thank you, Magiluka! I’m lucky I have you for a friend!” I thanked Magiluka for being quick to act and decided to go right into the main topic. “By the way, I’m starting to give up on waiting for the effect to go away on its own. I want to look for a way to remove the effect, so do you have any ideas?”

“...I can’t say I’ve found any effective way so far,” Magiluka replied with a sigh. “To begin with, there’s no real examples of anyone trying to remove this kind of effect.”

That was a good point. Any person who’d gone to so much trouble to make themselves more attractive wouldn’t try to remove the effect, and there probably weren’t any cases of the effect being so extreme in the past.

*But that doesn’t mean we should just sit back and do nothing! The longer this lasts, the more people will start questioning how much mana I have.*

“I see. That’s a shame...” I sat in a chair, slumping my shoulders with my hands on my waist.

It must have looked quite strange to an onlooker, but since the helmet was narrowing my field of vision, I paid it no heed.

“For now, let’s consult the teachers and try to figure something out. Just try to bear with the situation and keep the armor on for the time being.”

“Yes, I know. So until we find a solution, I’ll try my hardest to be an, umm... armored lady!” I said excitedly under my helmet as I pumped my fists.

"No, please, you really don't have to try to do anything," Magiluka sighed.

\* \* \*

"Now then, today we'll be practicing with explosion-type spells," the Aleyios grand master, Professor Fried, said with a gentle voice.

We were all gathered in the dome-shaped training ground for practical magic practice, and since I was dressed in a way that was radically different from the other students, everyone else kept throwing glances in my direction. I felt like letting that bother me would be a defeat, somehow, so I tried to ignore their gazes.

Professor Fried had been briefed about my situation by the headmaster, so while he did flinch when he first saw me in the armor, he went on to act like nothing had happened.

"It's considered elementary offensive magic," he continued, "but you need to keep the space around you in mind as you trigger the explosion, so it can be quite difficult and dangerous. You'll be going one by one, so please line up."

We all nodded in agreement and began lining up, and while we did, Professor Fried set up a scarecrow-like target for us to practice on.

"Now then, let's begin."

One by one, we were instructed by the teacher on what to do as we cast the spell. Like he said, keeping the space around us in mind was difficult, and many students ended up blowing up spots that were way off the mark. In the end, no one was managing to create an explosion in front of the scarecrow—although having the handsome teacher whisper with his relaxing voice into the young ladies' ears certainly hadn't helped their concentration.

"Burst!" Magiluka chanted the word of power, and the front of the scarecrow ruptured spectacularly, knocking the straw target back.

"Good. Exceptional work. As always, you pull off exercises with no problems at all, Lady Magiluka," Professor Fried remarked.

The other students cheered at the teacher's praise, and Magiluka proudly puffed up her chest. She then glanced at me, who was standing behind her in line, and made way

for me, as if taunting me by asking, “Can you do the same?”

*Well, if it's a contest you want, it's a contest you'll get. As an armored lady, I'll do as a knight does and blow away that target!*

Overtaken by knightly pride (or something?), I stepped forward gallantly. I drew my Legendary Sword (Cringe), held it up at waist length, and thrust it forward.

“L-Lady Mary?” Professor Fried was alarmed by my offensive stance.

“Armored lady, Mary! Moving in to attack!” I exclaimed, imitating the kind of knights I knew from fiction. Honestly, I was getting carried away and kind of enjoying myself.

Moving in from a crouched posture, I rushed forward and thrust the tip of my Legendary Sword (Cringe) into the scarecrow’s chest.

“Buuuuuurst!”

The moment the tip of my sword sank into the scarecrow, the explosive spell activated with a rumbling roar. The scarecrow’s interior blew up spectacularly, its contents scattering into the air. Enjoying the afterglow of the act, I swung my sword once and returned it to its sheath elegantly.

“Umm... Right...” Professor Fried said, unsure as to how to react. “Very well done, although I’m not sure that’s how a magician uses that spell.”

The professor looked a bit taken aback, but he still praised me with a smile. I curtsied to him and walked away. Magiluka stood with her hand cradling her forehead nervously, directing a fed-up glare at me. Needless to say, the other students stared with dumbfounded expressions.

*Being a knight's kind of fun... But actually, I feel like I get it now.*

I carried on excitedly as I took the rest of my classes, and by the time school had finished for the day, I’d learned some new magic words. And those words were...

“That was amazing, Lady Mary. I’ve never seen anyone move that fast!”

“Heh heh heh. Well you see, this is all thanks to this armor I’m wearing!”

"It's impressive how accurately you cast that spell, Lady Mary. Only you could do it so well!"

"Heh heh heh. Well you see, this is all thanks to this armor I'm wearing!"

As I chatted in the lounge with the other ladies after classes, I'd continually recite those magic words I'd learned; whenever I'd ended up getting carried away and doing something too conspicuous, I could just pin the blame on my armor!

With how expensive and solemn-looking my armor was, and coupled with the fact it was brimming with mana thanks to its ivory ore composition, it was able to pass off as being more than just a normal suit of armor. And because it was made by Deodora, the leading blacksmith in this kingdom, I was able to convince everyone that every impressive thing I'd do was thanks to the armor.

*This is great! I can move freely without having to worry about what everyone thinks! I can pin it all on my armor! Maybe I should always be an armored lady!*

But as I excitedly moved from one class to another, settling into this line of thinking, I would soon come to realize that there was something I wasn't taking into account.

\* \* \*

With all classes over, I returned to the old campus building's lounge and frantically took off my helmet.

"Aaah, it's hot! I'm getting steamed in this suit! I need to take a bath!" I whined.

"Yes, I assumed as much..." Tutte said emphatically as she picked up the helmet I'd thrown to the floor.

"And I can't go to the bathroom or even drink water! I can't eat anything or have tea! Gaaaah!" I launched into a tantrum.

With only Tutte in the room, I settled into a sofa and started swinging my legs and arms around in frustration, which naturally made my armor clink loudly.

"We need to solve this, fast!" I said seriously, finally calming down and fixing my posture.

"Didn't you say you'd be fine always being an armored lady?" Tutte asked with a chilly tone as she wiped my helmet clean.

I groaned, unable to retort.

"Ahem... Tutte, I'm a noble lady. I couldn't possibly spend my days being something as made up and absurd as an 'armored lady.'"

"Yes, of course. Well, you'll only have to put up with it for a bit longer." Tutte met my lame excuse with a kind smile.

"Th-Thanks, Tutte... Aaaagh!"

As I thanked her, almost in tears at her dedication, Tutte forcibly put the helmet over my head again like she couldn't help it anymore.

*Oh, she was looking straight at me... She probably couldn't restrain herself anymore. I'm sorry, Tutte.*

I started to fix the helmet's position when I heard a knock on the door. Tutte got up to check who it was.

"It's Magiluka and the others," she told me.

After checking that my armor was on right, I nodded for her to let them in. Magiluka hurried inside and blurted out excitedly, "Lady Mary, I found a way to cancel the effect!"

My heart jumped at her words, and I immediately thanked God for being on my side.

## 6. SETUP FOR A JOKE?

Our group gathered in the lounge, but one extra person was there. A female student walked in with the rest of them, holding a large book and eyeing me nervously. I remembered seeing her somewhere, but as I was trying to figure out from where, she sensed my gaze through the helmet and started bowing.

"H-Hello, Lady Mary! Thank you for your help the other day!" she squeaked.

Her flustered demeanor finally made me remember who she was; it was the same girl who'd approached us about the mandrakes and gotten us involved in this whole matter to begin with. But since I'd only met her once, and for a short time at that, my memory of her was kind of vague.

I'd always been a bit bad at remembering faces, including during my past life. It must have been because I hardly met people back then.

*But just a bit bad. Just a bit! I'm not forgetful! R-Right?* For some reason, I wasn't able to convince myself.

"Lady Mary, this is Finnel from the Magic Pharmaceutical Research Group," Tutte whispered into my ear, perhaps noticing how I'd frozen up.

*I really do have a good maid. And that's going to make sure I'll stay a ditzy lady...*

I thanked Tutte with a whisper and bowed back to her in my armor. I then gestured for Finnel to take a seat, and everyone sat down with earnest expressions.

"You said you can help me fix this problem?" I asked Magiluka.

Magiluka answered me by looking at Finnel, and I did the same. With everyone's gazes fixed on her, Finnel tensed up and opened the book she'd brought, placing it on the table.

"U-Umm, well, I looked into mandrakes and found some fascinating descriptions of their subspecies. Apparently, the fluid that splashed on you is nectar produced from the flower that blooms from a subspecies of mandrake."

"Oh, really."

"And you all know what that flower does, but the thing is, the part of mandrakes that's considered valuable is usually their roots. Their roots are rich with mana and nutrients, and they're used as root vegetables in all sorts of dishes—"

"Uh, Miss Finnel, you're getting off track..." Magiluka corrected the girl just as I was starting to wonder what this had to do with my problem.

"Ah, I'm sorry!" Finnel went very red. "I got carried away..."

"Don't worry about it," I consoled her. "So, what about mandrake roots?"

"Huh? Well, um, they're usually best served steamed, but I like boiling them with eggs, and—"

"We're not talking about cooking. We're talking about removing this effect." I cut into her words, my armor quaking.

"I-I'm sorry! W-Well, mandrake roots are said to be a panacea for many diseases, and they're seen as a treasure of medicine that are useful for making all sorts of remedies. Because of mandrakes' broad applications, the properties of the flower subspecies have also been carefully observed. Like other mandrakes, their roots are valuable for medicine, but the flowering variety were discovered to be less effective than regular mandrakes. In the end, they were just regarded as being needlessly larger!"

Having said all of this in one go, Finnel paused for air. Tutte handed her a cup of water, which she thankfully gulped down.

"All right. And?" I asked.

"Well, apparently, it has long since been discovered that if you boil and drink down the roots, they can curb the flowers' effects. But when the finding was brought up with a research committee, it was mostly ignored. I-I suppose no one's ever really tried to curb the effects of the flower before? So because of that, only a select few experts were aware of the discovery, and only one book in the library listed the root as having such a use. It was basically a little footnote on the side, so no one really noticed... That's it, that's all I know!"

Finnel said the rest of it in one go as well, and having finished, gasped for breath.

"Are there any roots of that mandrake left?" I asked Magiluka.

"The teachers are managing it now, so I doubt they acted that quickly, but..." Magiluka began pensively. "If what Finnel said about the roots being regarded as ineffective is true, the faculty might have decided they were a waste of space and disposed of them."

Since the plants had been cultivated illegally, the school had to keep up appearances. Plus, since I'd burned the surrounding plants and the flower burst on me, it only made

sense they'd try to get rid of it. All the more so if the roots were seen as unnecessary.

*Just when I found a light at the end of the tunnel! I'm not letting them take it away from me!*

"I'm in trouble if they did! Let's go dig up those roots right now!" I got to my feet, resolved to strike while the iron's hot.

Everyone else nodded and followed me. We left the room and hurried to the fields.

\* \* \*

As I tried to keep my impatience restrained, we reached the field in question, only to find students and teachers arguing on the field. The students who raised the mandrakes seemed to be asking Professor Fried for something.

"What's the matter?" Reifus asked with a pleasant smile.

Professor Fried looked a bit troubled, but once he and the boys noticed our presence, their argument seemed to stop. The professor looked at us like we were his salvation, while the male students hung their heads, looking like they realized they were finished.

"You see, I was thinking of looking over this field, and there are a few unnecessary subspecies here," the professor explained calmly. "I figured I'd dig up their roots to dispose of them, but these students are asking that I leave just those roots alone."

*That was close!* I shuddered upon hearing this. *If we'd left this for tomorrow, we'd have been too late!*

"Professor, please," one of the students protested, speaking up loudly so we could hear them. "The flower might be ruined, but so long as its roots remain, it could bloom again years down the line. But if you dig the roots up, the dream will be ruined..."

"You've done very well to stop the professor," Magiluka remarked at the students' request.

The students and Professor Fried were surprised by her words.

"C-Class Master!" the students called out happily.

Looking over them, Magiluka nodded. The students smiled excitedly, taking this as an affirmation of their actions.

"It's a good thing we made it in time," she continued. "Now, Sacher, if you could dig up the roots?"

"What?!" the students exclaimed, their class master's ruthless sentence knocking them down into despair.

Sacher walked over to the ruined flower without a second thought thanks to Magiluka's nonchalant request, but then stopped at the last minute and glared at her.

"Hey, wait a second," he said suspiciously. "I heard pulling out mandrakes can make your head go all fuzzy. And you're telling me to do that?!"

The male students' glances moved between my group and Professor Fried, but upon noticing my armored figure, they all took a cautious step back. Tutte and Finnel were standing to my side, while Reifus stood on my other side and watched over the affair.

"Yes, you're right." Magiluka nodded. "Ah, Your Highness, it's dangerous, so please step away."

"Hey, listen to me!" Sacher blustered at her.

*I know I'm not one to talk, but gosh, Magiluka treats Sacher like dirt...* I sighed under my helmet as I watched Magiluka move things along, ignoring Sacher's complaints.

"Um, maybe I should do it instead?" I raised my hand. "The armor should block the mandrake's effects, right?"

I brought up my armor's fake abilities, figuring it'd probably be faster if I just did it myself.

"No, Lady Mary, you just stay put!" Magiluka insisted.

"Right! If this is going to get any messier, I should be the one to take it!" Sacher turned down my offer enthusiastically. His expression was very serious...

*Whoa, what's gotten into him? It makes me look like I'm some kind of troublemaker! Well, I guess it's not "like" I'm a troublemaker. I did end up causing this mess...*

I was a bit taken aback by their attitudes, and I pressed my index fingers together in a defeated manner. The male students looked taken aback at me making this gesture while in full-body armor, but I wasn't in a state of mind to care. Safina tried to cheer me up by saying they were just worried about me.

"You have strong nerves, Sacher, so I'm sure you'll be fine," Magiluka said, sighing at my gesture. "Just pull it out already."

The students begged us to stop, but we all agreed to ignore them.

"F-Fine," Sacher said, still looking a bit unconvinced.

He grabbed the flower's stem, which was protruding from the soil, with both hands and tried to pull on it to test how it felt. The flower mandrakes were twice as large as ordinary ones, which gave the impression they would be difficult for him to pull out all on his own.

"A one, two—"

Sacher braced his feet against the ground and held his breath as he started pulling the stem. Everyone plugged their ears and watched on anxiously.

"Nnnnnnng! O-Oh, I'm getting a bad feeling about this...!" Sacher said as he pulled, looking at the soil with an oddly serious face.

"What's wrong?!" Magiluka asked him, noticing something was wrong.

We all tensed up.

"It's too hard! I can't pull it out!"

Hearing this anticlimactic response, multiple people sighed, myself included.

"And you call yourself the Solos class master?! Put some spirit into it!" I tried to stir him up.

"No, there's no point. I can't do it." The Solos class master ignored my incendiary comment and gave a lackadaisical response. "I'll just hurt my waist if I try any harder alone. Gimme a hand."

Even Safina frowned at Sacher's reply this time.

"Fine, I'll help," Reifus said with a troubled expression and made to approach Sacher.

"Your Highness, please stay put," Magiluka said, stepping in front of the prince.

"Yes, just leave this to Magiluka and me!" I nodded.

"Then you two do it," Sacher the good-for-nothing said. "If you're helping her, I'm sure Lady Mary won't mess it up."

He then got to his feet and walked over to the prince, switching places with us. With just the two of us here now, I—in my white armor—exchanged a look with my blonde ringlet friend, pondering how to approach this.

"You know what? Let me help anyway," Sacher piped in, getting impatient.

"Leave it to us!" Magiluka and I glared at him.

He retreated upon our angered response, taking a few steps back and hiding behind the prince.

"Fine, Lady Mary, let's do it."

"Yes."

"But do be careful and don't do anything excessive," she said. "Just do as I say. And be sure not to do anything strange. No matter what. Under any circumstance."

*She's being oddly persistent. Is there a reason she— Ah! Does she mean...?*

At that moment, a certain painful memory surfaced in my mind.

\* \* \*

"Lady Mary, your helmet is dirty."

It'd happened while I was walking about with everyone, enjoying a short break. Tutte

had suddenly told me about my helmet having a mark on it.

"It is? Where?" I looked around, pretending to look for the blemish though I obviously wouldn't be able to see it.

"Oh, it's nothing big, but it does bother me. Allow me to clean it."

"Really? All right, go ahead," I said and reached for my helmet.

I figured giving her the helmet would make it easier to clean, but the moment I did, Magiluka, Safina, Sacher, and the prince all stepped away from me in a hurry. Seeing their blatant aversion, I lowered my hands from the helmet and stiffened where I stood.

"Could you wipe it off while I have it on?" I asked, defeated.

"Yes. Excuse me, then."

I bent forward so Tutte could wipe my helmet more easily. Seeing this, everyone approached me again with relieved expressions.

"Mmm, it won't come off..." Tutte mumbled, wiping my helmet with a concerned expression.

"Maybe something stuck to it when I was practicing magic in class," I said. "I wouldn't dodge that kind of thing when I have armor on, so maybe it stuck to it then. Should I take it off after all?"

I made to take off my helmet, and once again, everyone stepped away from me.

"No, you can keep it on." Tutte shook her head.

"You sure?" I let go of the helmet.

Tutte continued scrubbing my helmet.

"Hmm, why is there small dirt in such a hard to reach spot..." she said with a frown.

"Maybe I should take it off anyway?" I once again reached for my helmet, and once again, everyone stepped away from me in dread.

"No, it's fine. Leave it on."

"You sure?"

And sure enough, once I got my hands off the helmet, the rest of them came back. The more it happened, the more apologetic I felt.

"There, all clean. Pardon me for taking a while," Tutte said with a relieved face. She then bowed to everyone, myself included, and returned to her regular spot. I checked if my helmet was on right and moved it a little.

"Seriously, Lady Mary, don't scare us like that," Sacher said, sighing in relief. "If you're going to take off your helmet, just do it already."

"I mean, Tutte told me not to," I sulked through my helmet.

"No, you don't have to take her seriously at times like that. You know, read the room a little, Lady Mary! Aha ha..."

Sacher was half joking, but hearing that from him shocked me to the core. *Aaaah! The guy who doesn't know the first thing about reading the room just told me that!*

"Sorry, Tutte." I hung my head and bashfully pressed my index fingers together again, moping. "I'm an armored lady who can't read the room..."

"D-Don't let it trouble you, Lady Mary," Tutte said.

She and Safina moved in to comfort me, while Magiluka directed a freezing glare at Sacher. The prince tried to console me.

*Aww, so it was like a "no means yes" sort of thing? Fine, I'll make sure to read the room next time! I swore to myself.*

\* \* \*

*Right, this is my chance to set things right! Magiluka's giving me a chance to redo things, so that's why she's emphasizing that I should be careful. Thank you, Magiluka. This time, I'll be an armored lady who reads the room like a book!*

I gazed at Magiluka, filled with renewed motivation.

*She told me not to do anything unnecessary, but if I think about it with the “no means yes” logic, that just means she’s telling me to do something! Don’t worry, Magiluka, I get it!*

In my mind, I was performing some Olympic-level mental gymnastics. And sadly, since this was all happening in my head, no one was stepping in to stop me.

*I think I remember seeing some skit in my past life about someone going ahead with something even if they were repeatedly told not to... Ah! Is Magiluka asking me to make her laugh?*

My mental gymnastics continued in full force with no one to stop them.

## 7. THE MANDRAKES...

*Can I do it? Am I good at telling jokes? No, I’m not! Oh, what am I supposed to do? Magiluka’s counting on me here! Think of something, Mary!*

Trying to think of a way to surprise her, I racked my brain. Meanwhile, I did as Magiluka said and got behind her. I didn’t realize Magiluka did this so I wouldn’t accidentally do something by touching the plant, mostly because I was too focused on finding a good idea.

“Now, I’ll pull the root. Lady Mary, you balance me from behind. All right, Lady Mary? You’re only supporting me here. Do not do anything unnecessary,” Magiluka said, once again setting me up for a joke.

“Y-Yes... I get it!”

*I’m just holding her from behind while she pulls... Is there anything, anything I can do? Do I pull too? Maybe pull up?*

I placed my hands on Magiluka’s body and held her under her armpits, when suddenly, divine revelation struck me.

*Oh! Come to think of it, Magiluka’s afraid of heights. Right, so when Magiluka pulls up the mandrakes, I’ll lift her up. Like you do with little kids! Heh heh, I bet Magiluka won’t*

*see that coming!*

I smirked behind my helmet and slackened my grip on her. Normally, you'd want to get a firm grip to prepare to lift someone up, but with my strength, doing that would end up snapping her. And so, I figured I'd be better off being careful and just gently pinching my fingers around her sides.

"All right, here I go!" Magiluka said.

"Ready whenever you are!" I told her.

And as Magiluka called out, I applied a bit of strength and lifted her up.

"A one, two— Pfha!"

*Huh? Magiluka made this weird noise...*

I lifted up my upper half, holding my arms up to the heavens, but once I noticed Magiluka's strange voice, I found myself dazzled by the sun.

*But wait, why am I seeing the sun? Magiluka should be right in front of me...*

With that thought in mind, I looked at my hands, realizing that Magiluka wasn't in my grasp.

"Huh?"

Unable to keep up with the situation, I looked down at my hands until I finally registered that the worst possible had occurred.

"Noooooooo!"

"Bwaaaaagh!" Hearing both a girlish screech and a scream—probably the mandrake's—I looked up and spotted a dot in the sky above me.

"Magiluka!" I screamed and walked backward, intent on catching her.

Much like I did two years ago in the Solos class, I'd let something slip from my grasp. Since I'd only held her with a pinch, I'd ended up lifting her along with the mandrake and throwing them both into the air.

"Wind!" Professor Fried chanted in a panic, producing a wind that swept up Magiluka in midair, curbing her fall.

With her having slowed down, I somehow managed to catch her.

"Catch!" I exclaimed. "Welcome back to solid ground, Magiluka."

I peered into Magiluka's face as I held her in a bridal carry, still clad in my armor.

She glared at me silently, teary-eyed and very red in the face. Apparently, she was too terrified to speak.

*Oh, she's mad. Furious, even.*

"Did you have a good flight?"

Another lethal glare.

"...S-Sorry. Teehee."

Normally, my smile would be enough to defuse her anger, but since I had my helmet on this time, she couldn't see it and kept stabbing me with her daggerlike glares of criticism.

"I mean, you were the one setting me up to pull a gag!" I complained.

"I said! Nothing! Of the sort!" she screamed at me, finally remembering how to speak.  
"I told you over and over again! Don't do anything unnecessary!"

She rained blows on my helmet as she complained. I couldn't feel them at all, so I let her bonk me to her heart's content.

*I'm holding her in a bridal carry while she's all blushed, teary-eyed and sulky, and she's hitting me nonstop... It's kinda... cute...*

I let that inappropriate thought cross my mind, with thankfully no one seeing my dopey smile through the helmet.

"Ah, wait, what about the mandrake?" Safina asked while the two of us were frolicking (I guess?), staring at Safina as she hit me.

"Huh?" Magiluka and I asked in unison, realizing the importance of the question.

Magiluka stopped whaling on me and looked at her hands. Sure enough, the mandrake root wasn't in her grasp. But she'd definitely had it when she went flying. Finnel started looking around for it, assuming Magiluka must have let go of it in midair.

"Isn't that it over there?" she pointed at a mass that lay on the ground behind me.

"O-Oh, thank goodness. We finally have it, even if getting it was a bit of trouble..." I sighed in relief, approaching the fallen root to pick it up.

But then, I froze up, my thoughts grinding to a halt. Everyone else did the same, unable to process what we just saw.

The mandrake was certainly lying on the ground. But then, the mandrake... stood up.

*Aaaah, leave me alone! My name isn't Seymour!*

Cracking that joke in my head helped me relax somewhat and get a better grasp of the situation. The mandrake was certainly standing up, the roots forming a head, torso, and limbs.

"Huh? What's... eh?" I heard Magiluka freeze up behind me.

I turned around, glancing at her through my helmet. She was pointing at the supernatural phenomenon standing up before us, shaking her head in a fidgety manner. Time seemed to stand still, but that moment ended when the mandrake very much ran off with an oddly graceful running form.

We could only watch in blank amazement as the mandrake skedaddled.

"Did it just... give us the slip?" the prince asked no one in particular.

His words finally made me come to my senses.

"Get back here!" I took off after the mandrake, my armor clanging with each step.

\* \* \*

On the road connecting the campus building sprinted one root plant, pursued by an

angry suit of armor. The passersby probably thought this was a very strange sight, but I wasn't in any state to look at them and find out.

I relied on the limited field of vision the helmet's visor offered me to chase the mandrake. The mandrake ran in zigzags, and it proved to be faster than expected. I was losing sight of it.

*Aaah, I can't see anything like this!*

In my panic, I forgot my condition and reached for my helmet as I ran.

"N-No, you mustn't, Lady Mary!" I heard Tutte call out behind me, but at that moment, I couldn't bring myself to care much.

I took off my helmet, revealing my silver hair which trailed after me as I sprinted. It drew the stares of every student walking by to me.

That was the start of the chaos that was about to ensue.

## 8. IT'S ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER

What looked undoubtedly like a root vegetable was speeding nimbly across the academy grounds, its form as perfect as that of an Olympic runner I'd seen on TV in my past life. And while I was very much a fast runner myself, I couldn't catch up to it thanks to students approaching the campus building and serving as living obstacles.

I couldn't very well just knock them all out of my way, so I had to constantly grind to a halt. In the process, I did end up bumping into a few students, but each time it happened, I ignored the boys staring at my face in favor of fixing my gaze on the fleeing mandrake. And while I was caught up with them, the plant gracefully weaved between their legs, gaining further distance from me.

*Curse you! How is a blasted vegetable outrunning me?! My pride as a noble lady won't stand for this!*

I burned with a strange sense of rivalry as I chased the mandrake around. But just then, some male students ahead of me knocked down a barrel, sending it rolling into

our direct path. In a stroke of good luck, it blocked off the mandrake's route.

*Nice! Now it has to stop!* I smirked, imagining myself finally capturing the errant mandrake.

But then...

"Huh?" I let out a silly utterance, shocked at what I'd just seen.

With a hop, the mandrake had done a spectacular backflip and had gracefully jumped over the rolling barrel. Its jump was so perfect I could see it happen in slow motion for some reason. And then, when I realized that it was my turn to dodge the incoming barrel, I panicked.

"Waaah! Move, get out of the way!" I shouted.

Male students stopped in their tracks, shocked by the sight of the mandrake's leap, leaving the barrel in my direct path. And in my panic, I tried to jump... and failed. My fully armored tackle shattered the barrel.

"I'm sorry! It's the armor's fault! The armor did thiiis!" I left behind this vague excuse and took off after the mandrake again. I sprinted without slowing down one bit, which thankfully allowed me to catch up to the mandrake in no time.

At last, I was able to corner it at an L-shaped turn outside the campus building.

"Haah, phew... I got you now. Give it up and let me crush you!" Catching my breath, I slowly sidled up to the cornered mandrake and taunted it like a villain.

"Lady Mary!" I heard someone call out behind me just then.

Sacher, who was the second fastest runner after me, had caught up to me. I replied without turning to look at him, my gaze fixed on the mandrake.

"I have the mandrake cornered, Sir Sacher. Help me catch it, please," I said, extending both hands toward the plant while wiggling my fingers.

But then, Sacher walked up beside me and grabbed one of my arms. Due to the armor, I could hardly feel it, and it certainly didn't hurt, but to my surprise, I turned to look at him.

"Huh? What's wrong?" I asked.

"I can't let you do that, princess," he said with an earnest expression. "Leave this to me. If it's for you, princess, I'll do anything."

"Pfft!" I burst out laughing. "Stop fooling around!"

Lines like that were the last thing I expected to hear from Sacher. Trying to restrain my laughter, I made to brush away his hands, but he grabbed my arm even harder, pulling me closer.

"I'm serious, princess," he whispered.

*Okay, whoa! Personal space, please!*

He looked down at me and drew his face closer to mine.

*Wait, didn't this happen before...? Ah! This is just like what happened with Reifus!*

As his face drew closer to mine, I could see my expression reflected in his eyes. It was then that I realized that my head was exposed.

*My helmet is off! No wonder my field of vision is so good! Mary from ten minutes ago, how could you mess up like this?!*

As I shifted the blame to my past self, Sacher continued closing in on me.

"Don't worry, I'll handle everything. You just need to give the word, princess."

For how flippant he usually was, right now Sacher was oddly serious, which ended up accentuating his naturally handsome features. Most noble ladies would get KO'd by the destructive force of his appearance—and since I'd been taken by surprise, I was becoming quite flustered by him.

"L-Listen, the mandrake is getting away..." I glanced at the mandrake, desperately trying to tear my eyes away from Sacher's.

Grasping the situation was turning in its favor, the mandrake edged along the wall slowly.

"That's fine," Sacher said with an absentminded smile.

"No, it isn't!" I snapped at him and used my free hands to land a body blow on him.

*I'm sorry, Sacher. I couldn't raise a hand on the prince, but with you, I don't have to hesitate.*

"Oh... Agh... Impressive, Lady Mary... A lovely... punch..." Sacher muttered stupidly as he crumbled to the ground.

I breathed out in relief as I watched him sink to the ground, and capitalizing on this chance, the mandrake sprinted, trying to escape the dead end.

"You're not getting away!" I shouted after it, spotting its movement from the corner of my eye.

I dived at the mandrake, successfully grabbing it by the head. It seemed the mandrake had frozen up the moment before I caught it for some reason, but I wasn't going to question what had happened.

"Phew, finally. You gave me more trouble than you were worth."

I lifted it up by the leaves on its head and breathed out in relief. I gazed at the mandrake thrashing in my grip and then turned around, feeling quite pleased with myself... only to then go very pale.

"The White Princess..."

"The princess... She's so... beautiful..."

"Lady Mary... Haah, haah..."

A large swarm of male students were shambling up to me like zombies, blocking my path. This was why the mandrake had ended up stopping in its tracks. The sight of the boys drawing in on me was so chilling I had to step back in dread. It was only now that I realized that on the way here, I'd bumped into countless boys who'd ended up looking directly at my face.

*There must be a lot of boys chasing me now...*

I thought back to things I saw in anime in my past life; the school idol being chased around the school by all the boys. Back then, I laughed at that development, but now I'd stumbled into it. That thought made me feel terribly awkward.

"Hm... Everyone, let's just calm down... I'm sure we can talk this out..." I told the boys shambling toward me, a nervous smile on my lips.

Without realizing it, I found myself being cornered into the dead end, just like the mandrake had been.

"Lady Maaaaaaaary!" the boys shouted as they charged me.

"L-L-L-Levitation!" I chanted and escaped into the air.

"Aaaah, Lady Mary!"

"Don't run, my princess!"

"Oooh, please step on me with your beautiful legs!"

The boys reached for the sky as they watched me soar up, like zombies clawing up from the bottom of hell.

*Whoa, scary... Some of those students were saying some pretty creepy stuff. Let's just pretend I didn't hear them.*

I rose up to a height where they wouldn't be able to reach me, slowly drifting through the air for a while. Once I confirmed no one was following me, I relaxed, realizing the danger had passed.

"That was dangerous... Well, anyway, I have what I came for, so all's well that ends well."

I lifted up the mandrake to examine it more closely, and it seemed to have given up on trying to get away and had gone limp. Thanks to my once over, though, I failed to notice someone approaching me.

"I see you caught the mandrake," a voice from behind me jolted me out of my thoughts.

"Whoa!" I exclaimed, very nearly letting go of the mandrake. "Ah, Magiluka?! Don't

scare me like that!"

I cradled the mandrake close to my body with both hands. Magiluka shrugged in apology and then started staring at me.

"Oh, right, Magiluka, sorry, but could you get me my helmet? I'll have to stay up here until you do. Oh, and right, could you take this to Tutte and ask her to crush this so I can drink it? Please."

I felt bad for using her like my gofer, but I was too focused on getting back to normal right now. And because of that, I'd failed to notice something.

As I handed Magiluka the mandrake, she stared at it for a moment, smiled, and then... let go of it.

She *let go of the mandrake*.

"Aaaaaah!" I screamed as the mandrake fell.

I followed it with my eyes as it plummeted downward and hit an irrigation ditch with a splash, and to my relief, it then floated up to the water's surface.

*Wait, but I thought root vegetables don't float. Can this thing swim?! I guess it isn't actually a vegetable. I mean, since when can vegetables scream or run? That's a fantasy world for you. Common sense doesn't apply here... But forget that!*

As I turned to look at Magiluka with teary eyes and thought to protest against what she'd done, she looked back at me unapologetically and approached me with blurred eyes. She lovingly brushed a hand through my hair as the wind toyed with it.

"Trying to put you back to the way you were when you're this lovely would be foolish," she said, her eyes entranced.

"Huh?"

Only then did I realize that she looked just like the boys who'd chased me, and recalled that Magiluka wouldn't normally be flying or floating for this long to begin with because of her fear of heights.

*No... She's under the effect of the charm. And the charmed state is overriding her fear of*

*heights. I can't believe it... Has my situation progressed so far that I'm charming members of the same sex too?*

As I laughed dryly thinking about how bad I'd let things get, Magiluka continued to draw in on me. Her eyes wavered, her cheeks were flushed, and hot breaths escaped her pink, puckered lips. I felt my heart skip a beat. Even to a fellow girl like me, the way Magiluka was acting was so...

*Wait, no! I don't swing that way!*

*"Emergency retreat!"*

I couldn't beat her up the way I did Sacher, so I momentarily undid my levitation magic. I immediately went into a free fall, like a string that had been holding me had snapped. I could have used levitation magic to descend slowly, but then Magiluka would have been able to catch up to me, and to that end I went for extreme measures.

*"Hiii! Th-This is scary!" I chickened out. "Levitation!"*

As soon as I fell, I chanted the spell again, and my fall slowed down into a more gradual descent. *Even if Magiluka comes after me, I've gained enough distance from her that she probably won't be able to catch up.*

I landed in the irrigation ditch the mandrake had fallen into and carefully looked around. Things were a bit hectic around the campus building, but for the time being, there were no students headed this way in sight. I was lucky it'd fallen into the other side of the academy, where no one was around.

But when I approached the ditch, I found there was someone there already. It was Safina, her fluffy chestnut-colored hair swaying as she used a long pole to pull the floating mandrake over. The mandrake wiggled its hands and feet, trying to swim away. I almost had to admire how devoted it was to running away.

*"Safina!" I called out to her.*

*"Ah, Lady Ma—" Safina turned to look at me, but then. "L-Lady Maaaaary!"*

*"What's wrong— Ungh!"*

As soon as she looked at me, Safina threw away the pole, screamed my name, and

dived at me. She did it just as I'd landed, meaning my footing wasn't good, and she ended up knocking me down to the ground. As Safina looked down at me, her eyes burning with feverish desire, I felt a cold sweat run down my back.

*I hate to admit it, but it's not just Magiluka. The charm is working on girls now too!*

Some part of me had leaned into wishful thinking and thought maybe Magiluka was the only one who'd go all crazy like that while the other girls would be fine. But when Safina straddled me in a most uncharacteristic manner, I had to admit the truth.

"Aaah, Lady Mary, Lady Mary, I'll! Aaaah..." Safina said, breathing heavily and blushing for some reason.

"Lady Mary!"

And then, as if to make things worse, Tutte showed up. As I lay pinned with my neck turned toward her, the maid looked at me with a shocked expression. Her face was very red, and realizing she was probably charmed too filled me with dread and despair.

*There's no one left to save me... Everyone went crazy, and it's all my fault!*

I didn't have the confidence, let alone a method, to shake both of them off. As I resigned myself to my fate, Tutte hurried over to us. But then, I felt something plop over my head.

"Huh?"

Everything went dark at once. At first, I suspected Tutte was hanging over my head, but then I realized the sensation touching my skin was of something covering my head.

*Is this my helmet?!*

Coming to, I fixed the helmet over my head, allowing myself to see. I saw Safina, sitting right in front of my face with a vacant expression. I slowly, carefully edged away from her, successfully freeing myself from her grasp.

"Thank goodness, I made it..." Tutte sank to the ground behind me with an exhausted tone.

"Tutte..." I said.

She wasn't charmed. She came over to put the helmet on my head.

"Oh, Lady Mary, why did you have to throw away the helmet like that...? Picking it up, cleaning it, and bringing it to you was exhausting..."

Tutte puffed up her cheeks in an angry gesture, but then she giggled. My dear maid was treating me as she always did. In my joy, I grabbed her in a hug, forgetting that I still had the armor on.

"Tudeeeeee!" I called out in tears, slurring her name.

I was honestly scared and overwhelmed by how strangely everyone was acting, so seeing my maid was able to treat me normally even when she'd seen me without the helmet was touching.

"L-Lady Mary, I can't breathe, and your armor, it hurts!"

As I hugged Tutte, forgetting restraint, I pressed my armor against her body, which suffocated her.

"O-Oh, Lady Mary, I'm sorry! I can't believe myself!" Safina, who finally came to her senses as she watched us, began apologizing profusely.

"It's fine, Safina. Don't let it weigh on you," I said. "It's all my fault to begin with..."

"O-Oh... But..." she started protesting, her cheeks going red at the memory of what she'd done.

"But really, I'm surprised you were able to stay sane while everyone else got charmed, Tutte," I said, changing the subject out of concern for Safina.

"Huh? Well, like I've said before, I've watched your adorable visage since we were little, Lady Mary, so I believe I'm more resistant to it than most."

"Tutte... That's pretty amazing. I mean, I saw that the charm does affect you, so that's some impressive mental discipline."

"Hee hee hee, well, and on top of that... Compared to everyone else, I've seen more of

how ditzy you can be, so I know that no matter how cute you are, you're too much of a ditz..."

"Huh? Hold on, Tutte... What was that?" I asked back, unable to overlook what she'd appended at the end there.

"W-Well, forget that, Lady Mary." Tutte averted her gaze from me like she'd just let her tongue slip. "Let's collect the mandrake and boil it, shall we?"

She got to her feet and approached the mandrake that was still floating—if not gracefully swimming—in the water.

"Yes, very well. But before that, I think we can take a moment to review what you just said, can't we?" I made to get up so as to go after her.

"Lady Mary!" I suddenly heard a voice shout at me. "It's dangerous! Get away from there!"

Just then, Magiluka finally descended from the air, a bit pale in the face. She shouted a warning, floating five meters over the ground.

"It's all right, Magiluka," I told her. "I have my helmet on, the charm won't—"

"Not that!" she said urgently and pointed behind me as she landed. "I mean that! Look at that!" She was pointing toward the campus building—at the direction I'd been running in earlier.

"What?"

I followed Magiluka's finger. There, I spotted a gigantic slime, large enough to swallow up two or three people on its own.

*Huh? What's going on?!*

## 9. A MANDRAKE AND AN ARMORED LADY

A black, writhing mass sloshed toward us, its gelatinous, gross body shining lustrously

under the sun as it approached us. It was a slime. In a certain game I knew, it was the weakest possible enemy, but as it turned out, slimes were actually pretty tricky opponents in this world.

As I asked myself what this thing was doing in the academy, the thing continued inching closer and closer to us.

*I'll be honest: This is gross. It gives me the creeps. I'm physically disgusted.*

I shivered inside my armor, grossed out. I wanted nothing more than to get the mandrake and make myself scarce. But sadly, the mandrake was still in the middle of its swim, and as Magiluka tried to catch it, it elegantly dodged her.

"Okay, but really, what's a slime doing here?!" I asked no one in particular the obvious question.

I spotted the prince and a few other boys running toward us from the same direction as the slime, a short distance behind it. The slime was thankfully sluggish, and the prince ran past it easily. As he did, the slime didn't react to him in any way.

"I see you got the helmet," he said, relieved. "Thank goodness. I was terrified to think what might happen when you took it off."

"I'm sorry I worried you, Sir Reifus," I said, bowing in my armor. "Do you happen to know what that slime is?"

"Allow us to explain!" interjected the male students accompanying him.

"Who might these gentlemen be?" I asked the prince and directed a cold glare at them over my armor.

"We're members of the Slime Research Society," one of them said. "Our activities mostly pertain to the research of slime biology and selective breeding of slimes!"

I moved my eyes to the prince, who looked very bothered by the whole affair, and then back to the students. Their words made me immediately come to my conclusion.

"Don't tell me that slime is yours," I said.

"Indeed it is! It's the fruit of our research, our masterpiece, and the specimen we

intended to bring to the fair this year!" the Slime Research Society members said boastfully, perhaps blind to the atmosphere right now.

I placed my hand on my forehead over the helmet, hanging my head.

"I'm surprised you were able to keep a slime this big stored somewhere..."

"Well, no, normally it's small enough for us to stuff it into a barrel," he said.

"A barrel?" I looked at the society member who said it, realizing I'd seen a barrel quite recently.

"Yes, while we were moving it around, a white angel gallantly ran past us and crushed the barrel. And then, much to our surprise, the slime started swelling to such a size! It was God's revelation! Simply wondrous! Just look at it, that size, that slimy sheen! It's the ultimate slime! With this, we'll definitely win this year's fair!"

The prince laughed dryly as the society member spread his arms wide and prattled on excitedly, while Safina and Tutte, who were behind me, and Magiluka, who was still floating in midair, all directed harsh glares my way. The words "white angel" had made everyone immediately look at me.

"So yes, that's what happened," Reifus said.

"I'm so sorry, Sir Reifus!" I wished I could kowtow before the prince and everyone else, but given how I looked, I had to bear with it and make do with a simple bowing of the head.

"That aside, why did it suddenly swell up like that?" Magiluka finally landed next to us.

"Well you see, that isn't your average slime!" one of the society members said boastfully. "Through years of research and selective breeding, this slime was accidentally born with the ability to absorb mana and grow in size. We call it a Drain Slime!"

"And what does it growing in size achieve?" Magiluka asked.

"Nothing. All it does is absorb mana to become bigger. Amazing, isn't it?!"

We all turned to look at the blobby mass approaching us.

*What a bothersome slime...*

"So, what happened was that when Lady Mary broke the barrel, the slime stuck to her armor and absorbed the mana emanating from it, which made it grow bigger?" Magiluka summed up the situation.

"Eww, that's disgusting! When did that thing stick to my armor?!" I wrapped my arms around my chest and backed away. "There's nothing on me now, right, Tutte?!"

I spread out my arms so she could check the spots I couldn't see. Tutte brought her face closer to my armor and checked carefully before soothingly telling me it was fine.

"Hmm... The slime's been getting closer to us. Shouldn't we be running?" Safina asked bashfully, which made me realize the slime headed straight for us had gotten very close.

"Why is it coming toward us, anyway?" I asked.

"I wouldn't dare to assume, but maybe it's charmed by you too?" the prince suggested, to which we all froze up.

"Lady Mary, you're indiscriminate!" Magiluka chided me.

"Wow, Lady Mary! Your loveliness attracts even other species now!" Safina exclaimed.

"No, no, it's not true!" I shouted, drowning the two of them out. "I have my helmet on right now! And don't call me indiscriminate or talk about my loveliness attracting other species! These are false charges!"

"Then why is it coming this way?" the prince asked.

"It's probably drawn to a source of delicious mana," one of the society students replied. "Like we said, all that slime is good for and cares about is eating up mana."

"Mana... Oh, you mean, Lady Mary's m—" Magiluka started saying like she'd realized something, but I silenced her with a glare through the helmet. "Uh, it's the mandrake."

Finnel did say mandrakes are rich with mana, after all. So to the slime, a mandrake must have seemed like we were dangling a delicious steak in front of it, and that was why it chased us...

*R-Right?*

"Forget that!" I said, forcibly changing the subject. "This slime belongs to you people, right? Do something about it!"

The society members smiled confidently.

*Well, their attitude is encouraging, if nothing else.*

They were very calm given the situation, leading me to speculate they had some kind of countermeasure in mind.

"Heh, just because we created this slime doesn't mean we can control it," one of them said. "Its creation was a complete coincidence, so we've given up on trying to make sense of it. And how could you expect anything but complete, unrestrained freedom from our absolute masterpiece?!"

"Why are you acting so proud about that?!"

As we were engaged in our back-and-forth, the slime had finally reached the irrigation ditch, looming a dozen or so meters from us.

"It's here, Lady Mary! We have to run!" Magiluka said, suggesting a retreat.

"No, if we leave now, we'll lose sight of the mandrake." I shook my head, glaring reproachfully at the vegetable swimming without a care in the world even now. "We can't just go away. What if the slime actually eats it?"

"Well, okay, but... What do we do about the slime, then?" Magiluka asked back.

"Well, there's only one thing we can do... Oh, drat, where's Sir Sacher when you need him?!"

I spoke up in complaint, realizing our strongest fighter was missing just when a monster was knocking on our doorstep. But then, the prince looked away.

"I'd imagine he's writhing in self-hatred and disgust right now," he said with grave, dark eyes. "I say we leave him alone for now."

*O-Oh... Yes, right... Pardon me.*

Hearing the prince's words, I realized this was partially... if not entirely my fault, and decided not to think about Sacher for the time being.

"Anyway, this thing is after the mandrake," I said, standing in the gross blob's way. "We can't let it steal it from us."

"We'll stall the slime, so you go collect the mandrake." Magiluka stood next to me and instructed the society members. "Your Highness, please step back. And Safina, physical attacks don't work on slimes, so guard His Highness, if you will."

Since physical attacks weren't useful against slimes, it fell to us mages to deal with the slime. But just then, the slime suddenly stopped its crawling, like it had just spotted its prey.

"It's coming!" I braced myself and warned Magiluka. "I won't let you get the manda—Aaaah, noooo!"

When I looked at the slime next, it started writhing toward me again, this time undulating at twice its prior speed. It extended slimy, half-transparent tendrils from its entire body, which—instead of lunging toward the mandrake as I'd expected—all extended in my direction. Seeing this, I screamed and turned around to run.

The slime's tendrils completely ignored Magiluka, who was standing right beside me, and went after me, generating additional length at a rapid pace. Horrifyingly enough, the sloshing sounds of the slime's movements were roiling into an ever more vigorous tempo.

Everyone could only stare in stunned silence, their eyes moving between me and the slime, unable to understand what was going on.

"Aaaaaaaaah, get away from meeee! I'm not a mandrake!"

A gigantic slime chasing a figure in full-body armor. It might have looked comical to an onlooker, but for me, it was no laughing matter. You might think all I had to do was fight it, but I wasn't in the presence of mind to think about it.

*It's just too gross!*

To a girl, the sight of its tendrils was revolting—in a genre-savvy sort of way. They chased after me, their gross movements swift and animated, and my instincts spurred

me to run. I bolted away from the irrigation ditch and toward the campus building, the slime hot on my heels, its tendrils wiggling in pursuit of me.

Left behind, everyone could only assume but one thing: “See, it really is charmed by her.”

“Nooooo! It’s not charmed by me! It’s all the armor’s fault, really! It’s all the armor!” I shouted, sensing their painful stares.

I once again sprinted across the academy, but this time I wasn’t chasing anyone—I was the one being pursued.

## 10. HUH? THE ARGENT KNIGHT?

As I, currently the armored lady, ran from the wiggling gigantic slime, I started doubting myself. *If I run into the campus building, I’ll just be causing more collateral damage, and I’ll be the one people blame for it. Because I’m standing out. A lot.*

I had to find a way to end this mess before things got any bigger, even though it might have been too late for that already.

*All right! Time to show off what an armored lady is capable of!*

I stopped in my tracks, turned around, and faced the approaching slime. The slime wriggled its tendrils toward me, its black luster shining under the sun. I felt a shiver run down my spine.

*Okay, no, this is gross! Swerve!*

I turned around and started running again. But then...

“Lady Mary! Over here!”

I spotted Magiluka, who’d moved away from the irrigation ditch and was standing in an open area, calling for me. Without a second thought, I ran over to her. I could tell she was chanting a spell, so I ran directly at her, setting the slime—who was chasing me—in her spell’s direct line of fire.

I reached Magiluka and ran past her, and she chanted the words of power as I did, and then I stopped in my tracks to watch the results of her plan.

“Freeze Arrow!” she shouted, holding up a hand toward the slime.

The moment she did, an arrow of ice formed in the air and went flying toward the slime. The slime didn’t try to avoid it, charging into the spell and allowing itself to be hit dead on. The spot the arrow touched started freezing over.

We both expected it would stop the slime’s movements, but contrary to our hopes, the slime made no signs of slowing down. It did take damage, and the spot the arrow hit did freeze and crumble away. But that was all it did. Even with part of its body missing, the slime’s charge didn’t slow down one bit. And it was still charging ahead at Magiluka, who was standing in its direct path.

“Aaaaah! It’s too big! I can’t defeat this thing!” Magiluka whined as she got out of the way.

“This is marvelous!” one of the slime breeders exclaimed. “It can withstand magical attacks too! I’d love to gather practical data on this!”

“You! Don’t get excited about this! Do something!” Magiluka chided them.

“We’re sorry, Class Master, but if you can’t do anything about it, how are we supposed to handle it? Oh, but stay away from that direction! His Highness is that way!”

*These cheeky little...!* I fumed.

I ran in a slightly different direction, but once I spotted Magiluka trying to run from me, I went after her.

“Magiluka, why are you getting away from me?!” I complained.

“L-Lady Mary, don’t follow me!” Magiluka begged. “The slime’s clearly going after you!”

“It’s not going after me! It’s going after the armor!” I corrected her. “Don’t say things that might give people the wrong idea!”

“Who cares about these little details now?!” she argued back.

I chased after Magiluka, resolving that if I had to go down, I'd be taking her with me. But suddenly, Magiluka disappeared from my field of vision. It looked like something had suddenly drawn her away. I stopped in my tracks and immediately looked at the slime...

...and just like I'd feared, the slime's tendrils had wrapped around Magiluka and yanked her into the air as the creature made to draw her into its body.

"Magilukaaaaaaa!" I called out.

"Noooooooooo!" I heard her scream.

The slime dragged Magiluka toward it, preparing to swallow her... but before it could do that, the slime suddenly stopped moving. Magiluka and I stared at it in wary silence. The slime seemed to inspect its prey and then, much to our surprise, dropped Magiluka. It was like it'd said, "Oh, I got the wrong one."

"It seems it has no interest in you because you don't have the kind of mana it's looking for," one of the slime breeders said. "Good for you!"

"I am a mage! This is insulting!" Magiluka complained, sitting squatted on the ground.

"Oh, don't say that! You're safe, aren't you?!" I told her.

But since I'd stopped running, the slime's tendrils started coiling around my arm.

"Ugh, this is gross! Gauntlet, cast off!"

I reflexively took off the gauntlet and the armor surrounding my arm, which was then promptly reeled back by the slime. My gauntlet was swallowed up into the slime's blob-like body.

"Aaaah! It ate Lady Mary's arm!" Safina called out tragically.

"It ate my gauntlet, not my arm!" I corrected her, waving my exposed arm. "Stop acting like the armor is me!"

But as I waved my arm, the boys started blushing for some reason.

*Seriously? Just looking at my arm is enough to start charming them now?*

I moved to hide my arm from sight, but then I heard everyone exclaim.

“Ooooh!”

I turned to look at the slime, curiously, only to be shocked.

*Whoa! It's huge!*

The slime had grown even bigger. It'd sucked in the large amounts of mana in my armor and had swelled up even further, becoming a gargantuan slime. With it being this large, it was visible from a distance and had started drawing attention from students even further away.

“Fantastic! This is wonderful, Lady Mary! Look at how much bigger it’s gotten!” one of the slime breeders said, elated, and then suggested something terrifying. “If possible, could you feed the rest of your armor to the slime?! We want to see how big it can get!”

*That would just make this mess even worse! And it'd also mean I'd have to walk around without the armor, which would just be pouring more fuel on the fire, so no!*

I was exasperated at these men who didn’t quite seem to realize that I was in a charm-inducing state. Resolving to handle this on my own, I drew my Legendary Sword (Cringe) and stood on guard.

“Magiluka! Can you use large-area freezing magic?” I asked, my eyes fixed on the slime.

I suspected she must be somewhere nearby, which was why I’d called out to her. And sure enough...

“Y-Yes, I can, but only once,” Magiluka replied tensely. “And one time won’t be enough to freeze something that big!”

At that point, students were gathering around us.

“Ooh, where did that giant slime come from?!”

“Look! The Argent Knight is fighting the slime!”

“It’s like something out of a fairy tale...”

*I'm not like Safina. I can't read my opponents to dodge their attacks and close in on them. At worst, if I try to swing at it, I'll end up getting bound by its tendrils...*

The image of it wrapping its tendrils around my limbs and dragging me close made me immediately shake my head and reject the idea of attacking it directly. I got the feeling a noble lady's dignity simply wouldn't allow me to go through with that.

"Heeey! I got the mandrake!" an inappropriately cheery voice snapped the tense thread of my thoughts.

Sacher, who'd apparently recovered from his shame, showed up and proudly raised his right hand toward me. Dangling from his hand was a root vegetable that'd been dipped in water and looked very vibrant and animated as a result.

We all turned to look at him, and even the slime stopped in its tracks, its tendrils swaying like it was conflicted over whether it should go after him or me. I immediately noticed and capitalized on the slime's doubt and sprinted toward it.

"Let me teach you a valuable lesson, slime! He who runs after two hares catches none!" I said.

I instantly closed the distance between us and thrust my Legendary Sword (Cringe) at the slime. The confused slime marked me as its target and swung its tendrils at me as I unconsciously (really!) mouthed the Argent Knight's finishing line. Habit can be a scary thing.

"Embraced by this primal light, thou shalt burst away! Nova Flaaaaaaare!"

I stabbed my sword into the slime, and as I chanted, blinding light built up within the creature. Its body swelled up like it was boiling.



“It’s all over,” I declared silently.

The light swelling up inside the slime burst, making it pop like a balloon. I jumped back to avoid the blast, and in my place, Magiluka swiftly approached the slime.

“Diamond Dust!” she chanted.

Her spell created a blizzard that washed over the slime’s remains. Everyone watched Magiluka’s spell as the seconds ticked by, and a moment later, they breathed out in relief when they saw the (now much smaller) slime standing there encased in ice. I confirmed the slime wasn’t moving, then turned around gallantly. And as I did, the ice cracked and crumbled away.

What followed was an eruption of cheers from all around me. I jolted at the sudden shouts and looked around in surprise, finding that the students who were watching from a distance had surrounded me at some point. Some among them were noble ladies that smiled at me ecstatically.

*Huh? They shouldn’t be charmed right now, should they...?*

I touched my armor, confirming it was still on. My arm was exposed, but otherwise, the rest of my body was fully covered by the armor, so they shouldn’t have been charmed.

“Oooh, that was amazing! You blew away that giant slime with one hit!”

“That’s wonderful! You really are like the Argent Knight!”

“It’s the second coming of the Argent Knight!”

*Wait, no, Magiluka was part of this too, you know?! You all saw her finish it off! Why am I the one getting all the credit?! I broke into a nervous sweat inside my armor.*

It seemed that despite Magiluka’s brilliant performance, my armor had simply left too much of an impression and had drawn everyone’s attention. But while everyone expected me to wave elegantly and walk away, I instead just squatted down and ran off.

*Nooo! Stop putting me on a pedestal, stop clapping, stop staring at me all dreamily like thaaaaat!* I screamed internally.

I ran off with my hands covering my helmet like I was trying to hide my face. The students cleared the way, allowing me to run. I made myself scarce, cheers raining over me all the while. After that, I was finally able to boil the mandrake we caught, drink its essence, and remove the charm effect.

But needless to say, I certainly didn't feel like everything had ended well.

## 11. IF YOU GIVE UP, THAT'S WHEN IT'S GAME OVER

Two days passed since the charm incident ended. As always, and as expected, I'd spent the day following the incident shut off in my room and refusing to attend the academy. The reasons for that were twofold.

One was that I'd wanted to make doubly sure that the charm effect was gone. I wouldn't have known what to do if boys had clung to me like that again. And attending the academy in my armor wasn't an option due to the second reason: with my incident having drawn the attention of everyone on campus, I'd known from experience the whole place would be abuzz with rumors about the Argent Knight. In light of that, there was no way I could show up to class in my armor.

And so, I ended up shutting myself off in my room. But I couldn't be absent again for the simple reason that my father was coming home that day.

*I can't let father hear about this. Who knows what he might do if he finds out?!*

Father loved me dearly, which I appreciated, but the way he showed his love to me was... extreme. And so, with the concern of what he might do if he found out about the incident hanging over my head like the sword of Damocles, I had no choice but to board the carriage to the academy.

"But what excuse am I going to make?" I asked, clinging to faint hope. "Will people believe me if I say it was all the armor? I just hope I'm worrying for nothing and no one makes a fuss about it... I just want to be a background character..."

"Lady Mary... Just give up," Tutte, who sat opposite me, said in a resigned tone. "You already got into enough trouble like this. Isn't it time you face up to reality?"

"Let me teach you an important lesson I once learned," I told her sagely, drawing on my memories of my past life. "If you give up, that's when it's game over... And I'm not giving up!"

"'Game over'...? Are you playing some kind of game, Lady Mary?" Tutte asked me quizzically.

"Oh, don't nitpick." I leaned forward toward the carriage's opposite seat, took her hands, and gave her the most puppy dog stare I could muster. "Anyway, I'm not giving up, so help me out, Tutte. You're the only one I can count on."

"...O-Of course, Lady Mary." Tutte squeezed my hands back and changed her mind, her cheeks a bit rosy. "I'll keep helping you until the game is over."

*Huh? The charm effect is gone, right? Because the way she just reacted is kind of making me worried.*

I wasn't sure if this was some kind of side effect or lingering influence from the charm effect or not. I only realized it when I arrived at the academy.

When we reached the academy, I was constantly exposed to the other students' stares, and I had to keep my head down. They were all staring at me. Fixedly. Intently. From every which way, I felt people's eyes, and I could only keep my head hung and my own eyes fixed to the floor.

What made it worse was that their stares weren't full of negative emotions like hostility or hatred, but they were instead fervent gazes of interest and affection, which just made me feel awkward and ill at ease. I couldn't look anyone in the eye.

*This is weird. Isn't the charm effect all gone now? Then why?*

"H-Hey... Why are all the boys staring at me? The charm effect isn't still working, is it?" I whispered to Magiluka, who sat opposite me in the Aleyios lounge.

"No, the effect is gone," Magiluka said plainly.

"B-Buuuut..." I glanced sideways, where boys were glancing at me, only to look away upon realizing I could see them.

"Well, that's different," Magiluka explained. "When you took off your helmet and ran

around the academy, you drew the attention of both students who were already aware of you and those who didn't care much about you before that. So even with the charm effect gone, they still remember how their hearts pined for you back then."

"Oh, no..." I dropped my shoulders.

Her explanation made sense, and I could only fall over the desk despondently.

"Lady Mary, please, everyone is staring," Magiluka chided me.

"Ugh..." I straightened my back and sat like a proper lady.

Usually, people didn't stare at us that much unless something was happening, but now there wasn't a second where someone *wasn't* staring at us, and I couldn't relax at all.

*Aaah, I wanna run into the lounge in the old campus building. I feel like I'm going crazy here...*

I looked around casually, and once I saw no one was looking at me suspiciously, locked eyes with a certain group of ladies and smiled softly—to which the girls squealed excitedly.

"I can understand why the boys act this way, but why are the girls like this too?"

"You should be asking yourself that," Magiluka replied coldly.

I brought my hands together, held them before my chest, and closed my eyes pensively.

"You remember a certain dashing knight who defeated a gigantic monster two days ago?" she asked me.

"...There was someone like that here?" I opened my eyes, lowered my hands, and cocked my head.

"I'm talking about you!" Magiluka raised her voice, outraged at my obliviousness.

That drew the eyes of everyone in the lounge, to which we both smiled apologetically and tried to make ourselves inconspicuous.

"Everyone in Aleyios was well aware that it was you in the armor, so the rumors ended

up spreading like wildfire. By now, everyone believes you're descended from the Argent Knight's bloodline."

"Isn't assuming that just because I wore some silver armor jumping to conclusions a little?" I said, struggling to make excuses.

"I wouldn't say that's the only reason," Magiluka replied dryly. "The explosion spell you used was quite advanced, as third-order spells go. Most students wouldn't know the difference, but us prospective mages would. That's why everyone assumes you're the Argent Knight."

"E-Erm, well... You know... I just did it in the heat of the moment... or something..." My eyes darted around as I struggled to come up with an excuse.

Magiluka sighed.

"Even with the armor helping you, you shouldn't do anything too conspicuous. You're frail without your armor, after all. When you use magic like that... Why, you had to spend a day in bed after that incident! You need to take better care of yourself."

Magiluka looked at me with a mix of exasperation and concern.

*Oh, right, they all think I'm frail and can't capitalize on my talents properly...*

Recalling the misunderstanding everyone's been under since seeing me in the Solos class, I felt relief wash over me. *Everyone still believes that.*

"I'm sorry I made you worry..." I apologized to my friend, feeling guilty about lying to her.

After that, we went into class, where Magiluka smoothly shooed away any boys that approached me. Whenever she wasn't around, Sacher and Reifus filled that role. Safina couldn't very much help with keeping the boys away due to her personality, but she did serve as a healing presence.

*Aaah, having friends is so good...*

But sadly, my warm, snuggly feelings of friendship could only help me so much. When the other young ladies started talking about the Argent Knight, Magiluka and Safina were of no help to me.

When classes ended, I ran for cover in the old campus building's lounge, where once again, the ladies were shrieking and chattering excitedly, replaying the events of the previous incident, much to my shame. It was like torture.

*Aha ha ha... Just give me a break...* Feeling a sense of déjà vu settle in, I could only laugh dryly as I watched Safina chatter excitedly with the other young ladies.

"Once she saw an opening, Lady Mary—the Argent Knight—swiftly hurried over to the slime, stabbed her sword into it, and said this!" Safina said, engrossed.

"Aaaaaaaah!" the girls squealed happily.

*Aha ha... Please, really, just give me a break...*

"Embraced by this primal light, thou shalt burst away!" Safina quoted me quoting the Argent Knight.

The girls once again shrieked excitedly.

*Ha. Ha. Ha. Break. Give. Please.*

As I put up with this torture, I could only hate my past self for feeling inclined to say that finishing line.

"Lady Mary must be descended from the Argent Knight!" one of the ladies said.

"Oh, pish posh," I said as pleasantly as I could. "Me, descended from who? I'm just a *perfectly average* person, a *perfectly average* lady."

I stressed certain words nervously, maintaining a smile all the while.

"Well, I'm sure that it has nothing to do with one's bloodline," another lady said. "But that armor simply picks its worthy owners!"

"No, no, that armor was made by Miss Deodora as per my order," I corrected her. "It's not some kind of legendary item like you think. It's a *perfectly normal* suit of armor."

I stressed certain words again. True, the armor was very useful to me, but it was still man-made. For the time being, I focused on trying to gently correct the people around me. I couldn't call the armor just a piece of metal because that would clash with my

earlier claims that it was what had enabled me to do all the things I'd done in the previous incident, so I had to be careful with my denials. I could imagine how the ladies would end up taking my words and twisting them to suit whatever narrative pleased them.

"I'm sorry for butting in, but can I borrow Lady Mary for a moment?"

While I was sweating bullets, trying to come up with explanations that would placate the ladies, the prince approached us from behind and called out for me in a gentlemanly manner. None of the girls treated him as a nuisance, and they all cleared the way for him with flushed cheeks.

"I'll be borrowing her, then," Reifus said, directing a dazzling smile at the young ladies and offering me a hand.

I awkwardly took his hand, rose from my seat, and, after bowing farewell to everyone, let the prince escort me to the adjacent room. I could just barely hear everyone sigh in delight as we left.

"Was this kind of performance really necessary?" I asked him. "I feel like it just creates misunderstandings..."

"Heh heh, I just assumed that would be the best way to keep the other boys from buzzing around you," he whispered with a jovial wink. "No one would think to try to meddle with a lady who's close with me, and the other girls would make for good vehicles to spread that rumor. It's all just a rumor, of course."

*I feel like that could end up being very troublesome for me too... But, well, I guess it will make everyone calm down and stop trying to hit on me.*

I decided to stop thinking about it too hard and entered the room, where I spotted Magiluka seated on a chair and deep in thought. Seeing her like this gave me another sense of *déjà vu*.

"Um... Sir Reifus... Is there some kind of problem?" I asked wearily, picking up on the situation.

"No, I wouldn't call it a problem, but we would love to have your help," Reifus said evasively and prompted me to take a seat.

I sat beside Magiluka, who was still racking her brains, and the prince sat opposite us.

"I'm sure you remember, but the Solos first-years have a martial arts tournament every year," Reifus said.

"Yes, I was part of it in my first year." I nodded.

*I'd rather not talk about it, what with all the messes I caused there,* I appended to myself.

"Well, this time managing the tournament falls to us," Reifus said, his expression quite serious.

"What?" I blinked vacantly.

## 12. HIDING A TREE IN A FOREST

"We— I mean, the class masters are going to be managing the martial arts tournament?" I corrected myself at the last second.

*That was close! I almost just said "we"!*

The two of them looked at me and nodded gravely.

"Traditionally, the professors would be the ones managing the yearly martial arts tournament, but over the years, the number of staff willing to work on it has been decreasing. On top of that, there have been less spectators too, so the faculty was at a loss as to how to handle it..."

Something about the prince's explanation struck me as off.

"Less spectators?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Well, put simply, the academy gathers funding through these guests," Reifus explained. "The academy may be backed by the royal family, but it can only do so much with funding from the kingdom. So, to make ends meet, it's relied on the martial arts tournament to obtain donations from the nobles and collect entry fees, seating ticket fares, and refreshments profits from families. This additional revenue used to cover

for the remainder of the academy's operating funds, but in recent years, there have been fewer and fewer spectators."

"All this means that there have been many problems with managing the tournament that have been ignored and have piled up over the years," Magiluka said flatly, her expression bitter. "And now they've thrown all those problems on us."

*I can imagine that stupid headmaster doing that. The professors probably keep asking him about what they're going to do this year, and he just ends up throwing a tantrum...*

With the image of the grand masters scolding him in the clock tower firmly in my mind, I sighed.

"So, how did that end up being your problem?" I asked.

"Well, the headmaster remembered how I always say that matters relating to the students should be managed by the student body," Reifus said with a strained smile. "So he suggested the students try to manage the tournament too."

It appeared the headmaster had used the prince's words against him, but since I remembered that it was me relying on my memories of my past life that had put that idea into Reifus's head, I suddenly felt very guilty.

"So, he dropped that huge project on you."

"Yes." The prince nodded. "But I do think it's worth doing. If it goes well, it could be managed by the student body too. It's a chance to change academy traditions."

*Yes, but should we be involved in something that makes big changes to academy traditions? I'd really rather not stand out any more... But I want to help everyone too...*

Torn between my desire to help and my attempts to not make a scene, I pensively thought things over. As I did, Tutte, who was pouring us some fresh tea behind me, whispered into my ear.

"I think this is a fine chance, Lady Mary. You can help everyone and make a real difference."

I glanced at Tutte, who walked away from me like nothing had happened. I got to my feet and walked to the room's corner, with my maid following me.

"What are you saying, Tutte?!" I whispered to her. "I'll just stand out if I do that!"

"Well, the one who'll stand out is His Highness, who'll be running the whole affair," she said. "Plus, since this will be a huge event in academy history, it'd make all the other things you did before seem like footnotes in comparison. Remember what you told me once? 'If you want to hide a tree, do it in a forest'? If you want others to stop looking at the things you've done, you may as well hide them behind someone else's big achievement."

Hearing Tutte's words, I froze up like I'd just been struck by divine revelation. I clasped Tutte's hands, brought them closer to my chest, and gazed into her face with glittering eyes.

"Tutte, I'm so lucky to have you as a maid!" I said.

"L-Lady Mary... It hurts. Please, restrain yourself a little..."

"O-Oh! Sorry, I just got a little overexcited... But hey, I'm holding back, you know? I want to hug you real hard!" I let go of her and cocked my head with a smile.

"I-I'd probably die if you did that." Tutte said something quite awful with a bit of a glare.

"My? Do you have complaints about me embracing you?" I wrapped my hands around her tightly again, a smile still on my lips.

"N-No, perish the thought! I love your embraces, so please, forgive me! O-Ow... Y-You're breaking something!" Tutte cried uncle with a nervous smile and tears in her eyes.

I let go of her, satisfied, and then returned to Magiluka and Reifus.

"My apologies for stepping away," I said confidently. "Sir Reifus, by my name of Mary Regalia, I will help you in whatever way I can. Let's make this tournament a success!"

"Thank you." The prince smiled in relief. "You're the most creative one of us, after all. I'll be looking forward to seeing what you come up with."

"You can count on me!" I curtsied respectfully. I already had a few ideas in mind, so I wasn't nervous about his expectations.

A few minutes later, the whole group gathered up—the prince, Magiluka, Sacher, and Safina. They were all seated in the room, while I was standing.

"Ahem... Well, then. My idea is that we reform the martial arts tournament, instead turning it into an academy festival that all students will participate in!" I proclaimed, my voice filling the room.

And so, I began my plan to have the prince's achievements eclipse all the trouble I caused.

# CHAPTER 3

## THIRD YEAR AT THE ACADEMY, PART 2

### 1. IS THIS A TRAP?

“An academy festival?” the four of them asked as one.

I went on to explain the idea of a school festival, as I remembered it from my past life. I wasn’t ever part of a real school festival, though, so I was only sharing my impressions of what one should be based on what I knew.

“Hmm... So you mean a festival run entirely by the student body?” the prince asked pensively, somehow understanding my rather roundabout explanation.

“Yes. All students will be participating, so there shouldn’t be a situation where we run out of manpower to run the event. Also, since all students will be participating, their family and friends will be inclined to come see them, which should increase the number of visitors too.”

The four of them nodded in agreement at my explanation.

“But what about the martial arts tournament?” Sacher, the Solos representative, asked me bluntly.

“Of course, the martial arts tournament is important for the first-years, so we’ll hold it,” I said without a hitch. “But the ones running it will be the Solos upperclassmen.”

“Everyone’s already experienced it, so they’ll know how to run it,” Safina said in agreement. “And our year had a lot of irregularities, so we’ll know how to handle those too.”

“Hmm, and if we could have the Solos students handle security and manual labor during the preparations, it would make things much easier,” Magiluka suggested.

“Lots of the students aim to be knights, so patrolling the premises should be right up

their alley,” Sacher agreed. “And we have students who’d be useful for that kind of heavy lifting.”

I was thrilled; the talks were progressing well, and everyone seemed to be on board.

“You can leave financial affairs like budget and operating expenses to us at the Lalaios class,” Reifus said. “Many among us aim to become civil officials, so it should make for good practice.”

“True, Your Highness,” Magiluka said as she jotted down all our suggestions. “We can have the teachers who were in charge of the tournament last year instruct the students.”

“And what should students who aren’t going to be in the managing side of the festival do?” Reifus asked.

“It might come across as a bit vague, but I think they should hold a performance or create an exhibit of some sort to draw in the guests’ attention. The Aleyios class can hold a display of magic or show off the fruits of their research, and the Lalaios class can run some kind of store or announce their academic studies. You know, things that’ll show what the academy’s students do during their day-to-day.”

“I see...” Magiluka nodded earnestly. “For now, we can talk things out with the rest of the student body and have them submit request forms once they’ve decided on what they want to do.”

*It's a good thing everyone's so bright. All I had to do was bring up the idea, and they knew how to develop it all on their own!*

“Hmm... We can adjust for the little details as we go along, but for now, let’s submit this to the headmaster as an overall suggestion of how the academy festival will go,” Reifus said.

“I’ll prepare a draft, then.” Magiluka rose from her seat, prepared papers for the draft, then returned, resuming the meeting.

*It might be a bit late in the game to say this, but I'm surprised no one was against it. It's going so well that it's making me a bit concerned, actually.*

With that concern in mind, I stepped away from the group and watched them from a

distance. Safina, who wasn't a class master, had also stepped back, and she was looking around restlessly trying to come up with something to do.

"Safina, let's sit over there and have some tea. I think our time to shine is going to come a bit later," I told her, inviting her to an adjacent table where Tutte was preparing a teapot.

"Y-Yes, Lady Mary." She nodded.

"Hey, Safina." Sacher craned his head over and called out to her. "How many students do we have at Solos right now? How many of them can we use?"

"Um, I..." Safina stopped in her tracks and looked between me and Sacher, conflicted.

"Go help Sir Sacher," I told her and sighed. "I mean, counting on him to manage things sounds impossible. He'll need your help."

"Y-Yes!" Safina hurried over to him and happily joined the meeting.

*Huh? Wait, does this mean I'm the only one left out of the loop? I realized as I sat blankly in my chair. No, this is good. I shouldn't stand out. I'll just make a mess again if I butt in. I gotta put up with this!*

Although I was a bit lonely, I decided to sip on some tea to maintain my composure. But for the first time in a while, my cup clattered in my hands. Noticing this, Tutte took it away before I could crush it in my grasp.

\* \* \*

The next day, both the prince and Magiluka went to the headmaster to submit the draft and explain our idea. Safina, Sacher, and I were awaiting their return, but Sacher and Safina were busy talking about their future plans, effectively leaving me out of the loop again.

*No good, this is starting to stress me out. What's this weird feeling? It's not like I'm feeling bad because I'm the only one not contributing, nor do I feel lucky because I'm the only one who doesn't have to work... I just want to be part of this! I want to be in on this!*

I stared idly out the window, getting caught in a downward spiral of anxiety. *You can't, Mary! This is a trap! If you get involved, there won't be any going back. The whole plan*

*to let the festival eclipse all the trouble you've caused is going to go down the drain if you do!*

I was facing the window, but I found myself glancing sideways. *B-But...*

Seeing my friends so focused made me want to get involved, but at the same time, I felt like I'd lost the right timing to ask to be part of this. *The only way for me to get involved now is if someone approaches me and asks for my help.* Before I knew it, I'd very nearly gotten up and started restlessly pacing behind them like a caged lion, but Tutte stopped me, telling me to be patient.

While I was fidgeting in agony, Reifus and Magiluka returned and told us the proposal for the Academy Festival had been accepted. My four friends became very excited about the whole affair, which made me feel all the more antsy.

"Let's start making corrections and fleshing out the plan, then," Magiluka said as she took a seat and then glanced at me. "Pardon me for keeping you waiting, Lady Mary. We'd like your help to iron out the specifics of our pla— Huumuuuh?!"

Magiluka had turned to me for help like it was the perfectly natural thing to do, and I swept her up in a hug without a second thought.

"Ooooh, whatever will you do without me!" I called out gleefully. "I suppose I'll have to help you, then! Yes, I've got no choice, do I?!"

"Wh-Why are you hugging me?!" Magiluka sputtered out, blushing and flustered.

I actively ignored the way Tutte was glaring at me reproachfully.

*I mean, I can't help it! I want to be in the loop! Being the odd one out sucks!*

And that was how I ended up sticking my nose into a historical event for the academy.

## 2. IT'S HIS HIGHNESS'S IDEA

The Academy Festival project was underway. First, we gathered all the academy's students in the large hall so the prince could explain the event to them. Since this was

an unprecedented idea, everyone was loudly murmuring in apprehension at first, but the explanation ended without any issues.

The Solos students weren't very confused by the explanation since the tournament was something they were already familiar with. The problem was the Aleyios and Lalaios students, who weren't part of a yearly tradition so far, but their class masters—Reifus and Magiluka—explained everything meticulously along with the grand masters. Thanks to that, they grew more interested in participating.

I was currently in the Aleyios lounge, in a meeting regarding the Academy Festival.

"So, what exactly are we expected to do?" the students asked.

Magiluka was standing in front of the Aleyios students, and for some reason... I was behind her.

*I guess I'm the one who came up with the idea, so it makes sense I'd help come up with the detailed activities. But why is everyone acting like it makes sense I'd be here behind Magiluka? Doesn't it seem weird? It makes no sense...*

"Firstly, I'd like for you to pick activities you think you'll be able to handle," Magiluka said.

The students started conversing; it was largely just chitchat, except they occasionally brought up questions about logistics or how they were supposed to approach the exhibits.

"You don't have to think too hard about it," I said. "Our exhibits are meant to show off the magic we've learned so far. Things like showing off magic theory or magical pharmacy are viable ideas too. Think along the lines of things we've learned here in the academy."

I suggested they didn't try to shock people with spells that haven't been seen before or research that's never been announced in the past. Focusing on easier things was the right idea in my eyes. Once I brought that up, things became much quicker.

*Phew, that was close. They were this close to trying to go for some crazy recipe that would blow up in their faces when all they had to do was cook a sunny-side up. Speaking of which, I hope the other classes aren't pushing themselves.*

But the following day, I found my fears confirmed when I checked the activity applications.

\* \* \*

“‘Group battles with monsters: We want to make a show of defeating vicious monsters. Please make it so we can beat them somehow’?! They’re basically asking us to bake pies in the sky here!” Magiluka yelled angrily.

After classes, we gathered in the old campus building’s lounge as always, which was now being used as our office for planning the Academy Festival. I sighed tiredly as I watched Magiluka shout and slam the application on the table.

We did make it abundantly clear that applications were to be reasonable, but some vain nobles still submitted several arrogant requests. Reading them made Magiluka’s anger boil over. This wasn’t just in the Aleyios class either; students from other classes had made some pretty outrageous demands too, and we had to either reject their applications or return them for resubmission.

As we worked on organizing those applications, the prince approached us with an apologetic expression.

“I’m sorry for coming up with this when you’re upset from the unreasonable applications, but I have a pie in the sky to ask for myself,” he said, settling into an empty seat and ushering Safina and Sacher over.

Magiluka hung her head guiltily at hearing the prince copy her choice phrase. Was the prince really going to ask for something that audacious?

“About the martial arts tournament, there’s something I’d like you to do when the finals start,” he said when we all gathered.

I swallowed nervously—hearing him say that gave me a bad feeling.

“I’d like for us to hold a two-on-two mock battle, with each team comprising a mage and a fencer.”

For a moment, I couldn’t quite understand what Reifus had just suggested. I just stared at him blankly, but then I jolted and hung my head.

"Your Highness, do you mean a mock battle where a team of a fencer and a mage fight another team of a fencer and a mage?" Magiluka confirmed, catching onto his intention first.

"Yes." He nodded. "Aleyios students have studied offensive magic, but during your studies in the academy, there weren't any chances to learn how to employ it in battles against human opponents."

"If I may, Your Highness, a spell's power is fixed, and the order of magic used is the biggest factor," Magiluka objected to the prince's proposal. "Because of that, I think offensive magic isn't suited for a mock battle."

"But that changes if you add fencers to the battle, right?" Sacher asked.

"So, what you're suggesting is a mixed battle between Aleyios and Solos students?" Magiluka asked.

"Yes. Magic and fencing are the cruxes of our kingdom's military might, so I want to give our students a chance to bring the two together while they're still only students. In order that we could possibly introduce this change to future tournaments, I was hoping our group could hold the mock battle. It is unprecedented, though."

We all fell silent at the prince's serious suggestion and started considering his idea. I personally wanted to refuse since I didn't want to stand out, but I couldn't exactly turn down a request from the prince. And since this was a demonstration, I didn't have to take it seriously and could lose on purpose. *In any case, if I could just refuse, that would be ideal...*

"A mock battle mixing Aleyios and Solos students..." Magiluka pondered aloud. "That would be interesting in its own way."

"Yeah, it's kinda exciting." Sacher nodded.

The two class masters seemed to be all for the idea. Safina, meanwhile, clung to me with a pale face and a lost expression.

"Well, since we're all for it, let's decide the teams," Sacher said.

"Hold it." I stopped him reflexively. "We don't all agree with this." But then I realized what I'd just said and glanced nervously at Reifus.

"You're opposed to the idea, Lady Mary?" he asked.

"O-O-O-Oh, no, not at all!" I denied it at once. "I'm just not sure it'd be right for me to handle such a big role. I'm sure there's someone else that's more appropriate for the task!"

"Oh, I'm not sure there is," Magiluka cut into my words with a devilish smile. "You're the White Princess and the second coming of the Argent Knight. Who else could be more appropriate?"

"Ngh!" I jolted. "Oh, Safina! What about you, Safi—"

In my desperation, I tried to get Safina involved, but when all eyes settled on her, she looked like she was about to pass out from the attention.

*Oh, sorry. I shouldn't throw you of all people into so much pressure...*

"I-I'll... I'll do whatever Lady Mary does!" she managed to squeak out, awaiting her fate.

All eyes then fixed on me.

"Fine... I'll participate." I gave up and hung my head.

"Then it's decided," Sacher said. "Now let's pick the teams. I think the fairest way of doing this would be to have Safina, Magiluka, and me on one team, then have the second team be just Lady Mary."

"Hey, this is a team battle! Why am I alone?!" I snapped at him.

"It's not balanced if you aren't," he whined. "You can use both fencing techniques and spells. You'll win easily if you can just fill both roles."

"I'm not that skilled!" I objected. "Anyway, I'm pairing with Safina. I'm not letting an idiot like you team up with her!"

"Heh, weren't you the one who said that only idiots call other people idiots! Heh heh heh!" he retorted.

"Why, you..." I growled, provoked by his words. "I'm never teaming up with you! And I

won't go easy on you in the mock battle even if you apologize later! I'll beat you silly until you're black and blue!"

And so, I ended up dragging Safina into my team, throwing my arms around her as she froze up in fear at my reckless threat. Magiluka watched over our childish spat of a discussion with tired eyes while the prince tried to calm us down. I simply held on tight to Safina, lest she be taken from me and I remain all alone.

### 3. EVERYTHING'S STARTING

I trudged through the academy with Safina and Tutte in tow. I dragged myself to the plaza where the carriage that would take me home was waiting, my legs heavy.

*Ugh... Why did I have to lose my temper like that? I can't lose after saying that...* I sighed, thinking back to the events that took place less than an hour ago.

"But really, when you think about it, I knew you'd pull through, Lady Mary," Safina said, her admiration showing clearly on her face as she walked beside me.

I stopped in my tracks and looked at her, confused. "What do you mean?" I wasn't playing dumb—I sincerely didn't know what she was talking about.

"I mean, when it was time to decide our teams, you immediately came up with the most inoffensive pairings!" she said, her eyes twinkling. "If the teams had been me and Lady Magiluka versus you and Sir Sacher, we'd have ended up fighting our respective class masters. The match could have ended up making relations between the Solos and Aleyios classes shaky."

I didn't think of that at all, but upon hearing her explanation, I realized that she was right.

"And to avoid that, you insisted that you and Lady Safina pair up," Tutte said. "Impressive thinking, Lady Mary. And here I was, thinking you only picked Lady Safina so you could go tit for tat with Sir Sacher."

My maid looked at me, impressed, as she stated the actual correct answer. Rendered speechless with guilt, I looked away from her.

"And besides, if we both win, we'd end up compromising the other two's positions as class masters, so we can probably afford to lose this," Safina said, continuing to put me up on a pedestal. "I'm sure everyone will understand why we lost a fight against a team of two class masters. You really thought of everything, Lady Mary."

"That's true." Tutte nodded. "With two class masters forming a team, there won't be any antagonism between the classes. And with their opponents being you—the fastest fencer in the academy—and Lady Mary, who everyone calls the White Princess and the Argent Knight, no one will claim this was an unfair fight. Good thinking on your behalf, Lady Mary."

"And the way you snapped at Sir Sacher also makes it so it doesn't seem like the two class masters chose to team up, allowing them to fight with all their strength," Safina continued enthusiastically. "I can't believe you were able to come up with a way to guide the conversation to such an ideal conclusion on the spot! Oh, Lady Mary, I'll follow you through thick and thin!"

All that praise was painful to hear, since I hadn't had any of that in mind. I could only look at the ground with the most stiff, awkward smile, trying to escape their fervent gazes of admiration.

"Oh, gosh... You both noticed all of that?" I murmured nervously. "Well, just keep it a secret from the other two, all right?"

*Aaaah, am I really going along with this?! But I can't just tell them I didn't think of any of that! I mean, excuse me, but I have my pride to consider here!*

As I argued with no one in particular in my head, I recklessly affirmed their claims.

"But that said, what matters this time isn't winning, it's showing everyone the charm of combat that mixes both swords and magic! I'll do my best to help you, Lady Mary!" Safina said.

"Y-Yes. We can iron out the details about that tomorrow," I said, resigned.

It was my fault for going along with their praise, but the thought that I'd somehow made people think even more highly of me made my steps feel heavier...

\* \* \*

The next day, each class's activities for the Academy Festival had begun. The festival's management and each class's representatives gathered around the prince as the talks began.

"Huh? What did you just say, Sir Reifus?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm very sorry, Lady Mary, but I want you to be in charge of security for the festival. Everyone else has requested that, as well."

"Huh? But isn't Sir Sacher better suited for—"

"You think I can do that?" The idiot cut off my retort.

I leveled an annoyed glare at him, then pressed a finger against my temple and sighed dramatically. "You want to be a knight captain when you grow up, right? Why not start now?"

"That's different." He shrugged. "Besides, I'm open-minded, so if I think someone's going to do a better job than me, I let them handle it."

"Stop putting on airs! You're not open-minded! You're just lazy!" I snapped at him.

Seeing our exchange, the prince cracked a bothered smile and appended, "Now, now. Lady Mary, unlike Sacher, you're recognized in both the Solos and Aleyios classes. And since both classes will be dispatching students to help with security, I think you're the best person for the job. This festival is a first for all of us, so we really would like to minimize any needless trouble."

*Security, huh...? I guess it's hard to tell if that position will make me stand out or not. If nothing happens, I'll be behind the scenes the whole time, but if trouble arises, I'll have to show my face. Hmm... What a pickle.*

But Reifus did have a point, and I'd never heard of any big scuffles breaking out during past tournaments, so I decided that working behind the scenes might be wise this time.

"Understood. I accept."

The prince looked relieved by my taking on the position, and the talks carried on after that.

\* \* \*

With the staff for the festival all selected, I made my way to the personal training room we'd used during the first year.

"I didn't think I'd end up using this place again," I said, looking around the room's stone walls.

The only ones in the room were me, Safina, and Tutte. Sacher and Magiluka had had a different room prepared for them. The teachers seemed to like the prince's idea of the two-on-two battle, and they decided it would be a surprise event for the student body that would be kept hidden until the day of the event. The students only knew that we were planning something, but they didn't know what.

*Still, we shouldn't have to hide our plans from each other, right? We can't plan how my side is going to throw the match like this.*

"So, what's our plan, Lady Mary?" Safina asked anxiously. "I've never fought with a spellcaster before, so I don't know what I'm supposed to do."

"Right, well..." I smiled at her. "For now, let's set a training target and see what we're capable of."

I decided to change my approach.

*At this point, I may as well leave it to chance. After all, back when I was in the tournament, overplanning made everything come out all wrong.*

"So, to begin with, you have your iai jutsu, which is a defensive style," I said.

"Yes. I'll protect you no matter what, Lady Mary!" She nodded earnestly.

"So, logically speaking, while you're guarding me, I should be attacking using spells. I suppose that's the most basic, elementary formation we can take."

"I suppose it does... Let's get into position and try."

With that said, Safina stood in front of me and assumed her iai jutsu stance. I drew my Legendary Sword (Cringe) and stood in position to cast a spell.

And then we both stood there. Wordlessly. It must have made for an absurd picture.

"It doesn't really work for me," Safina said with an awkward smile. "It doesn't work without someone to fight..."

"Someone to fight, huh...? Tutte, could you face us and be our opponent for a bit?"

"Understood." Tutte briskly walked over and stood opposite us as we once again went into position.

But then...

"Pfft!" Tutte snorted rudely, unable to restrain her laughter.

"Hey, be serious, won't you?!" I chided her. "Or do I have to shoot a spell at you?!"

"B-But, it's just... When I stand like this in front of you, I kind of end up laughing," Tutte said, her shoulders trembling as she tried to restrain her laughter.

She then took a few steps back, standing far enough to keep herself from laughing. Safina took a few steps forward, standing directly opposite her, and I unsteadily sidled over to remain behind her.

Seeing this, Tutte once again took a few more steps back, to which Safina took a few more steps forward, and I followed her.

Then we did it again. And again. And again—

"Stop pacing around the room like that!" I shouted, unable to take this absurd scene anymore.

The other two jolted and stiffened in place.

"Ugh, agh..." I breathed out nervously. "This is not working, ladies. We won't get anywhere unless we get some kind of opponent to practice on."

Having recognized our problem for the time being, we began to seek a partner to practice with.

## 4. IT'S BEEN A WHILE

*A practice partner... Well, we're supposed to keep it a secret from everyone, right? So we can't ask any of the students for help. So we have to ask someone we can trust and who's an outsider. And where would we find someone like that?*

As I was trying to figure out who could be the right partner for us, someone cheerily entered the training room.

"Ah, there you are. Hey there, Lady Mary. ♪"

A tall young man entered the room—someone I didn't think could possibly be here, and who greeted us with a wave of the hand and a bright smile.

"I-Instructor Karis!"

Indeed, it was Karis Yencho, the former Solos class master. He'd graduated from the academy and was supposed to be in training at the knights' barracks.

"Oh, maybe I shouldn't call you Instructor?" I asked. "Would Sir Yencho be better?"

"Oh, no, just call me Instructor. I'm used to that," he said as he briskly walked in front of us. Then he turned around, and seeming to realize no one was behind him, called out, "Hey, what are you doing? Why aren't you coming in?"

We followed his gaze, where we saw a young woman step out from the shadow of the door, sighing in resignation.

"I-Instructor Alice?!" I exclaimed, my voice breaking.

Yes, the woman at the entrance with gleaming silver-rimmed glasses and pretty straight blonde hair was none other than the former Aleyios class master, Alice Ordile. Due to an altercation we'd had in the past, my friends and I felt a bit awkward around her. Although said incident had resulted in Alice being stripped of her class master position and suspended, she ended up graduating without any further incident after her suspension ended. I was under the impression she wouldn't want to have anything else to do with us, but much to my surprise...

"Hello, everyone. It's been a while," she said as she approached, a pleasant smile on

her face like absolutely nothing had happened between us.

"Erm, yes... It has, Instructor Alice..." I said awkwardly.

"Umm... May I ask what you're doing at the academy?" Safina asked the question that was burning in my mind.

"That's a fine question." Instructor Karis nodded cheerfully. "It's simple, really. You know how it's almost time for the martial arts tournament? Well, every year the academy has alumni show up to help."

"B-Both of you...?" Safina asked meekly.

*I understand how she feels. A Solos graduate is one thing, but Instructor Alice is from Aleyios. What does she have to do with the martial arts tournament?*

"Aha ha! Keen observation, Miss Safina," Instructor Karis said with a jolly grin. "Yes, Miss Alice was an Aleyios student, so she shouldn't be related to the tournament. But there are unavoidable circumstances at play."

Safina and I exchanged confused looks at his vague explanation.

After a brief pause, Instructor Alice piped up to offer an explanation. "What he means is that as punishment for the uproar I caused, I'm being forced to help with the academy's events for a few years after my graduation. So, this year, I'll be helping with the martial arts tournament."

Despite her smile, there was something malevolent to her aura... or maybe I was just imagining things.

"Really, though, it's such bad timing. I'd much prefer to continue my research on the undead..." she lamented.

*I knew it! She still hasn't given up on her undead fetish!*

"But I have to say, I'm surprised," Instructor Karis said. "I came to help with the tournament, but it looks like this year it's turned into a festival with all the students participating. I hear it's the prince's idea? It's quite novel."

Hearing him praise Reifus for the idea made me smile to myself.

"Yes, it's a lovely idea," Instructor Alice said, her eyes afire. "Especially since I heard there's an undead research group in Aleyios that's going to announce their findings! Why, I simply must pitch in and help."

*Please, Instructor Alice, just don't cause any more trouble...* I could only laugh dryly at her ominous reasons.

"Still, don't go around teaching them any magic circles for summoning undead, you hear?" Instructor Karis poked her in the forehead, his usual smile on his lips.

Despite it looking like quite the harmless gesture, the sound of the poke was quite loud, and Instructor Alice ended up squatting down and cradling her forehead. I shuddered when I realized he'd poked her quite hard.

"Are you here with her because...?" I began to ask, a certain possibility already in mind.

"Yes, the headmaster asked me to keep an eye on her and make sure she doesn't cause any more undead incidents," he explained.

*I guess she really doesn't regret anything she did. The Academy doesn't trust her either. Nothing fazes her, does it?* I watched Instructor Alice as she held her forehead painfully.

"So, what are you two doing here?" Safina said, noticing our conversation had gone off track. "You look like you were looking for Lady Mary."

"Yes, another good question, Miss Safina," Instructor Karis said. "We've been told she's in charge of security, so we came over to offer advice and assistance. And I hear you'll be in some kind of two-on-two battle?"

*Hey, teachers. Aren't you supposed to keep that a secret? Why are people talking about it?*

But that said, they were now outsiders for all the academy was concerned, and they were trustworthy enough. I also realized why he brought it up. Much like Sacher, Instructor Karis loved combat, so I could easily guess at what he was going to say next.

"What do you say? I think we, as the former Solos and Aleyios class masters, should do just fine in helping you train for the match."

Instructor Karis looked excited, while Instructor Alice, who'd finally recovered from

the pain, glared at him with teary eyes. I could only crack a wry smile as Safina looked at me questioningly.

## 5. SOMETHING THAT USEFUL CAN'T POSSIBLY...

And so, we ended up facing off against the team of the two former class masters. And, well, we ended up losing. Of course, part of it was because I forfeited early on. I'd stayed behind Safina the whole time, trying to cast second-order spells. However, Safina had been so fixated on protecting me that we'd ended up being completely uncoordinated.

For instance, when Instructor Alice fired a spell at Safina, she'd dodged by rolling to the right. I, however, had jumped to the left, which broke our formation and provided Instructor Karis with a clear course to dash at me. I'd been so focused on casting spells that I couldn't deal with him, and when Safina tried to move in to protect me, she got stalled by Instructor Alice's magic.

And so, the practice ended with us helplessly flustered.

"Hmm... That ended faster than I'd expected." Instructor Karis sheathed his sword, looking disappointed.

*We couldn't do anything... We can't win a two-on-two battle by just focusing on ourselves. We need to coordinate and work together.*

My first experience in a two-on-two battle taught me how different and complex they were compared to one-on-one battles.

"I'm sorry, Lady Mary..." Safina said, looking as miserable as a dog with its tail and ears drooping. "If only I'd protected you better, I'm sure you'd—"

"No, Safina, it's not all your fault," I tried to encourage her. "This was a two-on-two battle. We're both responsible here."

"Yes, that's right." Instructor Karis nodded. "You two need to learn how to coordinate your actions."

"Coordinate..." I muttered. "But you two didn't plan anything, and you worked together just fine. How did you do it?"

"Well, that's because Miss Alice and I are deeply in love— Ugh!" Instructor Karis had made to state his affections proudly, but Alice whacked him over the head with a wide smile.

"Leave the jokes at that, will you?" she sighed and walked over to us. "Miss Safina, if you plan to move while defending Lady Mary, you must first reach a mutual understanding. In other words, you need to be in tune with one another."

"Mutual understanding... Being in tune..." I muttered. Her words spurred the genesis of a train of thought, within which a certain phrase stood out to me like a neon sign.

*Sync rate.* A term from a certain humanoid robot anime I'd seen in my past life.

"All right." I nodded earnestly. "We'll try."

"That's good!" Instructor Karis said cheerfully, giving us a thumbs up like he hadn't been hit over the head moments ago. "I look forward to seeing how you do next time we meet."

"Thank you, you two," I said.

They'd been quite helpful to us, so I thanked them sincerely, my thoughts full of admiration for the wisdom they'd carved out of their additional years of experience. But just as the two of them prepared to leave, a certain problematic statement made me freeze up.

"Now, we should go see Miss Magiluka and Sacher next," Instructor Karis said.

"W-Wait! Wait a second!" I called out. "I thought you were here to help *us*."

"Huh? Well, of course I'll help them too. It wouldn't be fair otherwise." He flashed a smile, as if to say that just makes sense.

I laughed dryly, realizing that to him it did, indeed, only make sense. And so, the two of them left the training room.

"Wait... Didn't Instructors Karis and Alice come here to discuss the festival's security?"

Safina mentioned.

“Oh, right. What are those two doing?! They completely lost track of why they came here!” I raised my voice in outrage.

The following day, I began training to raise my sync rate with Safina.

*So, uh, how do we raise our sync rate? Back in that anime, the foreign girl and the protagonist matched their movements to the sound of music, right? Let's try that!*

“All right, Safina,” I told her earnestly. “Let’s dance!”

“Huh?” Safina let out an uncharacteristic utterance at my out of the blue suggestion.

“Ahem...” Tutte cut into our exchange. “Lady Mary, I think you’re going too fast. Please don’t sum it up in a way only you can understand.”

Tutte’s chiding made me realize what I was saying, to which I cleared my throat and reworded myself.

“In order for us to be more in tune, I think we should try to practice moving in exactly the same way to the sound of music.”

“I-I see,” Safina agreed, still a bit confused.

We both stood side by side in the training room.

“Well, we don’t have any music, so Tutte, if you could please clap to give us a beat?” I asked.

“Yes, Lady Mary.”

“Hmm... You said to dance, but what kind of dance do you mean?” Safina asked. “The only kind of dance I’ve learned is ballroom dancing.”

I myself had never danced in my past life, and as a noble lady, I’d only ever taken lessons for ballroom dancing.

“Let’s go with that, then.”

Safina and I stood side by side and positioned ourselves to dance. Normally, we'd have needed partners to dance with, but we were letting imagination take care of that.

"Let's go, then. A one, and a two!" Tutte said and started clapping, and Safina and I started dancing elegantly.

We danced. And danced. And danced. And... danced...

"This isn't what I meant!" I grabbed my head and kvetched.

"Lady Mary, this just looks like you're practicing for a ball," Tutte said. "If this were going to improve your cooperation, it would have happened when you were learning how to dance."

"Yes, I was starting to think that this is a lot like dance class," Safina admitted.

*Ugh, I guess copying an idea off of superficial knowledge isn't going to work.*

"Well, if it's come to this, we should just try to do everything together around the clock!" I said.

"Um, but we're in different classes. I don't think it's possible," Safina gently pointed out, inadvertently shooting down my idea as soon as it'd left my lips.

"Ugh, then what are we supposed to do?! Aaah, really, how are we supposed to do this?!" I shouted, grabbing Tutte by the shoulders and shaking her.

"L-Lady Maaaary! D-Don't vent it out on meeee!" Tutte protested, her head dangling back and forth.

"Erm, uh... Lady Mary? This might be impolite of me to bring up, but, umm... Won't communication magic work?" Safina asked timidly.

"Huh?" Tutte and I both exclaimed at her idea.

"Communication magic? You mean the kind of spell that allows two people to communicate no matter how far apart they are, but which is limited to exactly two people?"

"Yes, that's the one." Safina nodded gladly.

"Lady Mary... How could you forget about such a useful spell?" Tutte, whom I was shaking earlier, glared reproachfully directly at me.

*Aaah, I'm feeling some murderous pressure from Tutte... I was so caught up with that idea from my past life that I didn't consider magic!*

"I-I-I, umm... I didn't... forget..." I muttered in a small voice, cracking under Tutte's pressure and looking away from her.

She glared at me silently again.

"Okay, I completely forgot! I'm sorry!" I gave in and confessed.

Tutte stepped away from me and returned to her usual pleasant demeanor. I sighed in relief.

"I'm surprised you know about it, though, Safina," I said. "Did you look into it?"

"No, Instructor Karis used it once, and they taught us about it during class. But Lady Mary, you're amazing! You don't let that kind of common sense restrain you. You're always trying to come up with new, novel ideas. I respect that!"

Safina, who wasn't aware of the truth, looked upon me with glittering eyes. I could only look away uncomfortably.

*But this does mean we can communicate without others hearing us. We have a way to coordinate, so it's all good.*

With that optimistic thought in mind, I let myself get amped up. *We made progress today, after all!*

## 6. H-HUH?

I organized an assembly at the academy's sports grounds—which we called our “training grounds”—to discuss the matter which I'd been appointed to oversee, namely, handling security. Lined up before me were rows of Solos students, standing like a small army, and cowering behind them were the Aleyios students.

Why were they frightened, you might ask? Well, they were overwhelmed from the disciplined way the Solos students responded to my words with clear shouts.

*Seriously though, this isn't an army!*

Instructor Karis and Miss Iks, who was the teacher in charge of security, watched over us from a short distance away. In past years, handling security was entirely under Miss Iks's jurisdiction, but this year, she was only watching over us. She did say she would step in if any real problems cropped up though.

I sighed and began to speak up to the students standing before me.

"Firstly, allow me to introduce myself. I'm Mary, and I'm in charge of security this year. Everyone, I look forward to working with you."

"We look forward to working with you!" the Solos students chanted loudly as one, once again scaring the Aleyios students into taking a step back.

*Seriously, you're being too loud... But I guess I'm glad they're enthusiastic.*

I threw an exasperated glance at Safina, who also ended up taking a frightened step back. Apparently, this wasn't how the Solos students usually acted. Today was different, somehow.

"For guard training, you can look to Instructor Karis, who will be in charge of teaching you. For Solos students, this training should be beneficial for your future paths, so take it seriously."

"Yes, ma'am!" the Solos students chanted and stood at attention.

I held back a sigh as I watched the Solos students, who were very much acting like a disciplined army corps. I then turned to the Aleyios students, who seemed terrified, and motioned for them to approach.

"Aleyios students, please come over. We'll be splitting you up into teams now."

I watched guiltily as the young mages-in-training went very pale and timidly shuffled closer.

"Umm... Lady Mary, we can't train as guards like them," one of the students said

bashfully.

*I can understand what they mean. If they trained with these enthusiastic muscle-brains, they'd end up knocked out on the floor.*

"Yes, I understand," I told the student with a soothing smile. "You can leave the heavy lifting to them, because you'll have another role to fill."

"Another role?"

"Yes. Now, please split up into teams of two. Safina, can you split the Solos students into teams of three?"

"Yes, Lady Mary"

Safina examined a paper we'd prepared for splitting up the teams and smoothly divided the Solos students for me. Once everyone was split up, I united the Solos and Aleyios teams into one group. Everyone followed my instructions with curious expressions, as nothing like this had ever been done in the academy before.

The resulting groups were made up of a mix of three Solos students and two Aleyios students each.

"Lady Mary, what's the purpose of this?" Instructor Karis, who was watching the whole thing, asked me. "I've never seen teams like this before. Should I have the Aleyios students participate in the training too?"

"No, they won't be participating in the training. The mages will be focusing on communications," I replied.

"Communications?" Instructor Karis and the team members near me asked.

"Yes. The Aleyios students are to handle scheduled reports, and if any problems come up, you are not to engage the problem yourself, but instead report it to your designated contact in headquarters. And if anything happens that you can't report ahead of time, please make sure someone reports it for you."

"Are you saying you're having us function as runners?" one of the students asked.

"No, that's more trouble than it's worth. We'll use communication magic instead."

I'd decided that this would be a good place to use the convenient spell I'd recalled all on my own the other day.

"Of the two mages in each team, one will accompany the team while the other remains in headquarters. This way, if anything happens, we'll be able to stay in touch rapidly. In other words, the mages will serve as transceivers of sorts."

"Transceivers?" Everyone mouthed the unfamiliar word.

I cleared my throat, pretending I hadn't just blurted that out.

"Lady Mary!" one of the Solos students said. "Am I correct in understanding that we are not to make our own decisions on the scene, but to report to the Aleyios members and have headquarters make the decision?!"

"Y-Yes, that's right," I said with a smile, despite being a bit put off by how I felt like an officer being spoken to by a soldier.

The most important part of this plan was to not have the Solos people make reckless ad hoc decisions. I came to this conclusion because when I'd asked Miss Iks and Instructor Karis about trouble that'd happened in past events, they told me that a lot of the time, problems had escalated due to security personnel acting recklessly on their own judgment.

*So yeah, thinking about it again, this really is a good idea I came up with!*

"Umm, I understand that our role is to use communication magic, but the spell's effects are brief, and we can't converse for long periods of time," one of the Aleyios students said. "It also consumes a lot of mana, so we can't use it nonstop. It only works one way, with one side speaking and the other listening, so it's not useful for coordination on the spot."

"Yes, that's true." I nodded with a smile. "That's why you'll be training to learn how to relay information in brief intervals."

The Aleyios students didn't seem to quite understand me.

"What I mean is that we'll be deciding on predetermined phrases for different situations and practicing communicating with them. As we work on it, you can come up with the terms that feel right to you. Thankfully, our job is security, so we only need

to account for situations and terms that deal with security.”

For some reason, as I explained myself, everyone started looking at me with adoring eyes. These were gazes of respect. I knew these gazes all too well; I’d seen them every time I’d screwed up and gotten people to pay attention to me.

*H-Huh? I mean, isn’t this a pretty normal idea? I mean, back in my old life, that’s pretty much how beepers worked. I used a pretty dated method from my world, but I guess it’s a novel idea in this world... I regretted bringing up this idea without thinking it through.*

And so, with everyone’s admiring eyes on me, I completed my first day as the head of security.

The following day, my new communication method spread to other areas of management, and everyone acted like I’d made some kind of revolutionary discovery.

*N-No! This is all the prince’s idea! Make it so everyone believes that, God!*

Somehow, despite the fact the school festival had only just started I was already praying to God for help.

## 7. UNDER DELIBERATION

“All right, let’s start today’s training.”

“Yes, Lady Mary.”

My training with Safina was becoming part of our daily routine, and it was going smoothly. Today, I wanted us to practice moving while coordinating our actions using communication magic.

The spell was something like a pact that only worked between the two of us. Using it was honestly something of a drag. But still, we had to master using this spell. Thankfully, Safina was taking lectures about magic, so she was keeping up well.

Safina and I chanted the words of the pact, and the communication spell was complete.

*It feels like we're exchanging mail addresses. I mean, I've never done that myself, so I'm kinda happy!*

"All right, let's try moving while communicating using the spell," I said.

"Umm, Lady Mary, I don't have much mana, and if I use my reinforcement magic and the communication spell, I end up running out of mana very quickly," Safina explained timidly.

"Ah, right, that makes sense. Then let's try going with me sending most of the messages."

"Okay!"

Safina and I got into position and simulated a combat situation. The instructors were training Magiluka's group today, so they weren't here.

*"Move diagonally to the right."*

I sent a message using the spell, and Safina promptly moved as instructed.

*"Move left."*

Safina stopped moving right and began moving left. Even without me uttering a single word aloud, she moved around as I willed her to, and it was honestly pretty fun.

*"Spin in place."*

Safina didn't question my mental order and twirled adorably in place.

*"Bark like a puppy."*

"Woof!" Safina obeyed unquestioningly.

I couldn't help but smile at this adorable display.

"Lady Mary, don't treat Lady Safina like a toy," Tutte chided me, having sensed my intentions.

"Ah! I just got carried away a little... I'm sorry— S-Safina?" I made to apologize to

Safina, but froze up when I noticed her expression.

“Aaaah... ♪ Lady Mary is moving me like a puppet on strings... ♪”

Her cheeks were flushed pink and her eyes were glittering as she looked up into the air, entranced.

“Safina, I’m sorry. Please come back here—and back to reality while you’re at it.” I motioned for her to come over with my hand, feeling a cold sweat come over me.

This brought her back to her senses, and she tottered over to me. But even that was cute, because she was still blushing, perhaps out of shame.

“There, there. Good girl.” As she approached me, I patted her fluffy hair and said the same thing I once saw people on TV say to comfort a puppy.

“Ahem! Lady Mary.” Tutte cleared her throat loudly as I started scratching Safina’s jaw.

“Ah!” I came to my senses.

*Safina’s just too defenseless. It’s making me go out of control. This is dangerous.*

“Ahem...” I cleared my throat and pulled myself back together. “So, now we can fight while staying coordinated. Still, Magiluka’s probably going to use this method too, so this doesn’t mean we have an edge on them.”

Safina nodded, looking disappointed that I’d stopped patting her.

“By the way, Sir Sacher hasn’t learned communication magic, right?” I asked hopefully.

“Right. He said he doesn’t need this spell so he won’t learn it, but the other day, Lady Magiluka said they’ll be practicing it extra hard. She looked angry,” Safina appended, a worried smile on her lips as she recalled the sight.

“Oh... I... I see...” I replied vaguely, trying to no avail to figure out what the appropriate response to that should be.



"All right, then let's start training in earnest!" I said enthusiastically in an attempt to change the awkward atmosphere.

"Certainly, Lady Mary, but how exactly are we going to train?" Safina asked.

"Hmm... Well, I'd really like to have some kind of finishing move. I mean, this is a two-on-two battle, so having some kind of finisher combo would be really cool. Like a double tech from an RPG!"

"Ar pee jee'?" Safina mouthed the term curiously.

"Uh, I mean like when one character attacks to stop the opponent from moving, then the other character swoops in with perfect timing like *pow wow!* and attacks them nonstop. It's so satisfying when the combo counter goes over twenty hits!" I explained, gesturing excitedly all the while.

"Lady Mary, you're being too vague. We don't understand," Tutte pointed out.

"Ah!" I exclaimed as Tutte brought me back down to earth for the umpteenth time that day. "Ahem... A-Anyway, I want us to make a special combination move that'll definitely win our matches, one where we attack together in coordination."

"I see, but what does that mean exactly?" Safina asked.

"Well, a character moves in and whacks the opponent, locking them in place, then the other character swoops in and goes like *pow wow!* And then—"

"Lady Mary, you're going in circles," Tutte cut me off.

An awkward silence hung in the air as I became vividly aware of how I just never seemed to learn my lesson. Realizing this wasn't going anywhere, I tried to imagine a specific finisher combo. "Well... how about this? First, I'll use my earth magic to make the ground pop up and send them flying."

"Okay." Safina nodded.

"Then, when they're in the air, you'll close in on them and kick them, then appear right behind them and kick them again, then you switch to their other side to kick them a third time, and you keep it up for a ten-hit combo that keeps them airborne for ten whole seconds!"

“H-Huh...? What?” Safina blinked in confusion.

“While you do the combo, I’ll set up a huge spell to knock them down into the ground and bombard them with magic! And to finish them off, you pound them further into the ground with a heavy blow! How about it?” I looked at Safina, confident my plan was perfect.

“Lady Mary...” Safina said, looking like she was about to cry. “If I could do that, I’d be superhuman...”

I realized that I was making unreasonable demands here. I could’ve probably pulled off those stunts I was describing, so I assumed Safina would be able to as well, but that obviously wasn’t the case.

*Yeah, that makes sense. I’m so used to having talented people around me that it’s ruined my standards. No good.*

“I-I’m sorry. I only realized neither of us could do that after I said it,” I said with a smile, pretending like I’d realized the issue before she’d pointed it out.

*Okay, let’s forget about game logic.* I realized all my ideas were wrong because I was using video games as my standard.

“Hey. I see you’re working hard,” someone called out to me from the door while I was contemplating what to do. I turned around only to see Reifus standing there.

“Oh, Sir Reifus,” I said, and we all curtsied toward him.

The prince smiled and entered the room, but then his expression clouded over. “Do you have a moment, Lady Mary?” he asked.

“Yes, what is it?” I replied.

“Um, you see... This is something of a private matter. Do you mind if we went somewhere else?”

“Oh, then we’ll step outside for a bit, Your Highness,” Safina said hurriedly.

“I-I see. Pardon me.”

With that said, Safina and Tutte left the room. Unable to keep up with the situation, I watched the two of them leave and then turned to look at the prince.

"Is something the matter?" I asked Reifus.

"U-Umm... I see you were training for the two-on-two battle. I'm glad it's going well."

"Thank you..." I replied suspiciously. *Is he being evasive?*

The prince looked away from me, his cheeks flushing. "Yes, uh... I hear preparations for security are going well too. Miss Iks said she's impressed at how everything's going more smoothly than ever before."

"Thank you for your kind words, Sir Reifus. Um, did you come here to tell me that?"

"Erm... Like I said before, this is something of a personal matter, so I'm not sure if I should tell you... Umm..."

Seeing him beat around the bush like this was very uncharacteristic of him. He was always so dignified and collected, but now he was exceedingly flustered, which made him seem a lot more like a typical boy his age. That made me all the more confused.

The prince remained in this state for a while before closing his eyes, taking a deep breath, and whispering something to rouse himself. "Lady Mary," he finally said, looking directly at me.

"Yes."

"There's something I've felt like I needed to tell you for some time now, but I've been too timid to do so. But that's not good enough. I've resolved to tell you, so that I might be able to move forward. That's why I'm here. I want you to hear me out."

His face was red with embarrassment, but he was still looking straight at me. I felt my heart thump as I came to realize what situation I was in.

*Wait, this is... Something he wants to tell me when we're both alone? Something personal and embarrassing he has to pluck up the courage to tell me? Does that mean...?!*

A certain idea flashed through my mind.

*He's asking me out.*

That idea made all the things the prince was saying fall into place.

*No, but... W-W-Wait, hold up, no! The prince wouldn't...!*

I could tell I was blushing too. I was so stumped as to how to respond that I froze up.

"I've worked up all my courage, and I'm ready to tell you," Reifus said.

I watched him silently.

"Lady Mary," he called my name, looking at me earnestly.

"Y-Yes," I replied, my voice trembling. It felt like my heart was about to pop out of my chest. We stood there for one long moment, and then he parted his lips to say the fateful words I'd been dreading so much...

"My mother is coming."

"...What?"

I replied to his grave announcement with that improper utterance, not quite understanding what he meant. I was wholly unaware that what he'd just said would, indeed, mark the coming of a storm...

## 8. SHE'S COMING

After a moment's silence, I sorted through what Reifus just said, my mouth still hanging open. *Well, that's a surprise. I guess this wasn't a confession. Ugh, I can't believe I was being so full of myself...*

In any case, I could feel my pulse abating as I grasped the situation. *So, uh, his mother is coming? It's not that strange. I mean, parents are supposed to come visit—*

But when I realized the implications, all the color drained from my face. I recalled that I was speaking to the first prince of the Aldian Kingdom, which meant his mother

was...

"H-Hmm, erm... Your mother...? As in, to our academy festival?" I asked cautiously.

"Yes." Reifus smiled awkwardly.

"*Your mother, Sir Reifus?*"

"Indeed."

"Which is to say, Her Majesty, the queen of Aldia, is coming out to visit... our academy festival?"

"Exactly."

A spell of vertigo overcame me, and the prince had to hurriedly catch me. However, I stepped away, telling him I'm fine. "Wh-Why is she coming?"

"I accidentally told my parents about the festival. They were pleased to hear I was running the event and became very curious about it, so they decided they'd both show up on the day of the festival."

"Both the king and the queen are coming?!"

"Well, that was their intent. I tried to convince them that this would be too much, but they wouldn't back down. In the end, we compromised that only one of them would show up."

"And they ended up deciding she would?"

"Father can't win an argument against mother," Reifus said with a dry laugh. "She's always the one to make all the decisions."

As the prince smiled, a bit bothered, I could only stare at him in amazement.

*Well, I've always imagined His Majesty being some kind of skirt chaser, which made it weird he hasn't had any adultery scandals yet. I guess he's henpecked?*

That idea actually seemed oddly probable, so, satisfied with my updated conception of the king, I returned my thoughts to the topic at hand. *The queen coming to the*

*Academy Festival will be exciting news for the students, but I guess the reason he's come to tell me about it is that I'm the head of security.*

"Hmm... The queen's guards will be coming too, right?"

"Yes, of course. Sir Klaus will be leading the imperial guards. It's just..."

"Just what?"

"Mother asked that we provide guards too, and that we have someone serve as her guide."

"Shouldn't the teachers handle something on that scale?"

The prince shook his head with a forced smile. "The headmaster said this was an event run by the students for the students, so he entrusted all the responsibility to us."

*That stupid, horny old man!*

The headmaster's statement made it seem like he was respecting the students' independence, but he was just dumping all the work on us because he didn't want to do it himself!

"So, you see..." the prince stammered, looking hesitant.

"I-Is there anything else?"

"Umm... Mother asked that you specifically serve as her guide..."

Hearing this made my brittle mental fortitude snap. I became dizzy, and everything went dark... *If the queen specifically asked for me, I can't possibly refuse...*

\* \* \*

When I came to, Tutte explained I was taken to the infirmary. I apologized to Safina, Reifus, and Tutte for having to take me there.

*Aaah, what I wouldn't give to make that conversation just a dream... But I'm already past the point of no return. Oh, what do I do? If I mess this up, my family will end up taking the blame for it. What if the worst case scenario happens? I can't do this on my*

*own! I can't! I can't!*

I maintained a poker face so as to not worry the others, but I was basically on the verge of snapping—until suddenly, a girl with blonde ringlets entered the room. At that moment, I was met with divine revelation. As my idea surged through my mind, I hopped out of the infirmary bed and caught that damsel in an embrace.

“Lady Mary, I heard you collaps— Aaaah!”

“Magilukaaaaaaaaaaa!” I whined.

Magiluka froze up upon me clinging to her as soon as she entered the room. Sacher, who was standing behind her, stared at us with wide eyes. I grabbed Magiluka’s hands and brought them up to my face as I prepared to plead with her.

“Magiluka, let’s fall into hell together!” I said.

“‘T-T-Together’? ‘Hell’?” Magiluka stammered, confused.

I explained the absurd situation that the prince had presented to me, and as I did, the color gradually drained from Magiluka’s face.

“W-Well, good luck, Lady Mary! I’ll support you from behind the—” Magiluka tried to say hurriedly.

“Let’s fall into hell together!” I repeated loudly, blocking off her escape.

“What hell are you talking about?! You know what? Don’t answer that, Lady Mary. I don’t want to know. Whatever it is, it can’t be good.”

Magiluka made to turn on her heels and leave, but I wrapped my hands around her waist, clinging to her.

“Magilukaaaa! Please? Aren’t we friends?! Your friend is in need! Help mееее!”

I knew this was a very bad thing to say to a friend, but at this point, I was beyond caring about appearances. If I was going down, I wasn’t going down alone.

“This has nothing to do with friendship,” Magiluka insisted. “Her Majesty specifically asked for you. You should put forth your best effort so as to not tarnish Duke Regalia’s

dignity."

"Don't leave me alone here! Please, together— Whoa!"

I ended up pulling too hard on Magiluka, and we both fell forward. She fell on her backside, but that was the last thing to bother me at the moment... because I ended up falling face first into her chest. I looked up at her blankly.

"L-L-L-Lady Mary. W-We can't do this! It's improper!" Magiluka's teary-eyed face filled my field of vision.

"Magiluka, please." I brought my face closer to hers, begging.

"F-Fine. Fine! I'll help, just let go of me!" She finally cracked under my horrifying assault.

"Really? You'll help me?" I looked at Magiluka with doe-like eyes as I clung to her, and she nodded hurriedly, her face flushed. "Oh, Magiluka, thank yoooou! I love yoooou!"

I hugged Magiluka's neck happily, to which she let out a silent screech.

\* \* \*

That night, as Tutte was preparing my room for bedtime, I sat on a chair and reflected on what was happening at the academy.

"Today was pretty tiring..." I lamented.

"It did sound quite difficult, Lady Mary," Tutte agreed. "You need to participate in the demonstration match for the two-on-two battle, serve as adviser for the Aleyios class exhibit, work as head of security, and on top of that, you need to serve as Her Majesty's escort."

Hearing Tutte acknowledge my efforts made me realize something. "Huh? Hold on. Aren't I doing a little too much? Wasn't the whole idea that I hide my achievements behind someone else's?"

"Erm, well, I suppose some trees end up standing out in the forest," Tutte said awkwardly.

"This is all wrong," I said dismally, staring down at my trembling hands. "How did it turn out like this?"

"It's because you lost track of your initial goal, Lady Mary," Tutte answered nonchalantly. I glared at her as she returned to preparing my room without a care in the world.

"Well, the festival hasn't begun yet, and you should still be able to keep yourself out of sight if you try," she carried on. "Well, as long as nothing goes wro— Mmmg!"

Before Tutte could sense the ominous intent in the air, I got off my chair and hit her in the face with a pillow.

"Phew, that was close! You almost jinxed it for me," I said, rubbing the pillow against Tutte's face as she floundered under me. "You don't know what gods of mischief might be listening in on us."

"Pfhaaa!" Tutte somehow escaped the pillow, gasping. "Wh-What are you doing?! Lady Mary, I couldn't breathe!"

"That's your fault for saying things that would jinx me." I flashed her a vicious smile.

"...Lady Mary." Tutte went from a reproachful glare to a broad smile all of a sudden.

"Wh-What?" I asked, daunted.

"I sure hope nothing bad happens!" she declared loudly.

"You blew it!" I threw my pillow at her, landing a clean hit on her grinning face.

## 9. MEETING HER

The news about Her Majesty coming to visit the festival spread through the academy like wildfire, as did the news that Magiluka and I would be serving as her guides.

*That was really close. If I'd been on this job alone, I'd totally have stood out.*

“Lady Mary, about your plans for today...” Tutte said to get my attention. We were on the carriage on the way to the academy.

“Ah, yes.” I straightened out my back.

“During lunch break, there’s two Aleyios exhibits that have requested your advice. After classes are over, you’ll be watching over the Solos students’ training, and Sir Yencho will be arriving to offer advice. After that, you’ll be meeting Lady Safina to allocate the security budget, after which you’ll be practicing for the team battle together. Then you’ll be meeting Lady Magiluka to discuss the queen’s—”

“W-W-W-Wait, hold on just a second. Is it just me, or am I getting busier by the day? How much am I going to have to work today?”

“This is after I tried to adjust your schedule to make it less crowded. This is everyone’s first time doing this, so they’re all coming to you for advice since you have a solid image of what the festival should be like.”

Hearing this, I closed my eyes and massaged my brow tiredly.

*It’s not like I have that solid of an image of it either. But I guess I do have a better grasp of it compared to people who don’t have the first idea of what it’s supposed to be like... Besides, I’m actually kind of happy to have people rely on me. That never happened in my past life. But if my workload gets any bigger, I’ll really stand out...*

And so, although I was a bit anxious, I got started on chipping away at my packed schedule.

\* \* \*

“By the way, Lady Mary, do you have plans for the weekend?” Magiluka asked me as we moved between classes.

“The weekend?” I repeated, thinking back to my schedule. “I don’t think I have any plans in particular.”

I looked to Tutte to make sure I remembered correctly, and she nodded.

“Yes, I don’t have any plans,” I said.

"That's good," Magiluka said. "In that case, there's an activity I'd like you to participate in."

"Hmm, very well. What kind of activity?"

"A tea party hosted by Her Majesty," Magiluka said nonchalantly.

I stopped in my tracks, still managing to keep a smile on my face. "Would you, um, care to repeat that?" I asked, that smile turning into a stiff smirk.

"A tea party hosted by Her Majesty." Magiluka stopped too and smiled back at me.

"Oh, Magiluka, you card! Stop the jokes. Tee hee hee!"

"Oho ho ho! Oh, posh, Lady Mary, do you really know me as the kind of lady who'd make a joke like that?"

To the unbiased onlooker, it would seem like we were discussing things with elegant smiles, but I was definitely at the end of my rope. We both stared at each other silently for a few seconds, smiles plastered on our lips.

"Well, I have plans—" I tried to make excuses.

"You said you were free just a moment ago." Magiluka mercilessly shot me down.

Silence settled over us once again.

"Why do I have to be part of such a grand affaiiiiir?!" I whined as I grabbed Magiluka's shoulders, going from smiling to bawling in three seconds flat.

"When Her Majesty heard that you agreed to be her guide, she asked to have a face-to-face with you and organized a tea party to facilitate it."

"B-But, but, I didn't get an invitation, so it doesn't count, right?!" I scrambled for a way out.

"It will probably arrive within the day, or perhaps tomorrow. And I was told to confirm your arrival just in case."

*Aaagh, I'm already so busy! I don't need such a nerve-racking event on my day off too!*

"B-B-B-But, you'll be at the tea party too, right, Magiluka? I mean, you're escorting the queen too!"

"Well, I've already met Her Majesty, so there's no need for her to get to know me face-to-face, but..."

"Magiluka, pleaaaase! Come to the tea party with me!" I shook her shoulders, which made her head jiggle like a bobble head.

"S-Stop that! *Hurk*, I'm getting sick!"

"Please, please, pleaaaase!" I begged.

It occurred to me that I'd stopped being picky about my methods recently and had been consistently going straight to begging, but I wasn't going to stop now.

*I'm not going to face the queen all alone. What if I mess something up?! I mean, I made a huge mess the first time I met Reifus!*

"Fine, fine, I'll come, just stop shaking meeee!" Magiluka capitulated again, her face very pale.

I sighed in relief and stopped shaking her, and Magiluka stumbled a few steps, her head still spinning.

"I-I'm sorry for strong-arming you into this, Magiluka," I apologized earnestly.

"Urgh... Don't worry about it..." she said, trying to keep her lunch down. "I knew you'd ask me, so I figured I'd end up coming along anyway..."

"...Thank you, Magiluka." I grinned at her, touched by this friend I honestly didn't deserve.

She bashfully averted her gaze from me and mumbled something too softly for me to hear.

\* \* \*

The time for the nerve-racking tea party was soon upon me. I was seated on the carriage, which was currently taking me to the palace.

*Come to think of it, I went there once before, didn't I? I ended up going home because Magiluka sabotaged me though. Since I was in the waiting room the whole time back then, this will technically be my first official visit to the palace. I wish I could U-turn home like I did back then... but I guess that's a bit of a tall ask this time.*

As I let my imagination run wild with escapism, my weak-willed self soon gave way to pessimism again.

*Aaah, I was thinking I've been doing better about staying calm recently, but I guess that was just because I was getting into the habit of things. Whenever I have to do something I'm not familiar with like this, I still tense up. Ugh, what if I make a blunder in front of Her Majesty...?! I fanned the flames of my own anxiety by imagining the many ways I could theoretically mess up.*

"T-Tutte, what am I going to do? I'm too nervous. My hands are shaking!" I asked my reliable maid for help, but this time, she was as rattled as I was.

"Wh-What are we going to do, Lady Mary?! I'm shaking too!"

*Yeah, Tutte is a commoner, so meeting the queen would be terrifying for her. She must be even more nervous than I am...*

We held hands tensely, which helped relieve my stress, and stayed this way for a while. But then, the carriage ground to a halt. As I heard the cab shake, my heart skipped a beat.

"We're here, Lady Mary," Tutte said, letting go of my hands and preparing to escort me out.

Before long, I stepped out of the carriage, whereupon I was greeted by the palace's maids and led to the waiting room again. When I entered the room, I found Magiluka was already there, seated on the sofa. When she noticed me, she got up to greet me.

"A good day to you, Lady Mary."

"A g-good day, Magiluka..." I said, my teeth clattering.

"Heh heh, no need to be so tense. Her Majesty personally asked for this tea party, so there won't be anyone but the queen and us. And Her Majesty is quite the gentle lady. So long as nothing major happens, you'll be fine."

*So I won't be fine if something major does happen!*

Still, meeting Magiluka did help alleviate some of my nervousness. After a few minutes, a maid walked in, told us preparations were complete, and ushered us inside. I walked with stiff movements, my left and right limbs moving as pairs as I made way to the palace's garden.

It was a very quiet place. At the center of the garden was a fancy table with two women seated on the chairs around it. One of them was a woman the same age as my mother, and the other was a girl roughly my age.

*W-Wait, wasn't this supposed to be a private meeting with no one but us and Her Majesty? Or, uh... Are there two queens or something?*

I was coming up with such baffling conclusions in my nervous state. Nevertheless, the maids simply stepped forward, announced our arrival to the queen, and then left the garden. Tutte followed their example and left too, of course.

"Thank you kindly for your invitation today, Your Majesty." Magiluka curtsied respectfully.

"E-Erm, th-th-thank you respectfully for your invitation!" I followed her example.

*Aaah, I stuttered! And slurred my words!*

I hung my head, feeling myself go red to my ears and trembling shamefully.

"Oh, my my, how adorable." A very kind voice reached my ears. "You must be Mary. Come, come, let me see your face."

I lifted my head, baffled. The woman sitting on the chair looked at me, grinning. Just like the prince, she had golden, silky hair that was done up beautifully. When her blue eyes met my golden ones, I felt my heart skip a beat.

"Hmph, silver..." I heard a husky whisper, but then..."Ow!"

A dry sound, like a whip's crack, filled the air. The girl sitting beside the woman was cradling her head painfully—because the lady, despite smiling at me, had snapped her folding fan shut and smacked the girl over the head with it.

But even more so than the queen's baffling action, what really made me freeze up was looking at the girl's head. For one thing, she had orange, wavy hair, with its tips taking on a more pinkish shade. Strange though her hair color was, stranger still were the two pretty horns growing out of her head.

Yes, horns.

"Th-That hurts! What do you think you're doing?!" The girl glared at the lady angrily, rubbing the back of her head.

Her eyes were a bloody shade of crimson, and I could see canine-like fangs in her mouth. I was familiar with people who exhibited such features—I'd never seen one before myself, but I'd been taught about them. The girl had all the hallmarks of what this world would call a demon.

*Whoaa! A demon, a real demon! Someone get me a camera!*

I became as excited as I'd been when I first met Deodora, which overcame my tension.

"My, pardon for surprising you with this guest," the queen said, noticing me staring at the girl. "She showed up all of a sudden and demanded I keep her company, so I had her join us."

I assumed this lady must have been the queen (since the other girl was a demon).

"Oh, no, I don't mind at all!" I bowed my head hurriedly.

"Heh heh. This right here..." Her Majesty giggled and made to introduce the girl, only to be cut off.

"Our name is Emilia Relirex!" The girl rose from her chair and stood imposingly, her hands on her waist. "Of the Relirex Kingdom of the Dark Isle— Ow!"

Halfway through her vigorous self-introduction, the queen once again slapped her on the head with the folded fan, a grin on her lips.

"You're being improper, Emilia."

*I thought the queen was supposed to be sweet? The way her smile doesn't extend to her eyes is pretty scary! And is it just me, or will this Emilia girl just not learn her lesson?*

All the tension in the air evaporated at once, and I could only stare pityingly at the pretty girl cradling her head in pain.

## 10. A PRINCESS, IT SEEMS!

Far to the southeast, away from the Aldian Kingdom's shores, was an island. Far in the past, in the ages of myths, the Goddess of Light and the Goddess of Darkness clashed in battle. The Goddess of Darkness was defeated, and her fall from the heavens created what became known as the Dark Isle. Upon the land of that Dark Isle, a country of demons, the Relirex Kingdom, had been founded.

Or so Emilia explained.

"And we are the princess of the Relirex Kingdom," Emilia said, seated back into her chair calmly. "What is it, Silver Hair? You look like you have something to say to us." She eyed me provokingly after finishing her proud explanation.

"Hm..." I clammed up, unsure of what to say.

*I can't just insist that my name is Mary and not 'Silver Hair.' I mean, she's a princess! She could have me executed or something!*

"Emilia, her name is Mary," Her Majesty graciously said, seemingly reading my thoughts. "And don't glare at her like that. You're scaring her."

"Hmph! To us, all things silver are threats to be wary of. You know as such," Emilia said in a sulking manner.

I was relieved that she wasn't as wary of me as it first seemed, but I wasn't sure why she was so aggressive toward me when I'd never met her before.

"Don't mind her, Mary," Her Majesty said soothingly. "Long ago, the King of the Relirex Kingdom, which is to say Emilia's father, the Dark Lord, was defeated by the Argent Knight and beaten severely. Thanks to that, the Relirexian royal family is wary of anyone with a silvery appearance because it reminds them of the so-called 'Aldian White Devil.' Incidentally, the weakened Dark Lord agreed to a nonaggression pact between the Aldian and Relirex Kingdoms, leading to peace between us."

“I-I see...”

*Is it just me, or is our kingdom kind of weirdly calculating?*

I almost laughed upon hearing that our national hero had a title oddly reminiscent of a certain robot anime from my past life. That said, I did have a history of walking around in silver armor, which was one tidbit I couldn't share with Emilia.

“My apologies if this is a rude question, Your Majesty, but it seems to me that you’re on very good terms with Princess Emilia?” Magiluka graciously diverted the conversation away from me.

That was something I was questioning, as well.

“She’s a schoolmate of mine,” Her Majesty explained. “She studied abroad and was in my class. And then, when I became queen, she started dropping in for surprise visits like this. It’s quite a bother, really...”

The queen sighed, to which Princess Emilia directed a sulking look at her.

“Mmmf... Everyone around us is extremely dull. We’re bored out of our minds. By contrast, this country is full of curiosities. It makes for a fine place to spend time in.”

“A schoolmate...” Magiluka said, looking between the two of them and seeming quite hesitant to say the rest. “Well, you both look very...”

I compared the two of them, and yes, the queen looked old enough to be Emilia’s mother. But as I looked at them, my eyes suddenly met Emilia’s.

“Heh heh, what is it? You look like you want to say our appearances don’t align, Silver Hair,” she said proudly. “Oh, pardon, Mary, was it? Well, us demons are blessed with longevity, and we can use magic to control the rate with which we mature.”

“Then why do you choose to remain young?” Magiluka asked out of intellectual curiosity. “Do you not wish to look the same age as Her Majesty?”

“Hmm? Isn’t it obvious?” Emilia asked smugly, looking like she’d just been asked a stupid question. “Why, when we look at how she’s aging into an old hag, how would we not long to retain our youth— Eek!”

Emilia was silenced by a glare of silent bloodlust from Her Majesty. That wasn't the kind of gesture a queen would make. If I had to say, it was the kind of look you'd expect a general like my father, Ferdid, to make.

"Aha ha ha... We jest, we merely jest..." Emilia said, breaking into a nervous sweat. "Goodness, when the queen formerly known as the God Spear Dancer glares at us with such bloodlust, we cannot help but shiver in terror. But, well, yes, we are still something of a youngling compared to other demons, so this appearance feels more natural to our subordinates. That's why, so please, stop glaring at us like that!"

As Emilia begged and apologized profusely, I reflected on what she'd just said. "The God Spear Dancer" was the pseudonym of a fairly famous spear user, a moniker known among not just the nobility, but even the commoners. It was said that the flash of her spear could cut through anything, and her movements were as fair as a beautiful dance.

It turned out the name of that God Spear Dancer was Ilysha, the queen. Taking her royal surname into account, her full name was Ilysha Nezha Dalford.

*Yeah, I think I can see why His Majesty can't argue with her.*

"Now, let's be done talking about Emilia, shall we?" Her Majesty said with a smile, her murderous glare vanishing like it was never there to begin with. "How go the preparations for the Academy Festival?"

"They're going well, with much thanks to Lady Mary's advice," Magiluka said with a smile. "She has a very clear image of what the festival should be like. You wouldn't think it's her first time doing this."

"H-Hey, Magiluka, don't exaggerate...!" I said, panicked.

"My, that's good to hear. I was quite surprised when Reifus told me he was the one leading the organization of the Academy Festival. He was never much interested in those kinds of activities, and one day he just actively started pursuing an idea for one. I was wondering what got the concept into his head."

The queen narrowed her eyes as she looked at me. I froze in place, feeling like she was staring into my very soul.

"Hm? What's this Academy Festival thing you speak of? We've never heard of such a

thing," Emilia said curiously, forgetting the terror she felt moments ago.

Magiluka briefly explained the festival, and Emilia's eyes lit up with excitement.

"Why, that sounds positively fascinating! We wish to go too! Let us participate in some activities!"

"No, uh, only the Academy's students can participate in the festival..." Magiluka said apologetically.

*We already have Her Majesty visiting, which is a major event. If we have another kingdom's princess attend on top of that, I'll probably just pass out.*

"Then we would at least like to come watch," Emilia insisted.

"Emilia," Her Majesty said. "You're the princess of Relirex. You need to get permission from the Dark Lord, and then permission from the king to attend."

*Good going, Your Majesty!*

"Aww, if we ask father, he would insist that we must go through all sorts of preparations to make sure we are watched at all times, making it impossible to do anything. We don't want to tour the festival like that. Not a word of this will reach father's ears."

Emilia rejected the idea for very selfish reasons.

"That would never be allowed. Do you understand your position, Emilia?" Her Majesty said sternly.

"Waaah! No, no, no, noooo! We wanna gooood! We wanna go to the Academy Festivaaaal!" She puffed up her cheeks and waved her arms and legs around like a toddler throwing a tantrum. Despite possibly being the oldest person here, she was totally acting like a baby.

"No means no," Her Majesty said flatly.

"Waaah!" Emilia moaned under Her Majesty's silent pressure, her eyes welling up with tears. "Ilysha, you bully! Poopyhead! Waaaaaaaaah!"

And so, with a parting remark that was on the level of a commoner child, Emilia got off her seat, ran away in tears, and flew off. As it turned out, she had bat-like wings; I couldn't see it behind her hair, but her dress was open in the back.

*Talk about a fussy princess.*

"Your Majesty!" Sentries hurried into the yards, having spotted a flying object soar away.

"A certain troublemaker princess ran off, is all." Her Majesty directed a smile at the guards. "No need to give chase."

The guards bowed their heads respectfully and returned to their stations.

"Well, that ended up being a boisterous tea party," she said nonchalantly. "Anyway, Mary, Magiluka."

"Yes," Magiluka said promptly.

"Y-Yes!" I followed soon in a flustered hurry.

"I expect good things from the Academy Festival."

*Um, Your Majesty, you should tell that to the prince, not to me.* Of course, I would never say that aloud, instead electing to smile and nod.

And so, the boisterous tea party came to an end. On the way out, Magiluka's expression turned quite pensive as we walked through the palace corridors.

"What's wrong, Magiluka?" I asked.

"It's nothing... I just get the impression Princess Emilia isn't going to just quietly agree not to come to the festival."

"I-It'll be fine," I said, trying to convince myself as much as I was trying to convince her. "I mean, she might be a bit spoiled and childish, but she's still a princess. She won't do anything too unreasonable... I think."

The more I spoke, the less I believed it myself. I'd only just met Princess Emilia today, so I didn't know her too well, but thinking back on how she'd acted at the tea party, it

was hard not to get concerned.

"I just hope nothing happens and the festival goes well," Magiluka said, to which I stiffened in terror.

*Gaaaah, what is with these people and jinxing me?!* I screamed internally as we left the palace.

## 11. PLANNING MY SPECIAL FINISHER

With the meeting with Her Majesty behind me, I began my preparations for the Academy Festival in earnest.

To break it all down: The Academy Festival would be held for three days. The first day would include the martial arts tournament's preliminaries, which meant it wasn't very much part of the festival per se. The second day would feature the qualifiers and the eve of the festival, which was when the class exhibits were to begin. The third day was to be the climax of the festival, with the tournament's finals and all the class exhibits open.

I also ended up blurting out the term "closing party." They naturally didn't understand the idea of folk dancing around a bonfire, but we did decide to hold a dance party that would be open to all. *If it were up to me, I'd have the queen visit on the first day, when there'll be the least visitors...*

"And our demonstration will take place on the third day in the middle of the martial arts tournament finals, right?" I asked to confirm the itinerary with Safina.

"Yes," she said happily.

We were in the middle of training for the team battle. We'd had a practice match against the two instructors today, and I was proud to see that we'd actually done pretty well. That said, the match had been stopped halfway through, so there wasn't a definitive winner. After all, if I'd won too easily, Instructor Karis and his loose lips would have ended up spreading rumors.

*My coordination with Safina's come a long way from when we started. But still, we need*

*some kind of trump card.*

"I think we need a special finisher after all," I muttered as we took a break.

"A special finisher?" Safina parroted me.

"Hmm, special finisher? That sounds like quite the flashy idea, Lady Mary." Instructor Karis seemed to have his interest roused.

Instructor Alice, by the way, was reading some kind of suspicious book, occasionally making a strange smirk and snickering in a way that very much ruined her pretty, dignified appearance.

*Please, please, please don't do anything crazy, Instructor!*

Pretending not to see how Instructor Alice was being the height of creepy, I turned to look at Safina and Instructor Karis.

"Do you have any good ideas for combination attacks or effective finishers?" I asked him.

My ideas were a little too far-fetched to be realistic, and Safina wasn't good at coming up with these kinds of ideas, so we still didn't have a good plan to work with. As such, I decided to rely on my senior's wisdom.

"Hmm... Well, the advantage of coordination is that it lets you attack consecutively. Still, you two have a problem with going for reckless attacks that are easy to block. Hmm..." Instructor Karis crossed his arms pensively.

Safina and I tried to put our minds to it too.

"If consecutive attacks aren't an option, maybe a simultaneous attack will work?" Instructor Alice suggested, looking up from her book.

"A simultaneous attack... I see—combining the sword and magic into a single strike. I like it," I said, impressed with the idea.

"It's quite difficult to pull off though," Instructor Karis commented. "You'll have to attack in perfect coordination, and the slightest inaccuracy would reduce it to an ordinary consecutive attack. You'll also have to account for your opponents' attempts

to move, counterattack, and defend.”

I thought there was a light at the end of the tunnel, but he shot it down at a moment’s notice.

*Hmm. Using simultaneous magic and sword attacks to stun the opponent and prevent them from dodging... Something that convenient can't possibly be...*

I scoured my past life memories of anime and manga for an idea, and an image flashed through my mind.

“Wait, I think we might be able to pull it off...” I whispered.

“Oh, that sounds promising.” Instructor Karis listened to me cautiously.

“I think it’ll be just me and Safina from here on out,” I said with a smile, pulling Safina away from Instructor Karis and over to me. “I have to ask anyone who’s connected with our opponents to leave.”

“That’s cold, Lady Mary.” Instructor Karis smiled and walked over to Instructor Alice. “But I suppose that makes sense. We’ll make ourselves scarce, then. We have places to be.”

The two of them seemed to discuss something for a few minutes, and then Instructor Alice returned her eyes to her book, looking very fed up. Instructor Karis gently plucked the book out of her hands with a grin and left the room, prompting her to follow him in hurried pursuit.

“All right, Safina, I have a question,” I told her.

“Yes, what is it?”

“When you’re facing one opponent, how many patterns are there for slashing moves?”

“Slashing moves? Hmm...” Safina pondered as she slashed through the air with her katana. “There are eight directions I can slash from, and a thrust, so that makes nine.”

“Right. So how would an opponent react if they were attacked from all nine angles at once?”

"Huh? If they're attacked from all nine at once? W-Well, they wouldn't be able to dodge, and they'd be helpless."

"Right. And that's what we're going to do!" I declared, clenching a fist.

*Well, I'm basically knocking off a technique from a certain manga. I think I might be able to pull it off by myself, but if I did that, I'd be drawing too much attention, so it's better that I perform it with someone else's help.*

And a few minutes of silence later...

"Huuuuh?! Y-You think we can do that?! Lady Mary, I don't have enough arms for that!" Safina made this exaggerated comment upon hearing my idea.

"Remember the undead incident? You used acceleration magic to pull off a two-hit combination. Do you think there's any way you can improve on that?"

"You mean casting acceleration magic at the same time I attack? It's not impossible, but attacking from nine directions at once is too much."

"Well, if you were able to perform a two-attack combo without magic, would you be able to attack from four directions at once with it?"

"Yes... in theory. But linking it into five more slashes would be a little too much..."

"Don't worry. I'll compensate for the rest with my magic."

"Huh? W-Wait, Lady Mary, you're going to fire five slash spells at the same time?"

"Yes, I am. If you're going to go above and beyond to use four consecutive slashes, I'll have to do the same."

I made it sound very simple—mostly because I knew I could pull it off—but Safina stared at me in disbelief.

*I-I mean, this reasoning works, right? It's just casting a few spells in tandem. Anyone can do that!*

"I mean, you used magic consecutively in the martial arts tournament, remember? I'll be fine. I mean, I'll be careful to not go into mana exhaustion."

“R-Right.”

“The problem is to get your four slashes to match my five perfectly. If we miss, there’s a chance they’ll guard each of our individual attacks. So after I cast my slashing spells, you’ll need to close in and pressure them with exact timing so our attacks perfectly cross paths.”

“I-I’ll try!”

As I explained it, I got the distinct concern that I was making a pretty crazy demand of her, but Safina enthusiastically agreed, which assured me that this was all possible.

“I’ll call it the Nine Blade Cross!” I recklessly named the attack when we hadn’t even actually finished making it yet.

“Ooooh!” Safina said excitedly, a blush on her cheeks.

“So, with that decided, let’s begin our training!”

We started by training individually first.

“All right, let’s go,” I told myself as I faced a target a few meters away from me.

I enthusiastically took position to unleash my spells.

“Sonic Blade! Sonic Blade! Sonic Blade! Sonic Blade! Sonic Blade!”

I chanted the words of power, producing blades of air that flew toward the target one by one with perfect timing.

“That was amazing, Lady Mary!” Tutte praised me. “You unleashed five spells at once!”

“This isn’t right...” I frowned. “This is just consecutive magic. It’s not what I had in mind.”

I just used the spell five times, but I didn’t fire the five spells at once. I recalled a certain manga where a character produced five fire spells on each finger and fired them all as one—the Finger something or other.

“Heh heh heh...” I flashed a smirk that would suit some evil minion and held up my

hand to the target. “In each of my fingertips is a slash spell known as the Sonic Blade. And they number one, two, th—”

I held up each finger as I spoke, imagining the spells contained in each finger. But then—

“Eeeek!”

Halfway through my spiel, the Sonic Blade spells went flying in random directions. My spells going haywire sent me tumbling back to the floor, where I landed on my backside.

“Are you all right, Lady Mary?!” Tutte hurried over to me.

“I’m fine, don’t worry,” I said with a strained smile, holding up a hand to keep Tutte away.

*Ugh... This is harder than I thought. Maintaining a firm image of what I want takes a lot of concentration. The smallest distraction makes my spells go haywire. Jeez, I thought this would be easy, but it takes a lot of mental discipline.*

It’d only been a few minutes, but my determination was already cracking.

“Safinaaaa, about what I was saying, how—” I approached Safina, who was training on her own, to whine, but then I paused.

She had a serious, earnest look on her face as she determinedly polished her skills. The sight made me fall silent.

*How could you be so stupid, Mary? You can’t pull it off right away, so you give up already? It’s all about effort. Yes, effort! Just like what Safina’s doing!*

I mentally beat myself up, scolding myself for my weakness. I came to realize that the broken abilities God had given me had made me pick up on everything easily, so I might have been unconsciously avoiding the idea of putting in effort.

*Come to think of it, even when I was trying to learn how to restrain myself, I ended up depending on Tutte a lot. This isn’t good. I need to get my act together!*

“First, I need to focus. That’s the first thing I need to train myself to do. Let’s do this!”

I spoke aloud, pumping myself up.

But what I didn't realize was that the magic I was lifting from that manga was actually some major magic in this world...

## 12. IT'S ALMOST THE ACADEMY FESTIVAL

"Nnnnng..." I sat on my seat, leaning over the table and holding my breath.

I gazed at the object placed before me with tense eyes. I was in the old campus building's lounge. The adjacent room was being used as the executive headquarters for the Academy Festival. I was currently with Tutte, but we weren't enjoying a leisurely time; we were in the middle of rigorous training.

"Ah..." I uttered as the tension drained from my body and my muscles relaxed. Scattered all in front of me were cards. "I can't get this house of cards to stay upright..." I stretched out my limbs, still seated, and looked up at the ceiling despite how improper it was.

To train my concentration and focus, I was stacking cards together to build a pyramid. This proved to be harder than I expected. It took a lot of sustained concentration, of course, but I was so tense that my overwhelming strength made the delicate work much harder than it should have been. Simply touching the cards ever so slightly with a finger kept producing stronger shocks than I'd expect and causing the pyramid to fall apart.

"Keep at it. This will help you both to temper your concentration and learn how to restrain your strength," Tutte encouraged me as she picked up the scattered cards and replaced the ones that were close to tearing with new ones. "Good luck, Lady Mary."

"You're right. Yeah, I'll work hard!" I straightened out my back and reached for the cards again.

I spent the next hour concentrating and focusing, and finally, I was able to complete the base of the pyramid. All that was left was to stack the cards on top of it, but the precise work made me extremely nervous and reckless.

*Focus... Focus... Focuuuuus....!*

But then, I heard a modest knock on the door that made my tension snap like a string, and my shoulders jolted. I dropped the cards in my hands, and the rest of the tower cruelly fell apart.

“Aaaaaah...!” I whined in disappointment as I sorrowfully watched the tower crumble, then I slumped in my chair.

Tutte, who watched me with a sympathetic smile, got up to greet the guest. “Lady Mary, it’s Lady Magiluka.”

“Oh, yeah, fine, let her in...” I waved my hand dismissively despite being decisively not fine with the surprise visit.

“What’s wrong, Lady Mary?” Magiluka asked dubiously as she entered. “You’re being quite improper today.”

“Don’t mind me. I’m just doing some concentration training, so I’m a bit tired...”

“Concentration training? What for?”

“Well, that’s for— Oh, I almost blurted it out. I’m sorry, it’s a secret.” I couldn’t let Magiluka, one of my opponents in the match, hear about it. I sat up in my chair and resolved to become tight-lipped.

“Oh, really?” She regarded me with a curious gaze and a chuckle. “Well, since you can’t share it with me, I assume it must have to do with the team battle.”

“No comment.” I crossed my arms in front of me, refusing to say anything else.

Giggling at my reaction, Magiluka sat in front of me. “Speaking of which, Instructor Karis said you’re developing some kind of special finisher move.”

“Oh, he’s such a blabbermouth.” I sighed. I could easily imagine him blurting it out by accident. “Speaking of the team battle, how are things on your end? Are you doing well?” I asked, nonchalantly fishing for information.

“Yes, I’d say the idiot is starting to look good. Instructor Karis’s advice is proving very helpful,” Magiluka replied, handling my probing without missing a beat.

*That's Magiluka for you. Unlike me, she's cool as ice.* But as I looked admiringly at Magiluka, I noticed something was off about her. She had a white bandage wrapped around her wrist.

"Magiluka, are you hurt?"

"Huh? Oh, this? Pay it no mind. I just hurt my wrist while training. It should heal in no time. It's not even worth using healing magic on it."

*Magiluka's always elegant and stays out of fights, so I'm surprised she got hurt. Why would a mage hurt their wrist, anyway? It's not like she's a fencer or something.*

"Both swords and magic... I have a renewed appreciation for you, Lady Mary," Magiluka muttered suddenly as I was lost in thought.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"...I was just talking to myself. Pay it no mind," she said evasively. "More importantly, there's the matter of Her Majesty. She's set to visit on the third day, so I made an itinerary for her."

"Mmhmm." I checked the sheet of paper she handed me.

"I avoided places that are too much of a long walk or are too crowded. Once Her Majesty sees a few exhibits, we'll take her to the arena at the end to watch the tournament."

"But won't we need to go to the arena ourselves?"

"I've prepared an escort for Her Majesty while we'll be absent, so there's no need for concern there. I want you to organize security to accommodate this itinerary so they keep the other guests from running into Her Majesty."

"Right, I'll talk with Safina and the squad leaders to set things up accordingly. That reminds me that Sir Klaus and his knights are set to arrive for an inspection soon. Should I inform him about the itinerary?"

"Yes, that's why I prepared it for you like this."

"Thank you. It's a huge help." I had my hands full dealing with my own problems, so

this bit of unexpected preparation made me greatly respect Magiluka.

"By the way, I had something I wanted to ask you about the team battle." Magiluka brought her hands together like she'd remembered something as I put away the paper.

"Wh-What?"

"Are you going to wear that armor for the day of the festival?"

"Armor?" I blinked, requiring a moment to realize what she meant. "Oh, you mean the silver set?"

*Come to think of it, what other armor would she associate with me? But hmm. If I end up doing something too impressive, I'll be able to pin the credit for it on the armor, so I'd like to have it on...*

"We'd like to come with our own equipment too," Magiluka said. "So what do you say? Should we approve the use of magic items? I mean, your armor counts as one, right?"

"Magic items, eh? I'll have to ask Safina." My armor was just a suit made out of ivory ore, but since I'd used it so many times to excuse away my feats, people came to believe it was some kind of magical armor. It made sense that Magiluka considered it as such.

"I've already spoken to her about it, and she said she'll leave the choice to you," Magiluka said.

"...You work fast."

"Wearing the armor should lighten the load on your body, right? I would very much like for you to have it on, then. If you don't, I won't feel comfortable going all out against you."

*Was that the lore I had for it? I kind of made it up on the fly, so I'd forgotten.* "Well, if you don't mind, I'm fine with using magic items."

"Thank you. That opens up all sorts of options for us."

"Huh? All sorts of options? Wh-What does that mean?"

"Heh heh. No comment." Magiluka chuckled and crossed her fingers in front of me to

form an X, a much more elegant gesture than the one I'd done in the same position. "I look forward to the mock battle. Anyway, I'll be off. A good day to you, Lady Mary."

Before I could press her for more information, Magiluka gracefully evaded me, rising from her chair and leaving the room.

"What is she scheming?" I gazed at the door she closed behind her, a faint concern in my heart.

The following day...

"Lady Mary! I was able to pull off the four-hit combo!" Safina reported happily.

"Wow, that was quick!"

Even for a hard worker like Safina, this was sooner than expected.

"Well, actually, I cheated a bit..."

"What do you mean?"

Safina diffidently showed me her right arm, which had an old-looking, elaborately made bracelet on it. There was an embedded gemstone that gave off a faint, mystical glow.

*It looks like an expensive antique. I never knew Safina was into this kind of thing..."* What's this?"

"A magic item passed down for generations in House Karshana." Safina hid her arm away bashfully. "I indirectly asked my father about how to do the four-hit combo, and when he heard Her Majesty will be watching the match, he lent it to me. Thankfully, the rules allow using magic items now, so while I'm a bit ashamed, I do think I'll use it."

"What's the item's effect?"

"It temporarily accelerates the wearer. House Karshana's fencing techniques are deeply tied to speed, so my ancestors sought out this item to maximize their agility,

and it's been passed down to each new generation."

"Wow."

"So, between this bracelet and my acceleration magic, I was somehow able to string four slashes at once. However, the bracelet has its limits—it only works for a few minutes, and only twice a day."

"Wow, that's impressive! It's not so much a magic item as it is a family heirloom, which is quite cool. Your father must expect a lot out of you if he lent you something this important."

"Y-You think?" Safina asked, looking at the bracelet with a mixture of tense bashfulness and happiness.

"Having a family heirloom must be nice... I wish I had something like that too."

"Doesn't your family have any belongings they could share with you?"

"Maybe? I'm not sure."

*Well, if I asked father about it, he'd probably go overboard and dump some legendary-class item on me, so I probably shouldn't.* I let out a dry laugh, easily imagining my dear father going overboard.

"Oh, but, Lady Mary, you have the Argent Knight armor!" Safina tried to encourage me, unaware that she was under the wrong impression.

"Well, yes, but that's not the Argent Knight's armor. It's just a useful suit of silver armor," I reminded her persistently.

For some reason, everyone was really stubborn about calling it the Argent Knight's armor, so I had to keep insisting that it wasn't. People only seemed to take my denial of it as confirmation that the armor really was special, however, so I made it a point to only correct people whenever I heard them mention it.

*Ah, wait! That means I'm the only one who's not ready for the match! I have to do something! Oh, isn't there some kind of item that can make my nerves as invincible as the rest of me?! Wishing for the impossible, I returned to another day of concentration training.*

## 13. PREPARATIONS ARE COMPLETE

A few days passed, and the school fully transitioned into a festive mood. I was, as always, in the training grounds.

“Let’s go, Safina!”

“Okay!”

As I called out to her, I held my hand out toward my target, and...

“Soooooooooonic Blaaaaaaaaade!”

“Acceleration!”

As I shouted out the words of power, mana began to form in each of my fingertips, and Safina’s bracelet lit up as she deployed a magic circle in front of her. I had somehow successfully managed to use the spell five times at once. I hadn’t perfected it though: my concentration was still insufficient, so my success rate was pretty much one in three, which meant that using it consecutively was unthinkable. On top of that, if I panicked, I was almost bound to fumble, so it was by no means perfect.

“Nine Blade!”

At my signal, one of the air blades in my fingertips went flying over Safina’s crouched figure in a straight line, while the other four spread out in different directions. At the same moment, Safina sprinted through the magic circle she’d created, springing forward with blinding speed. On top of that, she also chanted an acceleration spell.

My spells soon converged toward Safina, the blades once scattered in different directions drawing an arc through space as they closed in on the target.

“Cross!” Safina called out as she drew her blade.

I felt an intense shock wave blow, and the loud screech of air being cut shook the room. All that was left in the aftermath was the target’s remains, which lay cut into pieces on the floor.

“W-We did it... We did it, Lady Mary!” Safina scampered back to me like an adorable

puppy.

"Y-Yeah... We did..." I said, honestly surprised.

*Safina's amazing. It's hard to tell when my spells will hit the target, but Safina's managed to learn to keep up with them so quickly. Her talent is scary. Safina was a genius in her field, and I was positively impressed with her, and also a bit scared as I looked at what remained of the target. It might be a bit late in the game to consider this, but what are we going to do? This is pretty scary.*

Sonic Blade was an elementary second-order spell with very limited cutting capacity. And Safina was a girl, so I didn't think her blade would have that much force to it even if she did work in tandem with my magic. But seeing the fruits of our labors, I came to realize that Safina and my spells brought together produced a result that was quite overpowering. All of these factors combining together immeasurably increased the attack's potency.

*I-It'll be fine, I'm sure of it. I mean, Sacher's pretty sturdy, and he'll fight her with his own weapons and armor.*

I made excuses in my mind, putting my utmost trust in my friend's ability to take a beating.

"Lady Mary?" Safina stared at me as I was lost in my thoughts, her voice pulling me back into reality.

"Mmm, yeah, it's fine. But Safina, we should only use this attack on Sir Sacher, all right? I don't think Magiluka would be able to take it."

"Y-Yes, I agree. But starting in the second year, Solos students fight with real weapons, so mock battles have a magic tool called The War Angel's Protection set up. I think it'll be used in our match too."

"The War Angel's Protection?"

"Right. It's a magic tool that protects everyone battling within its range. It's possible for a combatant to get hurt, but past a certain threshold of injury, the tool absorbs their mana to enable itself to curb the damage that person takes. The worst that can happen to someone under The War Angel's Protection is that they faint... I think. I'm not sure how much mana it has to absorb to mitigate injury, so... if it can't take enough,

it could lead to a fatal injury..."

Safina punctuated this with a concerned glance at the dismantled target. She was probably concerned over whether Sacher could withstand the force of our attack, and she wasn't confident that this useful defensive item she'd mentioned would pull its weight either.

"I-I'm sure that defensive item will work, and at worst there's always healing magic. I- It'll be fine... right?"

We exchanged a concerned look, an awkward air brewing between us.

"Lady Mary, it's time," Tutte said, breaking the tension in the air.

"Oh, right, it's time for the meeting with Sir Klaus... Let's go, Safina," I said, deciding to shift my thoughts elsewhere.

"Yes, Lady Mary."

I made my way to the festival's administrative headquarters with Tutte and Safina in tow. An hour later, I waited in a room in the former campus building that served as the security office for the festival.

I was seated in my chair, my elbows resting on the table and my fingers folded together to hide my mouth. It was that pose. Yes, *that* pose, worthy of a commander. I'd always wanted to make that pose.

Safina stood in front of me and awaited my instructions, and the rest of the students that would serve as relays were lined up in front of me. Tutte stood behind me.



*Truly, it's the perfect image. I just need to go, "We won," and then say "Yes," and the reference will be complete.*

"Area D2, pattern yellow, type A, four in number." One of the Aleyios students gave his report while I was off in my own little world.

We'd presently asked the other students to play the role of troublemakers so the security unit could have some live training.

"Pattern yellow," Safina repeated and looked at me. "That's a verbal argument. If it's just four students, we can simply mediate the matter, Lady Mary."

"Very well. Wipe them ou—" I nearly blurted out, but corrected myself upon seeing the confusion in Safina's eyes. "I mean, uh, mediate the argument."

"Aye, aye," Safina said, relaying my order to the student who'd made the report.

The student himself recited Safina's instructions briefly so the person he was communicating with using magic could hear them.

"Area B4, pattern red, type B, seven in number."

"That's a quarrel between students and visitors. Red means a physical dispute... There's too many of them. Should we have the reaction team head over to resolve the situation?" one of the students asked Safina.

"Yes, have Instructor Karis send the team out."

"Very well. Contact the reaction team and ask them to head out to Area B4," the student repeated, activating their communication magic.

Instructor Karis led the response unit—my best unit, made up of graduates. They weren't part of usual security duties, intended only to be deployed to handle situations that were otherwise too much for our team to resolve.

"Why, look at this. This is wonderful," a stern man said. He was standing opposite Tutte on the other side of the room. "These reports are so concise that I can't understand what you're saying, but I never imagined communication magic could be used like this. Impressive thinking, Lady Mary. We should adopt this method for the palace. Of course, while making it known you were the one who came up with it."

This was Sir Klaus, a knight of the palace and Sacher's father. He approached me, looking quite impressed.

"Oh, no, this isn't all thanks to me. It only works because *everyone's* pitching in. If anything, you should say *everyone* in the academy came up with this idea," I said, stressing the word "everyone" each time. If I didn't do so, it would make me stand out more than I would like.

*See? I'm learning! Heh heh heh.*

"Even so, it's hard to believe students came up with such a detailed system. I daresay us knights won't have a role to play here."

"You can leave the academy's security to us, Sir Klaus. You and the knights should focus on guarding Her Majesty."

"Ha ha ha, I think we'll take you up on that offer."

I heard another report while I exchanged words with Sir Klaus: "Area A3, pattern green, type lost, one in number."

*Pattern green, type lost? Nothing's happening, but there's one suspicious person, and the security unit's lost sight of them? I don't think we asked anyone to simulate this kind of trouble...*

My puzzlement was showing on my face, but I soon assumed the commander's pose again and glanced over at Tutte. She seemed to read my intentions and shook her head.

"We never asked anyone to perform that kind of activity in that area," she whispered into my ear.

Tutte was the one who'd organized and allotted the work for our fake troublemakers. I'd had Tutte handle it because if Safina and I were to have known where every troublemaker would be at all times, it wouldn't really have been much practice for us.

Incidentally, Tutte didn't whisper in my ear for fear of the others hearing us, but simply because I'd insisted she act as such to keep up the reference of commander and vice commander.

*Hmm, this means... We can't overlook this.*

"For now, have nearby teams expand their search range and see if they can't find this suspicious figure."

"Understood."

I took a deep breath and checked the map set on the table between me and the relay members. This was a map of the entire academy that we'd created together using flight magic. Its scale was limited, but we did label the sectors we'd decided on it, allowing me to grasp where everyone and everything was.

*Area A3... That's one of the spots Her Majesty is set to visit, I realized, but then I shook my head and banished that thought from my mind. No, now's not the time to think about that. We're in the middle of an exercise. I need to focus.*

A report soon came in, updating that they didn't find any suspicious figures in the area. No other problems cropped up after that, and the training exercise ended, with Sir Klaus watching the whole time.

*All right, preparations are complete! I just hope nothing hap— Oops, I was this close to jinxing myself!*

And so, with me full of excitement and anxiety, the academy's first ever festival was about to begin.

## 14. THE ACADEMY FESTIVAL'S FIRST DAY

The Academy Festival had finally begun, but since the first day of the festival was dedicated only to the martial arts tournament's preliminaries, we had the same number of visitors as last year.

*Bleh. I guess it's no surprise, but the security team has to do their job well on the first day too.*

I slipped out of the security team's headquarters to take a leisurely walk.

*It's not like I'm skipping work. I'm just taking a break, and I had Safina take over for me. I made excuses for my behavior, although no one in particular was criticizing me.*

The interior of the academy was decorated festively, and I could hear the voices of students moving around and working on their exhibits. By and large, the festival was being prepared entirely by the students, but for the more complicated and large-scale parts of the work that required expertise and equipment, we were having merchants and adults lend us their help.

Since we had nobles studying here, we needed to avoid the kind of heavy lifting that could end up getting someone hurt. There was only so much students could do, after all. The merchants weren't hired to help, though, instead working as volunteers.

I was surprised to see merchants willing to work on something that wouldn't bring in any profit, but their participation did offer them other benefits. They were gaining reputation with the academy and forming business connections. On top of that, the prince was organizing the event, so if all went well, they could extend their connections to the royal family too, making the festival an investment opportunity.

I looked around the busy campus building. Everyone was moving here and there, making preparations and looking like they were enjoying themselves. The atmosphere matched my vision of a culture festival, which made me quite elated. A lifelong dream had just come true.

*This is the Academy Festival I dreamed about. I wish me and my friends could organize a maid cafe or a haunted house... But I don't think I could convince anyone to try that.*

I was feeling a bit disappointed as I left the campus building for the central trail, which had stalls set up around it, some still in the process of setting up, while others were already open for business. Most were open near the arena, where the preliminaries for the martial arts tournament were underway, and I could already spot some curious visitors walking around the stalls.

I caught a whiff of an appetizing smell coming from one of the stalls. *Hmm, it smells like sweets baking... Are they making cookies?*

I approached the stall, lured by the scent, where I found female students chattering happily and making sweets. Of course, there was a certified baker in the back of the stall making sure they were doing it right.

"Hello, how may we— Oh, Lady Mary!" one of the girls noticed me and exclaimed.

"Oh, it's you, Miss Finnel. I didn't know you were manning a stall here." I smiled at the

familiar girl.

I remembered her. It was the girl Magiluka had brought from the Magic Pharmaceutical Research Group to help resolve the mandrake incident.

"I am indeed! I remembered how you told me once to consider using magical herbs for drinks and confections, so I convinced my classmates to experiment," Finnel said happily as she handed me a freshly baked cookie.

*Right, I did give her that kind of reckless advice, didn't I?* I thought to myself as I cautiously examined the cookie. It gave off a faint, sweet aroma that made my stomach growl hungrily in protest.

"Are you feeling peckish, Lady Mary?" Tutte, who'd been charged with my wallet, asked perceptively.

I somehow felt like her question was implying I was being a glutton in a most unladylike manner, which made me go red in the face.

"N-Not at all," I insisted defiantly. "This isn't about me feeling hungry. I simply considered buying it because, as head of security, it falls to me to inspect and ensure the food being served in our stalls is hygienic and of sufficient quality for the festival."

"I am fairly certain that is not one of your duties." My capable maid shot down my flimsy excuse with a peevish glare.

I fell silent, positively feeling like I'd been cut down to size. I got the feeling Finnel and her friends were looking at me with warm eyes, like I was putting on some kind of amusing spectacle.

*Uuuugh, everyone's trying to peg me, Mary Regalia, as the token glutton character. But I won't let them!*

I turned my back to the others and wondered if I couldn't come up with some plan to salvage this situation. I could have just given up on shopping and walked away from the stall, but at this point, I felt determined to sample that sweetness—which, of course, meant that I was already kind of doomed.

"Well, see, as one of the people who came up with the Academy Festival, I need to inspect—"

"I have something here only the honest are allowed to eat," Tutte cut off my excuse, presenting a bag of cookies she'd apparently bought.

"I am hungry. I just wanted to eat some cookies." I instantly changed my character class to "Honest Mary."

\* \* \*

"Mmm! ♪" I gleefully stuffed my cheeks with one of the cookies Tutte'd gotten me. "It's a bit different in taste and texture from the cookies I know, but it's pretty unique. What's in this?"

"Mandrake sap," Finnel replied with a smile.

"Ngak!" I choked on my cookie.

At this point, "mandrake" was nothing short of a trigger word for me. The thought that I'd just eaten something that'd come from a mandrake made me flash back to how everyone was chasing me.

"Oh, don't worry, this isn't that kind of mandrake, so it doesn't have any charm effects. It's actually pretty healthy," Finnel said.

"It's fine, Lady Mary. Drink this." Tutte handed me a drink to wash down the piece of cookie I was gagging on.

"Th-Thanks, Tutte..." I gulped down the drink she gave me without checking what it was, only to contort my face when I felt a bitterness sting my tongue. "Eew! It's bitter!"

What I'd just tasted felt so bitter it couldn't possibly have been for human consumption. My ladylike dignity was the only reason I didn't spit it out right there and then.

"That's made from magical herbs that are said to be extremely good for your body," Finnel explained confidently. "It's my masterpiece! Well, except it tastes so bad it makes you wish you were dead. It really is healthy though! And you get used to it after a while."

I panted heavily, my shoulders rising and falling as I thrust the cup out at Tutte. "Tutte, was that some kind of bit? Was that intentional?!" I drew on her like a vengeful wraith.

"I'm not sure what you mean by 'bit,' my lady, but no, it wasn't." Tutte backed away from me with a crooked smile. "It was a coincidence, really. So please, Lady Mary, stop shambling toward me with that cup in hand."

"Tutte, we're a noble lady and her maid, partners who share a common fate. Come share this common fate with me... ♪" I approached her with the cup full of the nasty-colored liquid in hand.

"Lady Mary, forgive meehee!" Tutte bolted away.

"Ah, wait, Tutteeee! Don't worry, you won't die! The nasty taste will just cling to your insides the whole way down to your stomach!" I chased Tutte around with a very vicious expression.

A few minutes later, I returned to my jolly tour of the stalls, with one very pale and somewhat nauseous Tutte in tow.

"Oh, I just love visiting stalls. It'd be perfect if we had yakisoba and takoyaki and okonomiyaki and shaved ice and candied apples and chocolate bananas and cotton candy—" I rambled on and on.

"Nng..." Tutte held a hand against her mouth, still nauseous. "I have no idea what any of those are, Lady Mary... Are all of those foods?"

At this point, I didn't care and went full glutton mode.

"Yes, they're all foods I remember from my past life. You'd eat them at festivals, but I never got to taste them..."

"I see. I could try to look for something similar, so if you would be so kind so as to describe them in more detail—"

But just as Tutte was asking me to expand on what I meant, the venue around us stirred in commotion, drowning out her voice. I looked away from Tutte, examining the source of the noise.

It was a stall, in front of which was a student covered in a large robe with a hood hanging over their eyes. They looked extremely suspicious. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but they had the voice of a young woman. I was technically on break from my security duties, but I couldn't exactly overlook this.

I hardened my resolve and walked into the commotion.

"What's going on here? It's awfully loud." I walked in to handle the situation, presenting myself as cool and collected.

Silence hung over the place for a moment. Everyone looked at me in surprise.

"I'm from Judgmen—I mean, I'm from the security team." I showed the other ladies my security armband, not before nearly blurting out something that didn't belong in this conversation. "Making too much noise is in violation of the festival's rules."

*Heh heh! Nailed it! That was a perfect cool entrance, and I showed my armband!*

"Lady Mary, it would be wise to give me all the food and sweets you're holding," Tutte whispered into my ear. "Everyone is quite appalled."

I'd been gleefully holding a box of assorted foods the whole time. Realizing this, I let out a silent but somehow high-pitched screech as I went red up to my ears. I entrusted my haul with Tutte.

"Ahem!" I cleared my throat loudly. "Yes, I'm from the security team. Making too much noise is in violation of the festival's rules."

"She just started over like it didn't happen!" the noble ladies all exclaimed.

I broke into a cold sweat, but resolved to double down. "What's the source of the commotion?"

"Ah, um, well, this customer is... Huh?"

The student running the stall made to look at someone, only to realize no one was there.

The highly suspicious robed woman (or so they seemed?) from earlier had vanished without a trace.

*Wait, I heard the suspicious figure we lost sight of during the exercise the other day was wearing a robe and hood too. Who's this person, and why are they skulking around here?*

I got a bad feeling, like I'd just discovered some kind of evil group in a story that was

plotting behind the scenes.

"So, what did they want?"

"Well... They ordered a skewer, and I cooked it for them, but they wouldn't wait until I was done. They tried to throw a fire spell at the food, so I tried to stop them..."

That story made any image of an evil group plotting no good fall apart—if there was any group involved here, it was probably run by kindergarteners. I felt a headache settle in—how had I walked into such a silly incident?

*Was this person trying to burn their own food to ashes? Who'd be this childish? Based on her height, she seemed to be about my age, but... If they're hiding their identity, that means they're probably not a student here. But the academy is open to all right now. What kind of person would want to hide their identity at a time like this?*

At that moment, I came to a conclusion that I really hoped was wrong.

*Oh... Yeah, there's someone who'd do that. Someone I ran into recently who's about my age, who expressed interest in the festival, and who would need to hide her identity.*

I recalled that excitable princess I'd run into in the palace, but then shook my head and banished the thought from my mind.

*No, no, that can't be it. Say what you like, but that's not it. Okay, executive decision: I'll pretend I didn't see anything. Let sleeping dogs lie.*

Concluding that the wisest course of action would be to stay out of this, I decided to hush up this case and not report it to HQ.

*Aaah, I feel like I'm starting to understand why people in power cover up trouble now.*

And so, my Academy Festival began, with a hint of anxiety and the possibility of trouble rearing its horned head.

## 15. THE ACADEMY FESTIVAL'S SECOND DAY

On the second day of the Academy Festival, there were more visitors compared to the day prior and many more students actively running activities. I could hear cheering from every corner of the academy.

"There sure are a lot more people today," I said.

"There sure are."

I was on standby enjoying a cup of tea in the security headquarters, and Safina was at the opposite side of the table. Nothing of note had happened so far, allowing us to sit back and relax.

"Safina, I'll be busy tomorrow, what with me being the queen's escort, so how about we go around the festival with everyone else today?" I asked. One of my lifelong dreams was to go around a school festival with my friends.

"That sounds nice... Ah, but would the security team be all right with the two of us away?"

"It'll be fine," I said dismissively. "We arranged for a deputy security officer in case we're not available for whatever reason. Besides, things are going surprisingly smoothly."

I glanced at the relay personnel, who were continuing to receive their scheduled reports. Everyone seemed to be doing their jobs, and there were no signs of stress.

*Everything going well is so nice. I just hope nothing— Whoa, Mary, stop, don't say it!* I momentarily writhed at my own thoughts.

"L-Lady Mary? What's wrong?" Safina asked me, surprised.

"N-Nothing!" I instantly fixed my posture and looked at Safina with a gentle smile. "It's time for our break."

I then got up and turned to the relay personnel.

"Everyone, we're going out on a break, so we're counting on you to handle things while

we're gone."

"Yes, ma'am!" the relay personnel said as one.

"H-Have fun!" one nervous Solos student said with a stiff bow. I walked past him and placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Relax," I said with a smile. "Just follow your training, and you'll be fine. I leave this place in your capable hands."

"Y-Yes, White Princess!" He suddenly knelt before me.

"S-Stop that, no need to be so modest. I'm not a princess."

The Solos student got to his feet and enthusiastically got to work.

*U-Ugh, this is tiring. The Solos students all treat me like some kind of drill sergeant and keep complimenting me. Now they're treating me like a princess? Well, I guess knights-in-training like them would have romantic ideas about serving princesses, but I think most real-life princesses are nothing like what boys think...*

I returned to Safina's side and left, cracking a dry smile as I recalled a certain unruly princess I'd just met recently.

\* \* \*

I made my way to the festival's executive committee headquarters in the old campus building with Tutte and Safina. The maid waiting in the headquarters opened the doors for us, and I called out brightly into the room.

"Magilukaaaa, deaaaar, are you freeee?"

"Could you stop talking like that? It makes you sound like an imbecile," Magiluka replied tiredly, pressing a hand against her forehead in an exhausted manner.

"Oh, come on, Magiluka, don't be all bookish like that. It's you and me. Are you free right now?"

"You know I couldn't possibly be free right now, but I *have* been thinking it would be a nice chance to take a tour around the Academy right now."

"Good timing, then! Let's go together!" I brought my hands together excitedly.

Magiluka rose from her seat and looked at me peevishly. "Just so you know, I am not going out to have fun. As class master, I have a duty to tour the academy and ensure everything is going well."

"Yes, yes, I know. Come on, let's go!" I tugged Magiluka by the arm, disregarding her attempts to put on airs.

"Ah, wait! Are you sure you understand—" she protested as I pulled her away.

*You need some time off too, Magiluka. You deserve to have fun in the Academy Festival too!*

"So, where will we be going?" I asked as Magiluka freed herself from my grip and straightened out her back.

"...For now, let's check all the Aleyios exhibits," she said.

"Good idea. I wonder how they're doing. Oh, by the way, have you been to Finnel's place?"

"No, I haven't," Magiluka replied. "I believe she said something about setting up a stall with some research group?"

"I haven't gone there either," Safina said.

"Well, her stall has this special juice that I highly recommend," I said devilishly.

"Ooh," the two of them said, impressed.

"L-Lady Mary..." Tutte retreated half a step back as I moved my eyes from them to her. I probably had a really evil grin on.

"Huh? What was that?" Magiluka suddenly said.

"Ah, I'm sorry, it was just a little prank. I didn't mean anything by—" I apologized at once, reflexively thinking she had caught onto my prank.

However, Magiluka wasn't looking at me, but up at the sky. She stiffened in place.

"H-Huh? Um, hello? Magiluka?" I approached her timidly.

"My apologies," she said, turning to look at me. "Sacher sent me a message via communication magic... Lady Mary, could you lend me your aid for a moment?"

"Huh? Me?" I pointed at myself quizzically.

\* \* \*

Magiluka took me along to the woods near the academy, where several dozen students and visitors were lined up. When I saw the familiar figure they were looking at, I instantly realized what happened.

Standing there was one very proud-looking griffin.

*Come to think of it, Sacher did suggest the Solos class hold a griffin riding exhibit.*

This griffin was used for the Solos class's riding training, so it was used to letting people ride on its back. Sacher suggested having other students and visitors to the festival experience riding, which, given his usually lacking intellect, was a good idea from him. The only issue was that this griffin was a highly moody creature, and it seemed to be quite opposed to letting so many amateurs ride it.

*I imagine being set up as a festival attraction can be pretty humiliating.*

With the griffin being uncooperative, Sacher turned to me of all people for help. The last time this had happened, I'd scoffed at the idea, telling him (and I quote), "Are you stupid? What good would me being there do? It's not like it's going to tell me what's wrong." But then, when I'd actually come there and said (and I quote), "Please let them ride you?" the griffin obediently knelt on the ground.

As a young lady, this was something of a bitter memory for me. As I reflected on that unpleasant episode of my past, Sacher noticed our approach and called us over.

"It's a good thing you're here, Lady Mary. There's so many guests that the griffin's gone all lethargic, and now it won't move. Could you talk to it?"

"What do you mean, 'talk to it'? I'm not a monster tamer. Besides, griffins don't understand human speech."

Sacher led us toward the griffin. Noticing us, the seated griffin stood up. It kind of looked like an employee caught slacking off, and the fidgety way it acted like its boss was creeping up on it was honestly kind of adorable.

“Come on, Lady Mary, if you would?” Sacher said, pushing me by the back toward the creature.

“S-Sir Sacher, hold on. Don’t push me!”

I recalled how the griffin had fled from me in terror once, which made me terribly anxious. But apparently, this time the griffin was familiar with me. It wasn’t running away, instead trembling fearfully as my eyes met its own. It was such an adorable and amusing sight I couldn’t help but smile.

“What’s wrong, good griffin? The festival’s just started,” I said, patting its beak in a friendly fashion without even realizing it. “As part of the Academy, we need your help to liven up the festival. Show me how you fly elegantly through the sky with people on your back.”

It seemed that the habit I’d built up of praising the security staff had slipped out. Hearing my gentle words, the griffin lowered its neck and knelt, despite still being visibly scared. It assumed a position that made it easier for me to pat it and closed its eyes.

“Oooooh!” everyone exclaimed, impressed.

Hearing them, I came to and turned around. The guests and students all looked at me with sparkling eyes.

“That was beautiful. The way she was able to speak to the griffin’s heart... She really is the White Princess!”

“So that’s the White Princess, eh... I can see why people call her that.”

“Lady Mary’s so lovely!”

They all started praising me.

*H-Huh? Is everyone making another strange misunderstanding here? It wasn’t as lovely as they were making it out to be. It’s scared out of its mind and its knees are shaking.*

*And it's not kneeling because I spoke to its heart, it's just afraid of me. It's hanging its head out of resignation! Put yourself in my shoes—I'm a girl, and this is pretty humiliating!*

I retracted my hand from the griffin with a stiff smile on my lips and told Sacher to take care of the rest. I then walked away with speedy steps and returned to Magiluka's side. The griffin, who became enthusiastic out of sheer desperation, let Solos students and the guests ride on its back and soared elegantly into the sky. It returned to where we were after flying a lap around the academy.

"You sure helped me! I knew I could count on you, Lady Mary!" Sacher hurried over to me, looking relieved. "Right, how about you two trying riding it too? It's pretty fun."

"Oh, you don't mind? I've never ridden a griffin before, so that's exciting. Hey, let's ride it tog... ether?"

Since I'd only been in the Solos class for my first year, I never took the riding training that'd started during the second year. The idea of riding atop a flying magical creature struck me as a different sort of excitement compared to flying using magic. But as I turned to look at the others excitedly, Magiluka and Safina both shook their heads with pale expressions.

*Oh, right. Magiluka's afraid of heights, and Safina's just straight up scared of griffins...*

"Are you still bad with griffins, Safina?" I asked.

"N-No, I've taken riding training already, so I'm used to it. It's just, erm, uh, well..." she said, seeming awfully flustered for having gotten used to it.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Well, um... I'm a bit ashamed to admit it, but... I just... Um, I'm not good with heights..." she said meekly.

I sighed, having discovered yet another acrophobic friend. Hearing this, Magiluka took Safina's hands, her eyes glittering.



"There is nothing to be ashamed of, Miss Safina. We all have our weak points. I very much relate!" Magiluka said, excited to have found a kindred spirit.

"Lady Magiluka!" Safina's eyes filled up with tears at this show of sympathy, and she clenched Magiluka's hands back.

I could almost see the sparkles and bubbles floating around them, and I could only look on with a forced smile.

"Well, Lady Mary? What are you going to do?" Sacher asked.

"Well, I guess I'll ride it alone, if that's acceptable?"

With those two in their own little world, I left them to Tutte and walked over to try riding the griffin myself.

\* \* \*

I went to stand at the end of the line, but for some reason, everyone moved away to let me go first. I stubbornly refused.

*I might be a duke's daughter, but I don't need any special treatment!*

But despite my protests...

"I want to see you ride a griffin!"

"The White Princess, cantering about the skies! It must be a beautiful sight! Please, I want to see it!"

Their demands weren't quite what I'd expected. They all urged me to go ahead, much to my surprise, and I ended up cutting in line.

"Huh?" Sacher said upon seeing me step up to the griffin. "It's your turn already? Don't tell me you got everyone to let you cut in line."

"Th-That's rude! I didn't have them do it! They just did it on their own!" I protested, going red.

Sacher accepted my explanation without much complaint and escorted me to the

griffin. The griffin, which had a saddle of sorts on it, looked at my approach and shivered. I laughed dryly as Sacher straddled the saddle and reached a hand out to me.

“Do you want to ride in the front or back?” he asked.

I stared at his hand blankly, not quite understanding what the question meant.

*Come to think of it, I was so occupied with arguing with the other people in line that I didn't look at how they were riding the griffin...*

I tried thinking of what it's like to ride a horse. *If I sit in front, Sacher's going to sit behind me and grip the reins, meaning I'll effectively be in his arms...*

I imagined that happening and felt my face steam up. *Nope, nope! That's a big nope! That's too embarrassing! I'll sit in the back, so I'll just have to hold onto his back. Yeah, I think it'll work!*

I took Sacher's hand and sat behind him.

*It's kind of like riding a bike together. It's kind of exciting... I mean, it's not a vehicle, but I never thought I'd be riding with a boy like this. It's like a sappy scene...*

I hung my head, embarrassed, and diffidently grabbed onto Sacher's shirt.

“Let's go, then!” Sacher said and spurred the griffin on, and we took off into the air.

The intensity of soaring through the sky blew all my shame away, and I exclaimed loudly as I looked around. This was different from flying with magic; the griffin's vigorous motions jostled me, making me joyfully realize I was indeed flying.

But that joy was only momentary.

“Huh? Hey, what's wrong?!” Sacher asked the griffin with a suspicious expression.

Having risen to a certain altitude, the griffin flew very cautiously, like it was handling something fragile. Because of that, it wasn't flying as rapidly as before, and its body wasn't shaking as intensely.

In other words, it was going slowly. Very slowly. It wasn't so much flying as it was just hovering. I stopped leaning forward, straightened out my back and let out a sigh. I

knew this was because of me. The griffin was being cautious so as to not make a blunder while I was on its back.

*Even magical creatures are fussing about me now...*

"This is weird... You were flying fast just a minute ago, like you wanted to get this over with. What's wrong? You can go faster... Oh, I get it." Sacher turned his head to me like he'd realized something. "It's acting this way because of you, Lady Mary."

"Yes, that's what it looks like," I replied thoughtlessly in my disappointment.

"So I *was* right. You're heavier than you look!" Sacher said with a grin, coming to the single most wrong thing he could tell a girl.

The air froze around us.

"Huh? What did you just say?" I glared at Sacher, and the griffin's body trembled under us in fear.

Any sappy illusions of me and him riding atop a griffin shattered as the air became thick with murderous tension.

"Would you care to repeat that, Sir Sacher? I'm what?"

Feeling my stabbing gaze on the back of his neck made even Sacher realize he'd done something wrong, and he broke into a sweat. He leaned forward and gripped the reins.

"I, uhm, I-I don't remember! Come on, griffin, let's fly!"

And so, my romantic flight through the sky ground to a pitiful crawl, as both the driver and the mount itself trembled and flew at the lowest speed possible.

## 16. ENCOUNTERING HER!

The time had come to pass judgment, and the accused this time was Sacher.

"Sacher, son of Count Elexiel." I stood in front of Sacher and announced grandly. "You

are hereby accused of deeply insulting Lady Mary of House Regalia's maidenly heart with your careless words. That is a crime punishable by death. As such, you are sentenced to drinking an extra-concentrated cup of this juice! In one swig!"

Incidentally, we were at Finnel's stall.

"Oh, come on, I just said you were heavy," Sacher said with a disgusted expression as I forced the cup into his hands.

"That's terrible," Magiluka spat icily, glaring at him like filth.

"That's horrible," Safina said coldly, regarding him like scum.

Even Sacher, as oblivious and stupid as he was, couldn't help but wince under this pressure.

"Sacher, it's in your favor to just admit your fault and quietly accept your punishment." The prince, who had come here halfway through the trial and had heard what had happened, said this in a tired manner.

"Awww, fine! All right! I just need to drink this thing, right?!"

"In one swig. One. Swig. ♪" I stressed.

In desperation, Sacher gulped down the eerie fluid. But then his face went from pale to blue to purple. He clasped a hand over his mouth and bolted for the bushes.

"Well, that settles that!" I said, satisfied he'd served his sentence as I watched him leave.

But then, I spotted a flash of a cloaked figure past the bushes Sacher had disappeared into.

"Hmm?" I blinked and looked again, but there was no one there. I concluded I must have imagined it and returned my eyes to the others.

"Well, that's a relief," I said, my spirits high. "So, where do we go next?"

But then, my words were cut off by a large thud and a tremor.

"Wh-What?!" I turned to the direction of the sound. I could see something rise up from a nearby spot.

"Lady Mary!" Safina looked at me, noticing the disturbance.

"Safina, go back to headquarters and take command of the situation," I instructed her. "I'll take over from the scene. Sacher, Magiluka, come help me—"

But I trailed off, realizing one of the people I'd called out to wasn't there.

"I believe Sacher isn't available to help right now." Reifus shrugged. "You two go on. I'll look after him."

I had to wonder, with some trepidation, how much of a punch that drink had to have to have knocked out Sacher, of all people, for so long. Still, I was the one who'd made him drink it, so I was in no position to complain about this outcome. I left the prince to look after Sacher and hurried over to the scene of the disturbance.

"Magiluka, what do you think happened?" I asked as we ran, my eyes fixed on the large object ahead.

"Well, it certainly isn't one of the exhibits. As far as I can see, that seems like a golem, but none of our students should be able to make one that large."

"Let's go check it out!" I said and ran ahead.

\* \* \*

The scene of the commotion was in a total uproar. We weaved past a few people running away from the disturbance, and along the way, a group of students wearing security unit armbands met up with us.

"Lady Mary!" the group's leader called out in greeting.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"We aren't sure. The only thing we know is that thing appeared in the middle of the golem exhibit."

Like Magiluka had expected, this giant mass was a golem.

“What’s going on here? Was it not the students running the exhibit who created this golem?”

“N-No!” one of the students said in denial. “Even we couldn’t make such a big golem. The most we can manage are small, palm-sized ones!”

I looked at him suspiciously, wondering why he got so defensive.

“Oh, um, I’m actually in charge of the exhibition...” the student explained.

“Then what is this thing?”

“Well... While we were showing everyone how we used magic circles to create golems, a hooded visitor said that toylike golems like ours are no fun and that they ought to be *this* big. Then they chanted a spell, and our magic circle reacted to it...”

“...And then that huge golem came out of it?” I asked in sympathy as the student’s words trailed off apologetically.

“Yes...” The student hung his head.

*Oh, a hooded figure again, huh? I was going to overlook her coming here, but now that’s not an option. We’ll have to catch her and give her a spanking.*

I clenched my fist, fixing my eyes on my target. “Please help evacuate the students and guests in the area. Don’t let anyone near here. Magiluka and I will handle this. Refer to Safina in headquarters for further instructions.”

“Affirmative. Be careful!” The security group’s leader saluted me and mobilized his group to help evacuate the guests.

I saw them off and fixed my eyes on the golem, heading toward an area I could see it in full. But as I moved in...

“Oh? Why, if it isn’t the silver one.”

I heard a voice speak to me from overhead and looked up to the sky. The gigantic humanoid golem stood against the sun, and someone was standing on its shoulder.

“Who’s there?!“ I called out this clichéd line despite myself.

"Keh keh keh! We are hiding our identity on purpose!" the cloaked figure said arrogantly. "We would never admit that we are in fact Emilia, you imbecile!"

*You're the imbecile here, you nincompoop!* I jabbed at her internally. Interacting with her made me terribly tired. I felt bad for feeling tense about this entire situation just seconds ago.

"What should I call you, then, princess?" I asked sarcastically.

"Hmm, well. You may call us the Witch Princess, then!"

*I just called you princess and you still didn't get it. And isn't "Witch Princess" just one of Princess Emilia's epithets? Are you really trying to hide your identity? You're doing this on purpose, aren't you? Tell me you're doing this on purpose!*

I dropped my shoulders, exasperated.

"L-Lady Mary..." Magiluka looked at me in confusion, half-exasperated at Emilia's inability to hide her identity.

"It's fine. Don't say anything. Let her do as she pleases," I said with a sigh.

"Very well. Witch Princess, for what purpose did you cause this pointless commotion?"

"Keh keh keh! Is it not obvious?! Seeing those tiny excuses for golems held on display was painfully dull. We thought we would show everyone what golems truly are! You two, behold the majesty of our golem!"

Conveniently, it was at that opportune moment that the clouds covered the sun, revealing the full image of the golem. And honestly, the moment I did, I had to uncomfortably look away.

"What say you?! Behold this structural beauty! This work of art!" the Witch Princess—Emilia—laughed haughtily.

I was only half listening to her, my attention tugged by aversion and discomfort. The golem stood five meters tall, its head egg-shaped and its eyes little slits. Its mouth was constantly half-open. It was honestly a nonsensical design.

Golems' sizes were based on the amount of mana their creator used, and their

appearances were determined by the image the creator had in their mind. Having a weak mental image would result in a botched summoning, and maintaining a detailed, 360-degree image in one's head was quite difficult.

As such, most golems had very simple shapes. But in this case, its face was extremely simple, which made it difficult to look at it directly.

The problem, however, wasn't the face, but, well... further south. In my past life, I'd seen the image of a muscular, nude man called the *Statue of David* in an art history book. A muscular, *nude* man.

"This is le..." I sputtered out, my face going red.

"Le?" Emilia echoed me.

"This is leeeewd!" I blustered at her.

"What?! 'Lewd'?! How uncouth! Call it art! It's art! Can you not see the meticulous manner with which I recreated its muscular beauty?!"

The golem moved, striking some kind of pose, but I refused to look at it. I was adamantly looking down.

"I won't look at such an indecent... thing! How dare you show something like this to girls our age?!" I called out casually, forgetting in my anger that I was speaking to a princess.

"Rest assured! We kept that in mind and did not base the golem's lower half on anyone in particular!"

"That doesn't make it any better! I mean, if you can keep that in mind, don't fashion that part at all!" I shouted.

"Our word, how naive. This is just the image of masculine musculature! Why, when we were still a child, father would often show off his muscles and ask us, 'What say you? How are our muscles? Beautiful, aren't they?'"

*I have to question your father's sanity, then. Well, I guess if you're the princess, your father is the Dark Lord. And he's showing off his muscles to his daughter every day...? What's going on in the demon kingdom...*

I'd never been there, but hearing how the king she was so proud of acts so goofily made me worry whether the demon kingdom had adequate leadership.

"Very well, we understand. We'll have you two bask in the glory of these muscles with a passionate embrace!" Emilia said proudly, simply not getting the hint.

"Do you want to traumatize us?!" I bellowed at her as the golem reached out for us.

"Earth Wall!" Magiluka shouted, forming a wall of soil and rock that rose up between us and the golem.

The golem's fist punched into the wall, both its arm and the wall crumbling in the process. Mud gushed out of the hand like blood, making for a fairly grotesque sight.

"Cheeky, futile resistance! We'll start by giving you our first warm embrace!" Emilia smirked evilly under her hood and sicced the golem on Magiluka.

"I won't let yoooou!" I shouted, thrusting my hand at the golem. "Nova Flare!"

"Lady Mary, don't!" Magiluka exclaimed, trying to stop me, but I'd already chanted the words of power.

My explosive spell ruptured loudly, blasting the golem's top half off and sending it flying into the sky. The moment I realized the princess was sitting on its shoulder, all the color drained from my face.

"Oh god, Magiluka! The princess...!" I said.

"Forget that! Get away from here!" Magiluka said, primed to bolt away.

I didn't understand what Magiluka meant when something started to spill down on me from above. Needless to say, it was the golem's remains. Apparently, the golem had been made out of mud, and with its upper half blown off, its entire body dissolved back into its original state of matter, which surged toward us in a torrent...

...and washed over us heavily.

Once I realized what'd happened, I stared at Magiluka, who'd frozen up in place. We were both completely caked in mud. It was wet, sticky, and altogether felt quite gross.

“Bu ha ha ha! Would you look at yourselves? ♪” We heard laughing from above us.

Looking up, I spotted Emilia, laughing at us in midair with her wings flapping.



*I feel stupid for worrying about you!*

Clenching my fists angrily, I trembled in humiliation, seriously considering socking this flying prankster in the face.

“Ooh, that was fun! Absolutely amusing!” She reached inside her hood, perhaps wiping off tears of laughter. “Mmhmm, yes, we think we’ve had our fair share of fun. We’ll head back for the day! See you another time!”

With that said, Emilia flew off, satisfied.

“Grrr! Just you waiiiit!” I shouted after her. “Next time you show your face around here, you’re in for a spanking, you brat! Do you hear meeeee?!”

But the echoes of my frustrated bellowing were only swallowed up by the sky...

## 17. THE ACADEMY FESTIVAL’S FINAL DAY

It was the third day of the Academy Festival, and the climax of the event was approaching. The number of visitors was at a record high, so it was safe to say the festival was a smashing success. I feared the sheer number of people would make it difficult for the security unit to handle the event, but Sir Klaus and his royal knights, as well as Instructor Karis and the other alumni, all pitched in to help and secure the festival.

After all, with Her Majesty coming to visit that day, we couldn’t afford any incidents. Apparently, royalty visiting the academy was very rare. There were cases where they visited for political reasons, but this was the first time ever that a member of the royal family came as a parent to watch their child’s achievements.

And, of course, the queen of the kingdom visiting the academy when it was packed with people and everyone was allowed to enter was a very dangerous matter.

*In both that world and this one, so long as countries exist, there’s always the potential for conflict. Maybe we wouldn’t have to worry if the Aldian Kingdom were an island nation like Japan...*

*In any case, there's someone who's giving me an even bigger headache than Her Majesty right now...*

Needless to say, the source of said headache was Emilia. *If that naughty little tomboy of a princess causes trouble while Her Majesty is visiting, it could cause huge problems.*

*Tch. If only I had caught her yesterday... I groaned as I sank into the commander's seat in the security headquarters.*

For the time being, I ordered the security unit to question anyone who crosses the gate with their faces covered. There hadn't been any hits so far, though, which meant that if she was going to sneak in, she'd probably fly in.

I instructed everyone to keep watch on the skies too, but I realized I was asking them for too much. *It's not like Emilia's stupid. There's no way she'd just fly in nonchalantly.*

The time of the queen's visit was fast approaching, so if possible, I wanted to get any problems out of the way. If nothing else, I was hoping Emilia wouldn't mess things up—

"Witch Princess spotted in Area C2," one of the relay personnel reported. "She flew in from the sky and landed in front of us nonchalantly!"

*Oh, give me a break!* I raised my hung head in annoyance.

"Tell the security personnel on patrol not to interact with her and to keep watch over her actions. I'll handle her before the queen arrives!" I rose from my seat, ready to execute upon the course of action I'd chosen.

"Yes, ma'am," the relay operative affirmed, then they instructed the security personnel on the scene.

I turned on my heels and looked at Tutte. "Let's head out, Tutte. Prepare for combat."

"Understood."

Tutte bowed and hurried over to one of the rooms in the old campus building, leaving me behind. I followed her, but walked with elegant steps. If I was up against Princess Emilia, there was no room for mercy. I would pin her down and spank her for her misbehavior before the queen arrived.

After all, when all was said and done, she was still a demon. She was more proficient in magic than us humans, so on the off chance she resisted and did something excessive, I needed my full-body armor to maintain the usual pretense.

I stopped in front of the suit of silver armor that stood proudly in the corner of the room. Since I'd been putting on this armor more often recently, I'd applied all sorts of improvements to it. One such modification enabled it to stand imposingly like this even without anyone wearing it.

I didn't know how Deodora had done it, since there was a lot of blacksmith lingo I didn't understand involved, but simply put, she'd applied a spell to it that used the mana built up in the ivory ore to suspend it in formation. Nifty as it was, any strong impact would make the armor fall apart, so it was mostly a useful feature for when it was placed in storage.

The new feature made me come up with a brilliant way of equipping the armor. The fact all the parts were attached together meant I could put it on without requiring anyone's help. I just fit right in.

*This method's real convenient for me. Heh heh heh...*

"The target is in transit in Area E4," Safina reported using communication magic just as I put on the armor.

"Understood." I sent her my reply and walked outside, my armor noisily cluttering with every step.

I looked up to the sky. Flying over would be faster than running there.

*Everyone's so caught up with the festival. No one's going to notice me flying, right?*

"Good luck, Lady Mary." Tutte saw me off.

"Here I go, Tutte." After signing off, I changed my bearing toward the area Safina specified. "Noble Suit Mary, heading out!"

There was no catapult to launch me, so I made do by jumping into the air with a one, two, three. I soared gracefully through the air just as I'd anticipated.

*It's a good thing I'm wearing the armor!* I'd ended up flying higher than expected, and

if people had seen me doing it without the armor, I wasn't sure how I'd explain it away.

"Levitation!" I chanted, my body suspending in midair, and looked around.

As one might expect, there wasn't anyone flying beside me. I set my sights on my destination and confirmed a hooded figure pushing their way through the crowd with a skip to their step. Her carefree gait reminded me of the humiliation she'd put me through the day prior, and my blood began to boil.

"I found yoooooou! You naughty princess!" I roared and began nose diving at my target. I crossed my arms over my chest and dived in with my legs straight like I was trying to land a dropkick on her.

"Hm? What's this? Ah, it's coming from above!" The caped figure stopped in her tracks and looked up, reacting to the word "princess."

Thanks to her looking up, I could see her face and recognized that it was, indeed, Emilia.

"I-Impossible!" she called out in surprise.

From her perspective, she was seeing a figure in full armor dropping down on her with their arms crossed grandly. As I closed in, she could see the soles of my boots—she even got an extreme close-up, in fact, shortly before they sank into her face.

"Mmmf!"

She let out a cute squeal as I landed in something much softer than the ground. While I stood there arrogantly, I broke into a nervous sweat under my armor.

*O-Oh, oh no! I thought she'd dodge me! Why did she freeze up?!*

Since I'd figured she'd avoid me crashing into her, I recast the flight spell right before I landed, so I was now hovering over the caped princess's face. I didn't have much weight to me now, but I felt certain I'd made a pretty solid impact when I'd landed on her.

Incidentally, floating above someone's face with your arms crossed made for a pretty shocking image. Everyone was staring at us with their mouths agape.

*Uh, did I like, make a really huge mistake here? I guess I got carried away when I remembered how she humiliated me yesterday, but I, uh... I pretty much drop-kicked another country's princess in the face. I-I mean, this was an accident! I was trying to land and bumped into the princess! Tee hee, sowwy! ♪ Yeah, let's go with that!*

I used my newly recast levitating spell to rotate my body perpendicular to the ground and touch down. As I did, Emilia stood back up vigorously, which made the hood covering her head flap back and reveal her features—hair with an orange-to-pink gradient, two horns, crimson eyes, fangs that peeked out from behind her lips. The tip of her nose was reddish, and it was bleeding a little too.

*You might want to wipe that off, princess.*

*Ah, if people see her horns, they'll figure out she's a demon. That'd be bad. I should hide her face.*

Contrary to my concerns, however, all the visitors reacted positively and came up with their own explanation.

“Oh, this is some kind of performance!”

“A play about a knight fighting a demon?”

Their reasoning wasn't entirely nonsensical. Students in the festival were using all sorts of attractions to draw in customers, after all, so they assumed we were just another one of those. I was relieved to have been given such an easy solution to this problem and turned to look at Emilia, who was still frozen in shock. For whatever reason, she'd gone very pale.

“Ah...” Emilia finally moved, raising a shaking finger to point at me.

“Ah?” I repeated, pointing at myself.

“A-Aldia's White Deviiiiil!” she screamed.

“H-Hmm...” I stuttered, taking a step to approach her.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah! Don't eat uuuuuuuus!” Emilia screeched in a decidedly un-princess-like fashion and bolted away from me.

"Ah! Wait, you!" I called as I went after her.

I came here to catch her, and I wasn't going to go back empty-handed. Thankfully, she didn't even mention the fact I'd ended up kicking her, and I decided to leave the matter unsaid.

*She did call the Argent Knight the White Devil before, didn't she? But what does she mean, "don't eat us"?* I thought to myself as I went after Emilia's fleeing figure.

"They were right when they said the White Devil comes out to eat bad girls! Noooooo! We say nooooooooo!" Emilia bawled as she ran away from me.

*Aha ha ha... I guess the demon kingdom uses the Argent Knight as a boogeyman to keep bad children in their place...*

I followed Emilia, a mirthless smile on my lips. She would look back every so often, her eyes filling up with tears each time she saw me, her domineering attitude completely gone. That filled me with a streak of mischievousness. I sped up effortlessly, closing the distance with her before whispering into her ear with a husky growl. "ME. EAT. YOU."

"Gaaaaaaah! Accel Boost!" Emilia hysterically chanted an acceleration spell to get away from me. "G-Get away from us! Flame Rain!"

Invoking a second spell, Emilia conjured small fireballs that began to rain down on me. I thought to dodge the spell, but then realized something with a start.

*If I dodge the spell, it'll hit everyone around me, and the stalls will catch fire. I have to take all these fireballs. Okay, ivory ore power, full deploy!*

I filled my armor with mana, and in response, the suit gave off a white glow. Instead of dodging, I bolted into the fireballs, which disappeared as soon as they hit me thanks to the armor's defense and my damage nullification skill.

"Wa ha ha ha! Useless, useless, useless, useless!" I charged through her spells, laughing loudly.

"Ugyaaaaah!" Emilia ran away screaming, all her princess-like dignity forgotten.

*Is she that scared of this White Devil?*

Emilia hopped and ran and flung spells around to throw me off as she raced through the academy, but I kept chasing her, unperturbed by her resistance.

*Oh yeah, she's that scared. But I'm running out of time here...*

I couldn't waste my time playing tag with Emilia when Her Majesty was about to arrive. I needed to be there to greet her, after all.

"H-H-H-H-How about this?!" Emilia finally spread her wings and soared up to the sky.  
"W-We'll just reduce this place to ashes!"

She glared down at me in a half-crazed manner, and then raised her hands up.

"Fifth-order spell!" A large magical circle appeared above her hands.

I jumped up and used levitation magic to reach the same altitude as her.

*Huh? What order of spell was that? I didn't hear her...*

"Burn everything away! Vermilion Novaaaaaaa!" Emilia swung down her hands, unleashing a gigantic red glowing fireball.

Unaware of how much power was behind Emilia's spell, I got carried away and fought back.

"Divine Breakeeeeeer!" I thoughtlessly swung my fist into Emilia's fireball. And, despite my right hand not having any such power residing within it, the fireball still dispersed harmlessly, thanks to my damage nullification skill...

"Why?!" Emilia screamed out in protest at this unreasonable outcome.

"Heh heh heh... The Divine Breaker is a godly power capable of crushing anything."

*I basically came up with that name on the spot, but it sounds cool, so let's stick with that.*

There was no skill or spell by that name in this world, but I basically made it up like a kid playing pretend. I assumed there was no way she'd actually take me seriously...

"Divine Breaker... What a terrible technique..."

*Oh, darn, she actually bought into it.*

“But this time, we will reduce you to ash!” Emilia said, preparing to do something, when...

“What’s this about reducing people to ash?” a voice spoke up from behind her.

Emilia turned around to face the voice when the person grabbed her by the face.

“Wha— Nghaaa!” she squealed strangely.

“I swear, this girl always takes her pranks too far.” The person grabbing Emilia’s face with the strength of an iron claw was Ilysha, the queen of this kingdom.

“Y-Your Majesty!” I knelt in midair.

“Magiluka explained everything. Good work, Mary.”

“N-No, pardon me for not being there to greet you! I, um, my train got delayed—”

I panicked so much at the queen’s sudden appearance I brought up an excuse that I’d never actually experienced.

“Heh heh. We shouldn’t be chatting here, should we? Let’s land,” Her Majesty said with a sweet smile.

“L-Let go of us, Ilysha! O-Our head, our head hurts—” Emilia thrashed, trying to free herself from the queen’s iron grip.

“Settle down.” Her Majesty smiled and applied more force to her grasp.

“Ughaaa! Our brain, you’re crushing our head!”

The queen landed, and I followed her. We touched down, Emilia floating limply in midair as the queen continued to clutch her head.

“Get this girl a hat and put her in maid uniform,” the queen told one of her maids. “We’ll say she joined me here as one of my maids.”

“Understood.” The maid nodded.

The queen deposited Emilia with the maid like she was some kind of large stuffed doll.

*Whoa... You really can't argue with this lady, can you?* I thought to myself, suddenly sympathizing with Emilia.

As I watched the maid leave with Emilia, Magiluka showed up at my side.

"Your Majesty, welcome to the Altolia Academy Festival," she said, making a perfect curtsy of the utmost respect. "We will show you around as representatives of the student body."

I hurriedly curtsied too, despite being in armor.

"Heh heh heh. My, my, my, I have quite the dashing escort today, don't I?" The queen giggled upon seeing me try to curtsy in armor.

Only then did I realize how I looked, and I hurriedly took off my helmet.

"P-P-Pardon me, Your Majesty, for dressing so menacingly. I'll go get changed right away!" With my helmet off, I felt my face flush as my eyes darted about.

"No, stay as you are," the queen said, narrowing her eyes. "I can't imagine a more reliable guide than the Argent Knight... Don't you think so, Klaus?"

She turned to the stern faced man standing beside her.

"It's as you say, Your Majesty." Sir Klaus bowed his head with a smile.

*Huh? Did the royal family just acknowledge me as the Argent Knight? N-No, don't think about it! You're just imagining things!*

I couldn't keep up with how fast things were going, and could only do as the queen said.

## 18. N-NO, IT CAN'T BE...

We walked along the route we'd planned for the queen ahead of time.

"And so, we have the stalls and exhibits that put the topics we've studied in the academy on display for everyone to watch," Magiluka commentated. "Though I'm sure it all looks quite inexperienced and amateurish to adults."

"No, I think this is all wonderful work. You've nothing to be ashamed of," the queen replied as she looked around.

Meanwhile, I was trembling in shame, my mind completely blank. I was currently surrounded by real, bona fide knights. Imagine this, if you will: a group of dashing, dependable knights in armor... being led by a girl snugly clad in a suit of armor. I felt like a complete and total sham.

*Gosh, I hope I'm not all sweaty from all that running earlier... I mean, I'm fine! I think...*

I wished I could move away from the rest of the group, but given the situation, I obviously couldn't do that. That left me feeling very restless and fidgety.

"I have to say, the students in charge of security are very well-organized, Mary," Her Majesty said.

"Whoa!" I yelled shrilly at my name being mentioned.

"...They all keep in touch with headquarters using communication magic and move in accordance to orders," Magiluka filled in for me.

"My, communication magic?! I never thought to put it to use that way. That's very wise of you, Mary."

"N-No, i-it's all His Highness..." I tried to use my surefire strategy of pinning all the credit on Reifus.

"Indeed, thanks to Lady Mary, we can communicate not just with our security team, but with the rest of the academy too," Magiluka chimed in. "It makes everything much smoother for us all. And as the chief executive of the festival, His Highness helps us a great deal. We're quite grateful to him."

"Oh, goodness. ♪ Really, Reifus does all that?"

*Please, please, please, don't toot my horn now!*

Being praised by my friends or an important figure felt good, honestly, but all the screwups I'd experienced had taught me that such recognition would lead to bad things for me. And even when I did feel proud, it wasn't without some embarrassment, so I really wanted to change the topic...

"I-I'll go ahead and check to see if they're doing well!" I said and bolted away, unable to steer the conversation elsewhere. I couldn't risk trying to say something sensible because it felt like anything I'd say would dig my grave deeper.

Speaking of which, just as I was about to sprint past one of the exhibits, I suddenly ground to a halt. What gave me pause was that the exhibit was a cemetery—or rather, an exhibit made to look like a cemetery. But it wasn't just the place's appearance that'd stopped me in my tracks, but also the rather grim premonition it'd given me.

"U-Umm, excuse me? This is the Undead Research Society's exhibit. Can we help you?" The student running the exhibit called out to me, understandably rattled by the sight of a fully armored figure standing there imposingly.

Hearing this made me do the math right away. *Cemetery + Undead = Instructor Alice*. And that equation served to make my hunch all the more foreboding. I took off my helmet and took out my armband, showing it off to the boy.

"I'm from the security team. Did you set up this exhibit?"

"No, we had adult craftsmen make it and set it up," he said, relaxing upon confirming that I was part of security. "We only put the results of our research on display."

"Did a lady with silver-rimmed glasses happen to do anything with your exhibit?"

"You mean Instructor Alice?" the student asked happily. "She's been a huge help to us. She offered us a great deal of useful information, and she even drew a summoning circle for us."

"A summoning circle?" I reacted to the ominous term.

"Yes! She said drawing a summoning circle should help improve the mood of the exhibit and made one for us. But since undead summoning circles are hard to create, she made some kind of other summoning circle."

As the student explained everything, all the color drained from my face.

*Oh, no no no, that woman's devoted her whole life to this. It's not "some other" summoning circle, it's an actual undead summoning circle! She left us with a real parting present, didn't she?!*

It was a good thing I went ahead to check. We needed to get rid of this dangerous summoning circle before Her Majesty and her entourage got here.

"Where's the summoning circle?" I asked.

"Huh? It's in the back, but..." The student panicked a little, looking back at the exhibit and suddenly trailing off.

I looked in the same direction, spotting a robed figure busily moving around a circle drawn on the floor.

"Emiliaaaaaaa!" I howled, pushing past the students and hurrying toward the robed figure.

The queen had ordered for her to be put in a maid uniform, but seeing this, I thought she must have gotten away and was up to mischief again. The figure winced at my shout, stopping in the middle of their work as I flew toward them in low altitude. In their shock, they pulled something out and swept it at me, but I held out my arm, blocking it with my armor.

That moment, the sound of something shattering rang out. I paid it no heed though. I was determined to give the prankster princess severe punishment this time so she'd learn not to cause anymore trouble.

"Meteor Strike (physical)!" I swung my helmet like a bowling ball and threw it hard at my target. With my helmet hitting them point-blank, the robed figure was flung backward from the impact and crumbled to the ground.

"Haah, haah, I swear!" I breathed out angrily. "Between Instructor Alice and Emilia, why is everyone trying to sabotage this fe—"

"You spoke of us?" I heard a familiar voice behind me and fell silent.

"Huh? Ah! P-Princess Emilia?!" I turned around.

Standing there was a girl dressed in a maid's dress. My eyes moved between her and

the figure lying on the ground.

"Wait, so, if the princess is there, who's that on the ground?" Sir Klaus approached us.

I bent down and raised the figure's hood, and Sir Klaus walked over. We both peered at the figure's face. Under the hood was the figure of a small, unconscious man.

"He's armed," Sir Klaus said. "This is probably some kind of..."

Indeed, the man was holding a broken dagger, and he had several other daggers and knives on his belt.

"But bringing weapons into the academy is forbidden!" I said.

As one might expect, visitors weren't allowed to enter academy premises with weapons. This was a rule the teachers upheld extremely diligently, and with the royal knights helping with security today, it seemed impossible for something like this to have been overlooked.

"They probably infiltrated the academy before the festival began and hid themselves." Sir Klaus came up with a conjecture.

That reminded me of something. *Come to think of it, we did get a report of a suspicious figure on the day before the festival. We lost sight of him too... So that wasn't Emilia. Plus, I feel like I might have seen them yesterday too...*

"Is this man after the queen...? Or maybe the demon princess?" Sir Klaus got to his feet and whispered, though only I could hear him.

I looked up at Sir Klaus, concerned. Noticing this, he grinned at me and placed a hand on my shoulder.

"But you did good, Lady Mary. You noticed the spy before they caused any damage and caught them. We at the knights call that distinguished service. As you'd expect from the Argent Knight, eh?"

"Huh?" I let out a stunned utterance, unable to keep up with his praise. "N-No, I just, I was embarrassed, so I broke off from the entourage and just happened into this shady exhibit. I thought Instructor Alice had left something dangerous in here, so I went in to have it removed. When I saw the hooded figure, I thought it was Princess Emilia

trying to pull another prank, so I thought I'd punish her—”

I kept talking until I ran out of breath, eventually panting. Sir Klaus once again smiled and placed a comforting hand on my shoulder. “Either way, the credit is yours.”

“This really is impressive, Mary.” Her Majesty showed up and started praising me, which only served to twist the knife. “I’d say you deserve a reward.”

“N-No, Your Majesty, not at all! I didn’t do this for any rewards. It’s my job as chief of security to ensure the festival is safe. B-Besides, as the daughter of a duke, it’s my honor and joy to be of aid to you! So really, I don’t need any—”

I was really grasping at straws in my attempt to come up with excuses to get out of this situation.

“Your modesty and loyalty are commendable,” the queen said. “I feel all the more inclined to reward your hard work. We’ll discuss the particulars another time.”

*Nooooo! If I get a reward from the queen herself, that'll put me on such a pedestal that no matter how successful the Academy Festival is, everyone will hear about me! I need something! Some excuse!*

My eyes darted about, seeking an escape as Her Majesty continued raining praise on me.

*Ah, I can't come up with any ideas! Noooo!*

“Your Majesty, leave this place to us,” Sir Klaus said. “I realize it’s still early, but how about you head to the arena for the time being? The special guest seats there are very well guarded.”

“Very well. Mary, Magiluka, would you show me the way?”

“Of course. Come, Lady Mary, let’s be off.”

“E-Erm, wait, please, listen to me—” I tried to argue.

Everyone was getting back to work like there was nothing else to add, and Magiluka hooked her arm around mine, dragging me away before I could say anything else...

## 19. FINALLY, TIME FOR THE MATCH

Upon arriving at the arena, we made our way to the special guest seats at the top of the spectator stands. These were basically VIP seats. This booth was isolated from the other seats, which were effectively open, so this was the most sensibly secure place for the queen.

Magiluka, the prince, and I were in the corridor leading into the booth. For the time being, the prince would be taking over my duty so I could move on to my next role.

"Thank you, you two," Reifus said. "Of course, your job isn't done quite yet. You have the match coming up."

"We will do everything we can to meet your expectations, Your Highness." Magiluka bowed.

I followed suit and curtsied, despite my armor. Seeing this, the prince smiled, turned around, and entered the booth. I breathed out in relief, all the tension I'd built up this whole time draining from my body.

"Now, I should head back and get ready," Magiluka said and walked away from me.

"Ah, thanks, Magiluka. I kind of ended up leaving everything to you. I-I'll get you something as thanks later. Is there anything you want?"

Hearing this, Magiluka stopped in her tracks and turned around to look at me, her eyes narrowed.

"No, don't mind me. But if I can ask for one thing..."

"Of course! What is it? Don't be shy, I'll do anything! ♪" I offered excitedly.

Magiluka took a step toward me and whispered into my ear, like she didn't want others to hear it.

"Don't cut corners in our match, would you?"

"Huh?" I asked, my heart skipping a beat.

I tried to look Magiluka in the face, but she pulled away from me and turned her back. I couldn't tell what face she'd made when she'd said that.

"I look forward to a fair fight then, Lady Mary," Magiluka said without turning around as she walked off.

I couldn't quite wrap my head around what she'd said, and I simply remained frozen in place until she vanished from sight.

"Lady Mary?"

Tutte, who was standing a short distance from me, called out to me, which served to snap me out of my shock.

"O-Oh, ah, yeah, never mind. Let's go meet up with Safina," I said with a stiff smile before running off in the opposite direction of Magiluka.

*What did Magiluka mean by that? "Cut corners"? Why would I—*

As I walked off, unable to discern what she'd meant, her words continued to ring in my ears.

\* \* \*

Tutte and I headed for the waiting room designated for us, where I found Safina was already preparing for the fight. She had on sturdy wrist guards and was affixing a piece of plate mail to her torso.

"Are you ready, Safina?" I asked as I walked in.

"Ah, Lady Mary!" She jolted, apparently so focused she hadn't noticed me, and stopped working on putting on her armor. "Um, w-well, I'm still nervous..."

*I know it doesn't really matter which of us wins, but it's still nerve-racking. Plus, the prince and the queen are watching, so we can't put up a lousy fight, and Safina has her family honor to consider.*

That thought made me realize I had a family name to live up to as well, which made me tense up a little too. We both stood there wordlessly for a moment, feeling the pressure.

*Aaah, why does waiting for a big moment always feel so stressful? Ugh, I feel like I'm going to throw up!*

"I-I, um, I've never seen you with so much heavy armor, Safina!" I said, trying to lighten the air.

"H-Heavy armor? My armor isn't as heavy as yours, Lady Mary," Safina replied with a stiff smile.

"Oh, right. I forgot, I'm in full-body armor..."

Feeling that the atmosphere had mellowed down somewhat, I continued the conversation.

"Did everything go well with the security team?"

"Um, I changed places with the substitute commander, so they've taken over our duties. That said, the events in the arena should be the last ones for the festival, so our personnel are concentrated here, and the teams patrolling the academy premises are starting to tidy up."

"Right, so this is the last event for today... I guess we should put on a show, then."

I looked up at the ceiling, pondering over how this festival felt like both a very long and very short affair.

"O-Oh, right!" Safina brought her hands together and changed the topic. "I heard you caught a brigand of some kind. That's amazing, Lady Mary!"

I, however, wished I could forget about all that.

"Th-Thank you. But really, it was all just a coincidence."

"Still, a vile brigand made it into the academy..." Safina turned pensive. "I suppose we must have been so busy pursuing hooded figures that we'd overlooked them."

I felt a bad feeling settle in and fell silent. I could tell the air was growing heavy again, and I wanted to find a way to lighten the mood but I couldn't come up with anything. This gloomy mood, coupled with the pressure of the coming match, left us in a very unpleasant state of mind.

“Pardon me, but shouldn’t you be discussing your strategy for the match?” Tutte spoke up, effectively throwing me a rope.

“Right, Tutte!” I immediately latched onto Tutte’s idea. “Strategy! Yes, we should talk strategy, Safina!”

“Right.” Safina also gratefully accepted Tutte’s help. “Well, thinking about it, it’s likely Sir Sacher will go on the offensive while Lady Magiluka offers him support and attacks from range.”

“That’s what you’d expect, considering those two.” I took off my helmet and placed a hand on my chin in a pensive manner. “In that case, our best idea should be to limit Sir Sacher’s movements while trying to close the distance with Magiluka.”

“I’ll stall Sir Sacher while you try to launch a direct attack on Lady Magiluka. Since you’re both a warrior and a mage, you have the flexibility to do that. And then we’ll use our finisher move to stop Sir Sacher...”

But as I listened to Safina explain her suggestion, it looked like she felt something was missing.

“I understand how you feel. Magiluka’s definitely going to predict we’ll do that, so she’s bound to come up with some countermeasures. Aww, if only we could get Instructor Karis to fish for more information on them...”

We went on to flesh out some more ideas, but we didn’t come up with anything more concrete than what we’d already had. This left us with that straightforward, basic strategy, and before long, a student that helped run the matches came over to call us up.

“It’s finally time... Let’s do this, Safina!” I extended my hand out to Safina palm-side down for a team huddle.

Safina stared at the back of my hand, confused by the sudden gesture and unsure as to what I was expecting her to do.

*Oh, right, this kind of gesture isn’t really a thing in this world...*

“Safina, place your hand over mine,” I explained. “It’ll help pump us up. You too, Tutte.”

"Huh? Me too?" Tutte blinked.

"Of course! You were here the whole time while we were practicing. You're part of the team. Go on, you two. Hurry!" I urged them, my hand still extended.

The two exchanged curious looks and then chuckled before overlapping their hands with mine. I instructed them to say "Booyah!" after I said my piece, and then we all fixed our eyes on our joined hands.

"All right! We've practiced so much for this, so let's give it our all and do it confidently! I... I won't say we absolutely have to win, but let's have fun!" I gave each of them a glance and then moved my eyes back to our hands. "Let's do this! Fight, fight!"

"Booyah!" the three of us said as one.

*Aaaaah! ♪ I've always wanted to do this! It's a dream come truuue!*

I was on cloud nine as I broke the huddle and followed the student leading us, my excitement held firmly in my heart.

\* \* \*

As we waited at the entrance to the arena, the prince came out of the VIP booth.

"Hear ye, hear ye!" he called out, his voice magnified by a magical tool that had sound amplification magic applied to it. At the sound of his words, the murmuring from the audience hushed down.

"The finals are concluded, but before the awards ceremony, I would like to present a special mock match!" the prince continued. "I believe this match will prove to be a positive learning experience for both the Solos and Aleyios classes. I would appreciate it if you would all stay seated a while longer and watch it!"

The audience cheered, and the student guided us into the arena. My elation from earlier evaporated all at once, giving way to a wave of icy terror. I could feel my flimsy nerves beginning to fail me already.

I swallowed nervously and walked into the arena, my armor clattering as I trembled. The cheering grew louder, and I could hear people from the audience clamoring excitedly.

“Look at that armor! Is that the Argent Knight? But he’s kind of... short, isn’t he?”

“I think that’s the White Princess... And that’s Lady Karshana next to her.”

“But they’re from different classes. Why are a Solos and Aleyios student teamed up together?”

Hearing those voices made my heart thump ever faster. I looked at the entrance opposite ours where the other pair had already appeared. Not at all shockingly, it was Sacher and Magiluka. Sacher had similar armor to Safina over his hands and chest, and that too was within my expectations.

What I didn’t expect was what he’d armed himself with—a shield. Indeed, Sacher was carrying both a sword and a shield, and what’s more, his shield featured an elaborate design that reflected the sunlight. It clearly wasn’t an ordinary shield he’d found lying around. If I had to say, it looked like the kind of legendary equipment a hero would have.

And then there was Magiluka. She also had her fair share of unusual equipment. There was a suspicious-looking wristband over her left hand, and she was holding a fancy staff in her right. It looked like the kind of staff that helped with spellcasting, but it was taller than she was. She also had bracelets, amulets, and earrings on, which seemed to have little to do with fashion and more like a means to imbue herself with some kind of power. In other words, she was armed to the teeth with magical items and amulets.

“Erm... What’s with the equipment you have on, you two?” I couldn’t help but point at them, despite how rude it may have come across.

“I believe the rules were that we were allowed to use whatever magic items we wanted, so I brought these over,” Magiluka said. “Oh, and let me tell you now, these are all relic-class items. I borrowed them from my grandfather’s collection.”

“‘R-Relic-class’?!” I parroted her.

Relic-class items certainly didn’t seem like the kind of things a student should be using. Why bring them to bear at a time like this?

Incidentally, magic items were divided into several categories: low-class, high-class, relic-class, legendary-class, and mythological-class. Low- and high-class items were

commonly in use, the sorts of items often produced by craftsmen. Legendary- and mythological-class items were in the realm of the gods or close to it, making them very rare. Relic-class items, then, were considered the highest grade of items mankind could create.

"That's right! My grandfather had gathered them for so-called research purposes, but they were only collecting dust, so I borrowed them. In the end, weapons prefer being put to use than being put on display, no?"

"Hmm... Did you at least ask him for permission?"

"Grandfather did say in the end he'd cooperate to make this festival a success, and this is in line with that. I'm sure he'll be quite happy with the outcome."

"So, you didn't ask him for permission."

*I bet the headmaster is having a fit over at the VIP booth with the queen, I thought to myself with a dry laugh. I guess that's what he gets for dropping all the responsibility for the festival on us.*

"E-Erm, Lady Mary?" Safina looked at me apologetically as she held up her equipment. "Actually, I'm using relic-class items too... I have to, or else I can't keep up with you..." She said those last few words in a soft mumble I couldn't quite make out.

"Cheaters, the lot of you..." I sighed, dropping my shoulders. *What did you come here to fight? What kind of terrible monster are you fighting in this match that you have to arm yourself to the teeth?*

It was then that it clicked for me. "D-Don't tell me you got this as anti-Mary equipment?!"

"It most certainly is our anti-Mary equipment! You're exceptional enough that people are calling you the Argent Knight. It wouldn't be an even fight unless we armed ourselves properly!"

"Come on, I know how I look, but I'm not the Argent Knight! Stop comparing me to him, please!" I whined, only for the cheering audience to drown out my voice.

I squatted down and started fiddling with the sand, depressed. *Baaw, I wanna go home. I'm this close to crying!*

The match hadn't even started, but I'd already taken considerable emotional damage...

## 20. THE MATCH BEGINS!

"The two-on-two battle between the Aleyios and Solos students is about to begin! Since both offensive magic and real weapons are allowed for use, The War Angel's Protection will be invoked to minimize damage! Both sides, step forward!"

The referee raised his voice and announced the beginning of the match. The audience raised their voice, cheering. Surrounded by this commotion, I turned my dampened spirits into a bundle of nerves. Both our teams stood a safe distance from each other.

"Ready... Start!"

With the referee's declaration, we guarded ourselves.

*"Let's go for a preemptive attack! Pattern A!"* I sent Safina a message via communication magic, and she immediately moved in.

We had planned several possible tactical patterns and had given them code names. As Magiluka and Sacher strafed diagonally, hoping to get a better vantage point and cut into our flanks, Safina bolted straight ahead.

"They're not even going to wait things out?!" Sacher raised his voice in surprise, but his expression soon regained his composure.

"Draw!" Safina drew her sword, only for Sacher to block it with his shield. Safina had predicted this, however, and strafed horizontally, and Sacher tilted his body to match her. However...

"Fire Ball!"

The moment Safina moved away, I, who had been hiding behind her, launched a fireball at Sacher. With him occupied by Safina, he shouldn't have been able to predict my attack...

"Ice Lance!"

...but a spear of ice zoomed through the air and hit my fireball, and the two spells canceled each other out. Needless to say, this was Magiluka's handiwork.

*That's what I'd expect, Magiluka. Tricks won't work on you.*

I drew my Legendary Sword (Cringe) and sprinted forward, my gaze fixed on Sacher, who was about to attack Safina.

"*Pattern C*," I transmitted to Safina, who deflected Sacher's sword with her katana, hopped back, and sheathed her blade.

"Sacher! From the side!" Magiluka shouted.

Apparently, she couldn't use communication magic in quick succession. But hearing her, Sacher noticed me closing in on his flank and raised his shield to intercept me.

"Being able to use both magic and a sword?! I knew you'd be a pain, Lady Mary!"

"That's rude! Do not refer to a lady as 'a pain'!" I chided him as my slash got repelled.

But me getting pushed back was part of the plan.

"Draw!" Safina sprung forward, preparing to draw her sword.

"Tch, she's tricky too!" Sacher complained as he fell back, trying to get out of Safina's range.

"Earth Wall!"

Suddenly, a wall of soil and rock surged up from the ground and stood between the two of them. Magiluka interfered with their clash, but Safina unflinchingly slashed the wall and cut it down.

"Get back."

I called back Safina, who had stopped in her tracks. She retreated, her eyes fixed on her opponent, and hopped back to my side. As we kept our distance, the audience cheered excitedly.

"Wow! Swordsmen are cooperating with mages to fight! That's the first time I've seen

anything like it!"

"The White Princess and Miss Karshana are impressive. Their coordination is beautiful."

"But their opponents are putting up an amazing fight too. Class masters really are on another level!"

I could make out some of their praise, which was honestly pretty satisfying.

*Sacher's shieldplay is pretty good considering he only picked it up for this fight. Maybe he learned it beforehand...*

"Safina, is Sacher supposed to be this good with a shield?" I asked her, who stood ahead of me.

"I've heard members of House Elexiel learn to use a shield since they're tasked with defending important figures," she replied without glancing back at me.

*So he didn't just pick it up for this battle, he's been using it all along... And that shield looks pretty fancy. I doubt it'll break easily.*

"Lady Mary, they're coming!" Safina called out, pulling me out of my thoughts.

Focusing ahead, I saw countless arrows of ice rain down on us, and at the same time, Sacher closed the distance between us.

"*Special Defense!*"

"Accel Boost!" Safina and I chanted as one.

"Draw! Consecutive slash!" Safina drew her sword at the ice arrows approaching us. Her sword slashes flashed through the air like afterimages, cutting down the ice arrows with blistering speed. It was then that Sacher closed the distance with us.

"Overlight!" I called out.

A flash of light appeared, separating Sacher from us.

"That won't work!" Sacher said, using his shield to protect his eyes from the flash.

But him looking away from us was my plan.

"Cast Off!" I incanted just as the flash disappeared. When Sacher lowered his shield, he was faced with my suit of armor towering before him.

"You're mine!" Sacher called out and unflinchingly attacked the armor.

"Sacher, no!" Magiluka called out as he swung his sword.

Sacher's slash hit the armor, which crumbled with a clatter—because I wasn't inside it.

"What?!" Sacher called out in shock.

"Ninja technique! The cicada shell jutsu!" I exclaimed from a distance, and he turned to look at me.

*Mwa ha ha ha! This is my swift undressing technique, enabled by acceleration magic! I modified my armor and trained so I could remove it in the blink of an eye. Well, I didn't manage it perfectly because I still have my boots and gauntlets on, but still, it worked out!*

Sacher spotted me standing there with my armor off, while Safina moved in from the left.

*That stalled Sacher, and Magiluka's too shocked to react. Now's our chance!*

"Let's go for the finisher!" I transmitted to Safina and prepared to cast my spell.

*Come on, faster! Before Sacher starts moving again or Magiluka pulls something! Safina can't get started unless I make the first move!*

*I was panicking. I need to send five Sonic Blades at my target, and I can't change their trajectory even if he moves. Now's my only chance since he's frozen in place. Safina's waiting on me too, so I have to get this done now!*

The more I thought about it, the more I panicked. If I were to screw up now, after we'd come so far, it would be a waste of Safina's effort, not just my own. I was pressured by this sense of shared responsibility.

*I have to do it... I have to do it now!*

“N-Nine Blade!” I shouted and unleashed the magic.

It was only then that I realized that I’d blown it. I’d intended to fire five spells, but I’d ended up only sending one. I was so focused on firing the spell at all that I’d forgotten to prepare five.

“Ah!” I yelped.

“Ugh, nng...!”

Safina, who had used the time she could only use twice a day to speed forward, realized halfway there that I’d only fired one spell. In her surprise, Safina didn’t accelerate further and instead reached for her sword to release a double slash combo. I could hear her blade whistling through the air, and then... hitting something hard with a thud. Sacher had tilted his shield, blocking our incomplete finisher.

“Now’s my chance!” Sacher shouted, his shield beginning to glow as it pushed Safina away. “Shield Banish!”

With that call, he drew on Safina from close range and bashed her with the glowing shield. The shock wave of the shield bash was stronger than I’d ever have anticipated, and it blew Safina back like a leaf in the wind.

“Safina!” I called out in concern and bolted after Safina.

“This isn’t an ordinary shield. It’s a relic-class item that absorbs and stores up any impacts that hit it, and then it can unleash them all at once.”

I could hear Sacher’s explanations, but I wasn’t in the presence of mind to listen or care. I couldn’t bring myself to care—my whole mind was occupied with the sight of Safina toppling right in front of me. It gave me a familiar feeling, the same sense of dread I’d felt back when I was in the Solos class and I’d accidentally injured her.

*This is all my fault. This happened to Safina because I couldn’t pull off the spell.*

I wasn’t hyperventilating like last time, but the sense of failure and guilt were flooding my mind. But then, Safina reflexively crossed her wrist guards together, abating the shock wave as it pushed against her. Blood burst from Safina’s mouth, and the armor

plates on her waist cracked and fell apart. The War Angel's Protection guarded us from fatal wounds, but it didn't block heavy injuries.

*"Lady Mary, hurry!"* Safina pleaded using communication magic. *"Get Lady Magiluka!"*

*"Huh?!"* I looked around, surprised that she would use the spell on her own.

*"Hurry! It's our chance! I'll be fine!"*

I did as she ordered and almost unconsciously started closing in on Magiluka. I didn't know what Safina was planning, but she had Sacher drawing on her with the hopes of knocking her out of commission. That left Magiluka open to attack, and he would have to hurry over to defend her, which would spare Safina.

Then my eyes met Magiluka's. I saw her lips curl up into a smirk, and I felt a shudder run down my spine. I realized that attacking Magiluka would result in some kind of terrible outcome, so at the very last moment I restrained myself.

*"Gauntlet of Revector, bless me with the light of advancement! Draw on my flesh and blood!"* Magiluka held out her fancy gauntlet and chanted words of power. *"Maximum Triple Boost!"*

As far as I knew, this was a fourth-order augmentation spell that increased one's attack, defense, and speed at once. Magiluka shouldn't have been able to use it, which meant the gauntlet had probably enabled it.

I watched as the gauntlet shined red as blood, and the rest of the amulets and accessories she had on shined likewise in response. Magiluka's expression contorted in agony, and a strand of blood flowed between her arm and the gauntlet. Seeing this confirmed my suspicions.

*That gauntlet is sucking on Magiluka's blood to forcibly raise her sorcery's order and let her punch above her weight!*

My swung sword clashed with something heavy. It wasn't Sacher's shield or sword, but rather the long staff Magiluka was holding.

*"Huh?"*

*"You're not the only mage capable of fighting at close range, Lady Mary!"* Magiluka said

as she deflected my sword, swung her staff around, and tried to strike my flank.

I reflexively hopped back, but Magiluka followed up with a thrust. Only now did I realize that unlike the staves mages typically used, this staff didn't have a decoration at its tip. Instead, both of its tips were designed to serve as blunt weapons.

This was why Sacher didn't hurry to her side. He was confident she could defend herself.

*Magiluka did have a sprained wrist earlier... So it happened because she was practicing fighting with a staff?*

I dodged Magiluka's attacks, impressed with the amount of effort she'd invested in such a short period of time. Her attacks were still a bit clumsy, but she did have her basics down.

*It's been long enough, hasn't it?*

I stopped in my tracks. I decided that now was the right time to lose.

"I subm—"

"Are you going to yield again?" Magiluka cut me off grimly.

"Huh?" My eyes widened in surprise.

Magiluka stopped with her staff fixed on me, glaring at me with tears in her eyes. I swallowed, taken aback by this intensity that was so atypical of Magiluka.

"You slackened the impact of your slash earlier, didn't you? With the spell affecting me, I'm only about as strong as Sacher is, and you're at least his equal, if not stronger. Then how did I block your blade?"

"I-I..." My heart was racing from the guilt her words had made me feel, and I couldn't look her in the eye.

"Are you... Are you that disinterested in competing with me, Lady Mary?"

Those words made me look at her again. Her severe expression gave way to sadness. She had always looked so dignified and proud, but now she looked like she could burst

into tears. I never thought I'd see her like this—the sight made me feel like an icy grip had taken hold of my heart.

"Whenever we study magic, you always look like you have so much fun. You master spells before anyone else can, and you always race ahead of the class. But whenever I race to catch up to you, you always stop and clear the way for me. You always back down."

"That's not..." I muttered.

But she was right—that really was what I'd always done. I'd learn and use spells, then hide in someone's shadow so as to not draw attention to myself. And that someone was always the person in second place, Magiluka.

"Are you really that opposed to the idea of competing with me? Am I such an unworthy mage that you won't even bother with me, Lady Mary?!" Magiluka shouted at me.

I'd never once felt that way about Magiluka; I'd just never wanted to end up competing with a friend. After all, my power was basically cheating. If anyone wasn't worth competing with, it was me, not her...

This was the first time I had ever seen Magiluka snap. She swung her staff haphazardly, her intense assault flicking the sword out of my hand. Her attack continued, but it lacked any of her usual elegance. In the midst of this stressful match, the fraying threads of her composure had finally given way.

The fact that Magiluka had told me not to cut corners before the beginning of the match crossed my mind. I'd ended up doing exactly that, and it'd made her lose her temper. As mature as she may have been, she was still a twelve-year-old girl. But I had forgotten that.

I had betrayed Safina's expectations and failed. I had also betrayed Magiluka's expectations and failed. Self-loathing washed over me, and I grew angry at myself.

*What am I doing?! Get your act together, Mary Regalia!* I scolded myself and caught Magiluka's attack with a bare hand.

"Ah!" Magiluka stiffened at how suddenly and easily I'd blocked her attack.

"Sorry, Magiluka. It's not that I think you're a mage not worth competing with. It's just

that I've always thought of you as my precious, dear friend who's with me every step of the way, so the idea of competing with you has never crossed my mind. But if it's a competition you want, I'll show you a fraction of what Mary Regalia is capable of!"

The moment I finished speaking, I tightened my grip on her staff, which broke with a snapping sound. I could hear what sounded like a scream from the distance, but I ignored it.

"Gauntlet of Revector, bless me with the light of advancement! Draw on my flesh and blood!" Magiluka let go of the broken staff and hopped back, holding up her gauntlet.

"Let's go, Magiluka! I'll show you my full strength!" I said, clenching my fist under my gauntlet and closing the distance with her at once.

"Sword of Judgmeeeent!"

"Divine Breakeeeer!"

Our shouts overlapped. Magiluka unleashed a sword enveloped in blinding light, but I flung my fist into it, shattering the spell to bits with my nullification skill.

"What?!"

The spell broke apart into particles that rained over the arena like sparkling rain. The crowd couldn't follow what was happening, and in fact, the flashes of light from the spells made it nearly impossible to follow the fight.

Magiluka had fallen to the ground, exhausted, and I approached her.

"I guess my armor ended up beating your gauntlet this time," I said, waving my armor's silvery gauntlet. *Phew... It's a good thing not all of my armor came off. This works, right? I can still blame it on my armor.*

But this match wasn't over yet. This was supposed to be where things settle into an inconclusive loss for us, but I wouldn't end it like this. Magiluka implored me to take this seriously, and I wanted to answer her feelings. So this time, I wasn't going to concede the win.

*I'm not sure I should declare I'll win this... But still...* Still conflicted, I looked at Magiluka. She finally grasped the situation and returned to her usual calm and collected self.

“I can still go on, Magiluka... The way you are now, I can... I can...”

“I lose this match, Lady Mary.” Magiluka shook her head with a satisfied smile. “I forfeit.”

“Magiluka...” I muttered.

“Heh heh, I finally managed to be true to myself and put how I felt into words. I’m sure you have all sorts of reasons to act the way you do, but you answered my feelings regardless. Thank you.” Magiluka bowed her head to me, still seated.

“Magiluka... No, even I...” I mumbled, flustered.

“But just let me say this.” She raised her head and looked at me with defiant eyes. “I may have lost this time, but next time, I’ll definitely catch up to you.”

I paused as her words sunk in. “Right!” I smiled and reached my hand out to her.

She grabbed my hand and pulled herself up to her feet. And as that happened, the quiet audience erupted into cheers, like their voices marked the match’s conclusion.

With the match over, The War Angel’s Protection was lifted, and the arena returned to normal. At that moment, I heard a suspicious whisper from the audience and realized something was off.

“Do it. Now!”

The moment I heard this, something was thrown into the arena. All I could see was that it was a sparkling crystal the size of a baseball.

“Huh? What?” I asked.

“Lady Mary, look out!” Magiluka pushed me away.

Still unsure as to what was going on, I let myself get pushed away. Magiluka screamed in front of me as a magic circle formed around her, and an explosion of sparks filled the air.

## 21. BELIEVE IN EVERYONE

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Magiluka was standing in the middle of a magic circle, screaming in pain as the crystal floating in midair shined and unleashed sparks that enveloped her. The accessories she was wearing lost their glow and cracked loudly, and as they did, the crystal's light intensified.

"M-Mgiluka..." I said, keenly aware of the trembling in my voice.

My head was so full of the sight before my eyes that I couldn't register what was happening. Only when Magiluka's screams petered out and she fell limp did I realize the situation.

"Magilukaaa!" I scrambled forward, not minding the magic circle.

I held onto Magiluka's body and pulled her out of the circle. Upon doing this, the violet shower of sparks from earlier died down and the magic circle's glow stabilized.

"Th-That's impossible! She pulled her out in the middle of the ritual?!" I could hear someone speaking from the audience, but I wasn't in a state of mind to care about that.

"Magiluka! Hang on, please! Open your eyes!" I sat down, laid Magiluka's body down, and started shaking her.

Magiluka groaned, her face contorted in pain, and then slowly opened her eyelids.

"La... dy... Mary..."

"Oh, thank goodness..." I breathed out, tears of relief running down my cheeks.

Magiluka's face was pale, and she was clearly exhausted. Looking at her cracked ornaments, I got the impression the crystal must have drained her mana. I recalled what I once learned at the academy: losing a lot of mana at once can lead to mana exhaustion, and losing even more mana after that could result in death. Remembering that gave me chills.

*If I'd have left Magiluka inside the circle...*

I banished that terrible thought from my mind and hugged Magiluka tightly,

confirming her warmth.

"It's not over yet! Watch out, Lady Mary!" I heard Sacher shout.

I looked at the magic circle still shining behind us, where the crystal thrown into the arena floated in the air. The next moment, the crystal shattered to pieces in a flash. Its particles scattered over the circle, prompting it to grow brighter. After that, something rose up from the center of the circle and hung over the ground.

"What's... that...?" I whispered, unable to recognize the mass that appeared from the circle.

Then I realized I actually had seen something like it before. I'd never seen it in the flesh, but I had seen pictures of it.

Floating inside the magic circle, covered by a thin membrane, was a human brain.

However, while I did recognize it as a brain, it was much too large, much bigger than an adult's skull. Beneath it were two eyeballs, and extending below that were countless tubes. It wasn't clear if these were part of its skeleton or its innards, but they dangled like tendrils. Shining above it was a brilliant ring of light, and two wings of pure light adorned its back.

The whole sight went beyond mind-boggling to straight up disgusting.

"Tch! It didn't receive enough mana, which summoned it in an incomplete state!"

"Well, so be it. We summoned it either way. Have it run wild, and we'll use that opening..."

I heard those voices from afar, which pulled me back into the situation I was in. My eyes met the monster's exposed eyeballs, and the moment they did, the tendrils dangling from its body rapidly extended toward us.

I reflexively pulled Magiluka's limp form closer and shielded her body. I heard the sound of metal clashing a few times. Looking up, I saw Sacher standing in front of us, using his shield to block the monster's attacks.

"Shield Banish!" Sacher called out, and the monster's tendrils splattered and were pushed back with a loud blast. "Lady Mary, take Magiluka and run! I'll keep it occupied

while you evacuate the audience!"

Sacher spoke with his eyes fixed on the monster in a glare and his shield held up. The enemy once again attacked. This time, multiple magic circles appeared around it, which began firing magic attacks in all directions. Sacher used his sword and shield to deflect any attacks coming our way, but other spells impacted the audience stands, kicking the spectators into a panic.

"Wh-What about Sir Klaus...?!" I asked, recalling the reliable knights who were present.

"Sir Klaus and his knights are prioritizing the queen's safety," Safina said as she hurried to my side, clutching her chest and supported by Tutte. "They're focused on that, so we have to stall this thing for the time being."

"Safina! You're hurt?!" I exclaimed.

"I had healing magic cast on me once the match ended, but with all this havoc, they didn't finish healing me in time. Don't worry, I'm mostly healed."

She assured me with a smile, but there was greasy sweat dripping down her face. Low-order healing magic wasn't enough to heal someone to the point where they can get up and fight right away. It was clear she was pushing herself.

"Lady Mary, we'll stall it here. You need to take Lady Magiluka and run!" Safina said, urging me on too.

Normally, my desire not to stand out would stir me to obey her words unquestioningly and run. But right now, I wasn't in the state of mind to do that.

"What are you saying?! If I'm running, it's only if all of you come along! Otherwise, I'm going to stay and fight!" I told them.

"But what about Magiluka?" Sacher asked. "We can't just leave her lying here."

"W-Well, I could just have Tutte carry her away—" I said, looking at my maid who was supporting Safina.

"Now, would you please... not treat me like a sack of potatoes?" Magiluka raised her head heavily and tried to stand on her own. "I'm a daughter of House Futurulica, and

I don't intend to... be a burden at a time like this..."

I watched her in suspense as she unsteadily stood up on her own.

"So, what do we do?" Sacher asked. "I don't think there's a whole lot we can do. Plus, I don't think my shield is going to last much longer."

Sacher had been blocking the monster's haphazard attacks the whole time, so it only made sense he would be nearing his limit. The monster's spells were weak individually, but it was firing so many of them at once nonstop.

*What is this thing...?!*

It was unlike any monster I'd heard of in my studies. Meanwhile, Tutte moved from supporting Safina to helping Magiluka stay upright.

"I think we should rely on Lady Mary's and Miss Safina's special finisher here," Magiluka suggested.

"Huh?!" Safina and I exclaimed as one.

I went very pale, recalling how I fumbled the execution of our finisher just minutes ago.

"True..." Safina said pensively. "A full force Nine Blade Cross could dispatch this monster..."

"Nine Blade Cross?" Sacher cut her off mercilessly. "You mean that thing you tried to pull earlier? Are you sure that's gonna work? Even I could block that."

"I... Well, you could say we failed to pull it off..." Safina replied with a shaking voice.

I jolted and felt the color drain from my face.

"I can still use my acceleration item one more time," Safina said, looking straight at me. "I think I can move for that one more time. And this time we won't fail. Right, Lady Mary?"

"In that case..." Sacher looked at me, and then moved his eyes back to the monster.

Everyone had their eyes on me, and I felt my heart sink. The pressure was intense.

*Wh-What do I do? When I think of what would happen if I screw up again... No, I can't lose faith now! I'm Lady Mary of House Regalia! I need to get my act together!*

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, then looked everyone over.

"Understood," I said, my voice faint but clear. Having actually said it out loud calmed me down somewhat. "But there's just one issue... I need some time to activate that spell. I need you to keep the monster from moving while I do that. I know I'm asking for something dangerous, but—"

"It's not a problem," Magiluka said with a kind smile, her tone calm and collected. "Sacher and I will keep the monster pinned down. So Lady Mary, put your faith in us and use your spell."

"Magiluka..."

Despite the danger involved, she was willing to stall the monster for me.

"Don't worry." Safina gripped my hand encouragingly. "Believe in us."

*Believe...*

That word ignited a light in my cowardly heart. *Believe in everyone, and focus on what you must do.* The flame in me burned even brighter. I looked around my friends and nodded firmly.

"Let's beat that thing! Together!" I said with my head held high, to which everyone nodded back.

"Lady Mary..." Tutte stepped away from Magiluka momentarily and presented my sword, which she'd picked up earlier. "Good luck... I'm sure you can do it, my lady."

She whispered those words so only I could hear them. Her eyes, wavering with concern, fixed on me. She knew my secret, meaning she understood how fragile my heart was. But the fact she was so worried about my feelings encouraged me. I was touched by her kindness.

"Thank you. I'll do it," I whispered to Tutte, accepting the sword with a smile.

The four of us faced the monster. Sacher stood at the very front, followed by Safina, then me, then Magiluka stood at the very back supported by Tutte.

The monster was firing its spell attacks in every direction, apparently not paying us any attention, throwing the arena into further chaos and confusion. Instructor Karis and the graduate unit attacked the monster, but perhaps their attacks simply lacked enough force, since they'd only damaged the membrane surrounding the monster without actually hurting it. Even when they used magic, the monster only counterbalanced it with its own spells or dodged them. Nothing seemed to be actually hitting it.

"So, what's the plan? I'll follow orders," Sacher said.

"Sacher, you attack the monster from above," Magiluka said. "Do that, and I'll use my magic to keep it from moving. After that, Lady Mary and Miss Safina, you two finish it!"

We all nodded.

"All right, let's go!" I said resolutely.

"Yahoo!" Sacher exclaimed and unflinchingly charged at the monster.

*Focus, focus... Imagine five Sonic Blades... Stay calm... Calm...*

Unlike the match, this time I was able to remain calm and concentrate.

*Everyone's buying me the time I need. I just need to focus on my role here!*

"Instructor Karis, back down! We're attacking!" Sacher called out.

Hearing this, Instructor Karis, who was engaging the monster, got out of the way. The monster reacted to Sacher's call and began attacking him. Sacher used his sword and shield to block its attacks and closed the distance with it.

"Earth Wall!" Magiluka chanted, forming walls of rock and earth in front of him.

Sacher predicted this and used it as a stepping stone to jump up. They'd probably matched their timing using communication magic. The monster floated over the ground, but Sacher jumped even higher and dived toward it.

The monster wasn't going to just sit by and do nothing though. It launched more and more attacks at Sacher, but he blocked them all with his shield. Looking closely, I could see cracks were forming all around the shield, though.

"I'll reflect all the attacks you've used on me back at you! Shield Banish!" Sacher shouted, and the shield shined, producing an intense shock wave that pressured the monster from above.

But as it flashed, the shield's cracks ran deeper, and it began falling apart. What's more, Sacher himself was subjected to the shock wave, which sent him flying back the moment he landed.

"Magilukaaaaa!" Sacher shouted, as if to pass the baton over to her.

Magiluka stepped away from Tutte and glared at the monster, which had been knocked down into the ground.

"Gauntlet of Revector, bless me with the light of advancement! Draw on my flesh and blood!" Magiluka held up the gauntlet. "Thousand Crystal Edge!"

Upon her chanting those words, a magic circle appeared under the monster, from which several thick gigantic icicles burst out and propelled themselves toward the creature. Wherever the icicles touched the monster, their frost spread, freezing it and holding it in place.

"Lady Mary, Miss Safina, do it now!" Magiluka passed the baton over to us.

"Let's do this, Safina!"

"Yes, Lady Mary!"

We replied to Magiluka's voice with determined shouts.



“Nine Blaaaaaaade!” I chanted the words of power and swung my sword up overhead. “Accelerate!”

The blade-shaped shock wave I fired from my sword split into five, which soared through the air in an arc and closed in on the monster. Safina followed suit behind my slashes. The monster’s eyeballs swerved to look at Safina, but it was too late. Safina accelerated further, moving faster than the monster could keep up with.

“Cross!” Safina called out, and a loud, sharp, deafening sound rang through the arena.

A moment after the sound rang out, an accompanying shock wave billowed forth. I squeezed my eyes. A few seconds later, silence settled over the arena. I slowly opened my eyes and looked at where the monster was.

Where it once stood was now a pile of glittering particles, which vanished from sight as Safina watched over it, her katana still held up in its drawn position.

“Did we d—” I started and then clasped a hand over my mouth. “Oh, no, no, I almost jinxed it!”

I turned to look at Magiluka, who was once again standing with Tutte supporting her. Her face looked terribly exhausted, making it clear that she was pushing herself during the battle. Even still, she smiled and nodded slowly.

“Lady Mary! We did iiiit!” I heard a cheer behind me, and Safina soon rushed me and wrapped her hands around me in a hug.

All the strength drained from my body as relief washed over me, and Safina’s tackle-like hug made me lurch forward and bump into Magiluka.

“Waaaah!” The three of us screeched as Safina, Magiluka, and I all fell over like dominoes.

Tutte, who was standing next to Magiluka, stepped away at the last second and managed to stay out of her entangled mess. *Dammit, Tutte!*

“Oh, Miss Safina, must you be so careless?” Magiluka, who was lying beneath us both, protested.

“Hee hee, I’m sorry,” Safina, who was at the very top, apologized bashfully.

I, meanwhile, enjoyed the cushioning of Magiluka's chest.

"Soft..." I mumbled, rubbing my head.

"L-L-L-L-Lady Mary, what are you doiing?!" she screeched, going red up to her ears despite being so pale earlier.

"You three really get along, huh..." Sacher approached us with an astonished expression, dragging his crumbling shield along.

*Aaah, I'm sleepy... I'm so tired. Mostly mentally... And I've got this nice pillow... Ah, no good, I'm falling asleep...*

With all the tension draining from my body, I gradually and naturally conked out.

## 22. THE ACADEMY FESTIVAL ENDS

When I woke up, I found myself looking up at an unfamiliar ceiling. It was dark and gloomy, and it took me a moment of staring blankly to grasp what had happened to me.

"You're awake, my lady."

I heard Tutte's voice from nearby. Filled with relief, I tilted my head to look at her.  
"Where am I?"

"The academy's infirmary. You fell asleep after the fight and were taken here. Everyone was quite surprised. They thought you'd overexerted yourself and collapsed."

I sat up, and Tutte offered me a cup of water.

"Thank you." I sipped on the water, looking around only to realize the two of us were alone here. "Oh, what happened to everyone else?"

"Sir Sacher and Lady Safina had their wounds treated. His Highness insisted they didn't have to, but they returned to the festival. They all said they would come check on you later."

“O-Oh...”

“They all really hung on. Meanwhile, you were sleeping like a log despite not having a scratch on you...” Tutte appended peevishly.

I averted my gaze awkwardly and sipped on more water.

“F-Forget that. Is the festival still going on? After all that havoc?”

“Yes. Her Majesty said it would be sad to have the festival ruined by what happened, and she said you should leave the rest to the adults and enjoy the occasion. She contributed resources for the after-event’s dance party. His Highness is managing the event right now. They brought rental outfits and food, so everyone was quite enthusiastic.”

“After all that happened? Everyone’s really quick to rebound...” I muttered, half-impressed.

“Thankfully, there were only a few injured people, and all of them could be healed with healing magic. I think one wanted to see the festival end like this. Better to have it end on a more enjoyable note.”

“I guess so...” I sipped on my water again solemnly.

“But if I may be blunt, I’m quite relieved. If that finisher move had failed, the situation could have resulted in you exposing your secret to everyone, and the legend of an argent hero would have begun then and there.”

“Pfft!” I squirted out my water.

Honestly, I got very carried away in that situation, so that possibility hadn’t crossed my mind at all. And speaking of such a turn of events, if I’d just charged in alone the others wouldn’t have had to have put themselves in danger like that.

I was disappointed with my carelessness, and I also felt guilty for what I’d put my friends through. But at the same time, my more calculating side was relieved that Tutte was right and things didn’t go down in the worst possible way.

“Oh, and also, the credit for resolving this incident goes to you, Sir Sacher, Lady Magiluka, and Lady Safina. You are all to be rewarded. The details for that will be

discussed at a later date."

"Oh, really?! So I don't have to get a reward on my own! That's great!" I exclaimed, uplifted by the good news.

*They're treating me as just one contributor to the achievement this time! When it was just me, I thought I was finished, but I guess God threw me another bone! Thanks, God! I guess I got out of this by the skin of my teeth?*

As I thanked God, the door to the infirmary opened and my friends all walked in. Reifus led the group, followed by the rest of them.

"Oh, Lady Mary, you came to."

They all approached me, relief on their faces.

"Oh, Sir Reifus." I hurriedly handed the cup back to Tutte and made to get out of bed.

However, Sir Reifus raised a hand to stop me. "No need to force yourself to get up. I told this to everyone else, but they're not listening." The prince glanced at everyone else behind him in an exasperated manner.

I looked at the others and realized two things that were off...

"I'm glad you're looking well," Reifus said.

"Yes, I'm sorry I made you worry. By the way, why is Sir Sacher looking the other way so sullenly?"

Indeed, the first anomaly was that Sacher looked quite moody.

"Oh, don't mind him," Magiluka replied, looking fed up. "After seeing your finisher move, he became all grouchy after realizing you'd tried to use that move on him."

"Oh. Yes, I guess using an attack strong enough to beat that monster would have been dangerous against you, Sir Sacher." I bowed my head, feeling apologetic.

"Aha ha ha! That's not the issue, Silver! This boy said you failed that technique against him because you held back. He's sulking because he wanted to challenge that technique of yours head-on! He's a bold one, we say!" Thus spoke a girl in a maid's

outfit who was vigorously patting Sacher's back.

As you might have guessed, this was the second thing that was off—a familiar face who didn't belong was among my visitors.

"Are you sure your attack failed, Lady Mary? Safina says so too, but are you sure you didn't hold back?" Sacher asked, still maintaining a sulky pout even after being lunched forward by the maid's repeated back pats.

*Seriously, you're such a barbarian. Now I feel stupid for worrying about you.*

"We really failed the first time. We weren't trying to hold back, I promise you," I said.

Sacher seemed satisfied with my explanation and smiled again.

"You sure do stabilize quickly. But we like it! Men shouldn't spend their time brooding," the maid said.

Seeing her talk to Sacher like nothing was out of the ordinary looked stranger the longer I looked at them. What was she even doing here?

"May I ask why you've come here?" I said, losing my patience and looking at the disguised princess.

"Oh, yeah, this maid of yours is really weird, Lady Mary," Sacher said obviously. "She's like, oddly friendly?"

"Huh?" Magiluka, Reifus, and I all stared at Sacher.

Safina simply stared at him blankly, not understanding what he'd meant. We all knew who she was, so we thought he was talking to her casually because she'd given him permission. Apparently, by the time Reifus and Magiluka had regrouped with Sacher, he'd already taken to talking to Emilia like they were peers.

"Um, Sir Sacher... You don't actually think this person is my maid, do you?"

"Isn't she? She was talking about you with a smile the whole time. I figured she was your new maid or something."

I shuddered. *He really was just chatting with her that whole time without knowing who*

*she is...* Extending my trembling hands, I introduced her. “This is Emilia Relirex, princess of the Relirex Kingdom. She’s not my maid.”

“Huh?!” Sacher and Safina exclaimed.

“Oh, we forgot to introduce ourselves, did we not? Pardon. You have our apologies! We couldn’t help but speak to you after we saw that nerve-racking battle,” Emilia said with a grin as she patted Sacher vigorously on the back again.

*Oh no, don’t tell me Safina thought she was my maid too...*

Heaving a sigh, I turned to look at Tutte, hoping to get the glass of water again, only to find her hanging her head with her forehead rubbing against the wall.

“Lady Mary’s maid is... weird...? I’m weird... A weird maid...” she mumbled incoherently to herself.

*Oh no, what Sacher said dealt psychic damage to her... Let’s just leave her alone until she recovers.*

“M-My apologies, Your Highness! I wasn’t aware you were a princess, and I said all those rude things!” Sacher apologized profusely, his brain finally catching up to the situation.

Safina bowed her head too. She hadn’t said anything, but she wanted to apologize for being under the wrong impression.

“Aha ha ha, it is fine. No need to apologize! We are in a very good mood right now. You are very interesting toys—ahem, we mean, rabble— W-We mean, you are quite interesting, so we do not mind. We quite enjoyed your match!”

Some of the things she said were a touch concerning, but it seemed this little tomboy of a princess was fond of us. This was good, if not for the fact that her being this fond of us gave me the distinct impression she was going to get us in trouble in the future.

“And you say that after you ran from me in a panic like that earlier...” I muttered.

“Hmm? Oh, that?” Emilia picked up on what I meant and spoke smugly. “We were simply under the wrong impression. Pardon us. It was foolish of us to think that the Argent Knight was inside that armor. Clearly, you are not the White Devil. Hence, we

have nothing to fear."

*That right? You know what, fine, I'll take it. Anything works at this point. Any chance Her Majesty could show up and take her away already?* I thought to myself, managing a fake smile.

"W-Well, Lady Mary, if you're good enough to get up, I'd appreciate it if you could show yourself to everyone before the festival ends." Reifus changed the topic forcefully and extended a hand to me.

"Oh, yes. I'll come with you to see the festival's conclusion," I said, tiredly taking the prince's hand and letting him pull me off the bed. And so, we all made our way to the scene of the after-party, to see the Academy Festival we'd put together through to the end.

# EPILOGUE

As the after-party Mary and her friends were attending was about to come to an end, a peculiar pairing went out to the lawn outside the party hall to discuss something.

"We must say, this was quite the enjoyable festival. Prince, we hear you planned this event? Impressive work, we say."

"No, Princess Emilia, I was the one charged with managing the event, but it was Lady Mary who came up with the idea."

"Oho, so it was that lass..." Emilia smirked like she'd just remembered something.

"May I ask you something, Princess Emilia?" Reifus said, his expression turning serious.

"What is it?" Emilia asked curiously.

"That group that's suspected to have gone after both you and mother... and that monster that ran amok in the arena. Your people have an idea as to who they might be, don't you?"

Several minutes of silence followed. The smile vanished from Emilia's face, and her expression turned more firm than she'd ever shown Mary and her friends.

"It is naught but conjecture, but if anyone were to go after us, it'd likely be extremists from that small country who snuck here. They see us as an enemy... No, forget we said anything. We should not speculate baselessly. Either way, we and our people will investigate this matter, so expect a report in the future."

"But..." Reifus refused to back down, but Emilia simply patted him on the back with a smile.

"Do not jump to conclusions. Let the adults handle the rest and focus on your role. See? They're looking for you."

Emilia jerked her chin in a direction, where the prince's reliable friends were looking

for him. Seeing one of them, a silver girl who was resolute but at the same time restless, Reifus smiled.

"Very well. I'll focus on what I can do right now."

"Good. Aaah, we did cause some trouble here, so we must go about too. We ran here, hoping to shirk those responsibilities, but... Haah, we dread nothing more than having to go to Ilysha's side..." Emilia dropped her shoulders.

"I'd say you brought that upon yourself," the prince said, bothered, and bowed to her before walking over to his friends.

After that, he grandly announced the conclusion of the festival to the people attending the after-party.

# AFTERWORD

Hello to both newcomers and existing readers. Thank you for picking up volume 2 of *Invincible Little Lady!* This is Chatsufusa, the author. Thank you sincerely for buying this volume. I'm proud to deliver it to all the readers.

Volume 2, though! I was so excited over the series being published, and we're already at the second volume. I'm generally considered a slow writer, so I expected to only put out a volume or two a year. This made me quite stressed over whether I'd meet this volume's deadline. In fact, when I first got the news about volume 2's publication, I didn't actually have enough pages yet... Keep that a secret, though!

But the more I wrote, the more motivated I was to keep writing. The temptation to keep going made the story grow bigger and bigger... which only moved me away from reaching the end of the volume, aha ha ha.

I recall thinking to myself, "Are you even trying to meet your deadline?!" And then when I worked on revisions with my editors to improve the story's quality, I got so into it I added even more pages... In the end, the volume ended up needing to be longer than the first to have a complete story! Suffice to say, I could stand to give myself a little more leeway, and I don't mean just on my deadlines.

But well, despite how much of a struggle it was, I do think I did a good job with volume 2. I hope you enjoy it. Now I can go back to that one online combat game I've been abstaining from all this time! Bravo!

But once I got back to it, I was hit with loss after loss and came to realize I kind of suck at it. It was horrible really. After losing too much, I could only laugh at myself, aha ha ha. But I won't give up! I'll keep going until I get good! And then I'll win! And so, I spent an entire month of repeated defeats with that kind of positive thinking.

I couldn't even count how many matches I'd lost already. Boo-hoo.

But things were bound to get better. And then I won! I got the win I wanted! Hooray! I felt so happy and accomplished when I did too. Like Lady Mary once said, it's only game over once you give up, and now I see the truth behind her words.

Now then, I've gone a bit off track, but I'd like to take the time to thank everyone involved in the making of this book. I'd like to thank Micro Magazine Publishing, who both published the series and allowed it to get to volume 2. And to my editor, Mr. I, who guided me when I was lost, helped polish up my novel, and gave me advice every step of the way. Thank you so much!

I'd also like to thank fuumi, who once again provided wonderful illustrations. Lady Mary looks so cool on the cover art. I had to wonder if she didn't accidentally destroy everything behind her... And also, fuumi gets the credit for everyone's wonderful outfit designs! I put that illustration as my wallpaper and admire it every day!

Lastly, I'd like to thank everyone who helped with the book's publishing, all the readers who support this series, and of course, you who picked up this book. Thank you so, so much!

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll be off. But I'll be dreaming of when we next meet, when volume 3 comes out!

# BONUS SHORT STORIES

## TRANS... FORM!

I was in my room, glaring fixedly at a certain object kept on display there—my full-body suit of white armor.

“You really can just keep it standing in place fully assembled, huh? It’s so convenient,” I mused, impressed.

“Yes, it makes it easy to store and transport,” Tutte agreed behind me.

“Seeing it set up like this makes me want to improve it even further,” I said.

“Improve it? How?”

“By making it transform!” I declared my dreams confidently.

“Transform...?” Tutte cocked her head, baffled. “Isn’t putting on your armor enough of a transformation?”

“Tch tch tch.” I closed my eyes and wagged my finger coolly to the cadence of my clicking tongue. “You just don’t get it, Tutte. Transforming is about more than just what you end up as. The process of transforming demands passion as well!” I clenched my fist excitedly.

“The process? Don’t we get it on quickly enough when I help you put it on?” she asked.

I sensed that Tutte clearly wasn’t on the same page as me, so I tried to get her excited and play along with me.

“There’s no passion in that! I need something more, like... dreamy! With production values! Like, for example, I say a cool line and swing my magic wand, then cool special effects and sparkles shine while each part attaches itself to me. That’s passion!” I professed enthusiastically, staring at my armor with glittering eyes. I looked at Tutte, confident that she’d get it now.

"Hmm... I'm afraid I don't quite understand, but for now, I'll help you put on the armor. You just stand there and relish in your 'passion,'" Tutte said, walking up to the armor.

"...Y-Yeah!" I turned my back to her, a bit unconvinced that this was what I'd wanted. Then I drew my Legendary Sword (Cringe) and held it up to the heavens.

"Trans! form!"

I swung the sword down and let Tutte put the armor on me. Once she was done, I exclaimed "Kaching!" and struck a pose. I then heard clapping behind me, presumably Tutte's, and froze up.

"Why does this feel like some kind of school play? This is like... really embarrassing..." I muttered to myself as I shivered in my armor, mortified.

"Really? Ah, maybe it didn't work because it lacked those 'production values' you were talking about. Maybe there should have been more sparkles involved?" Tutte proposed as she took the armor off of me.

"Sparkles..." I pondered. "Well, I guess using magic for production values would feel right. Okay, let's try it! I'll strike a transformation pose and cause an explosion behind me. That should make it convincing."

"Why does there need to be an explosion when you strike a pose?" Tutte asked me calmly.

"Well, that's because..." I paused, coming to my senses. "Huh. Now that you mention it, why *is* that a thing?" I then shook my head and brought out a sentimental explanation. "It's, uhh, because of passion!"

"Erm..." Tutte could only muster this vague response.

With the armor completely off me, I was back to square one and got in position for take two. "Okay, let's do it! Hmm, light effects would be good, right? Light!" I swung up my sword and chanted a spell, which made the tip of my sword light up.

Tutte and I stared at the tip of my sword as light filled the room. This wasn't exactly what I'd wanted.

"We need it to completely fill the room," I concluded. "Overliiiight!"

I chanted a large area illumination spell, filling the room with a dazzling glow. But when my eyes finally adjusted to it, I found I was still as unarmored as I'd been before casting it.

"Hey, Tutte, you forgot to put the armor on me," I complained.

"It was too bright! I couldn't see anything, Lady Mary. Why did you blind me like that?"

"Oh! Yeah, I guess that would happen... Sorry!"

We went on to make a few more pointless attempts, after which I decided to put my passionate dreams on hold. But my efforts weren't for naught, because in the days that followed, this attempt led to the creation of the cicada shell jutsu...

## WHO'S THE KING?!

"I'd like to play the King Game with everyone today!" I told everyone one day in our break room in the old campus building.

Everyone looked at me with surprise and confusion at my sudden declaration, but I didn't let that discourage me. This was all within my expectations.

I knew about the King Game from my past life, and while I had never experienced it myself, I was interested in trying it and finding out if it was fun. I'd never gotten to play it in my past life, after all, so I very much wanted to try it in this one. That said, I'd never been able to suggest that we do it in one of the school lounges since having the whole school watch us would have been too embarrassing, and if I'd asked to try it during a tea party at home, the grownups would have been able to spectate.

*But now that we have a room all to ourselves, we can do it! I can finally get to experience this obligatory game!*

"So what is this 'King Game', exactly?" Magiluka asked, sipping on her tea in a composed manner. She glanced at Reifus upon saying the word 'king', and he looked away with an uncomfortable smile.

I enthusiastically explained the rules of the game, but I ended up kind of skimming

over some of the rules since I'd never really played it myself.

"I see. So, it tests one's capacity for following instructions and also lets you experience giving orders to others," Reifus said, seeming impressed with the concept as he summed it up. "This really is the kind of game I'd expect you to come up with, Lady Mary. It's very thought provoking."

Magiluka nodded in agreement, and Safina and Sacher looked on in amazement as if to say, "Wow, that's so cool!"

*No, really, it's not half as impressive as you're making it out to be...*

I knew that denying it wouldn't get us anywhere, so I decided to let the matter slide so we could start the game. I had Tutte hold out a collection of sticks I'd prepared beforehand for today's game , with the bottom half of the sticks hidden.

"Okay, let's do it! And remember, the king's word is law," I said enthusiastically. "Okay, now. 'Who's the King?'"

They all did as I instructed and each drew one of the sticks.

"Ah!" Safina exclaimed, holding out the king's colored stick. "E-Erm, does this mean I'm the king?"

"Yep! Go on, Safina, give us an order!"

Everyone looked at her curiously, waiting to see what she'd say. But everyone's rapt attention made Safina look at all of us with fidgety, skittish eyes.

*Oh, adorable! Imagine such a cute king giving you orders. I'd obey!*

"E-Erm, uh... Ah... Well... Number two, should, uhm... give number four an order!"

We were all momentarily confused by this most unkingly of orders.

"Erm, I'm number two." I rose from my seat, realizing I had the stick marked with the number two.

"I'm number four." The prince raised his hand happily.

We all froze over.

*Wait, this is a little too much! Don't tell me Safina expected this! Oh, Safina, you're fearsome!*

Reifus got to his feet and awaited my order, and I could only look at him in a cold sweat. Sacher and Magiluka watched us curiously, and Safina kept looking up at me in anticipation.

*Th-This is just a game. It's pretend! Don't worry, Mary, you can say whatever you want. Give him an order, Mary!*

With a fake, stiff smile on my lips, I racked my ditzy brains in an attempt to come up with a good idea.

“Um... Sir Reifus, obey my order!”

“Yes.”

“P-Please... Erm... S-Sit back in your chair...”

As soon as I said it, I turned my head to avoid everyone’s questioning gazes, all of which were demanding to know whether that was my idea of an “order.” But I had to chicken out in the face of real power and authority!

The prince settled back into his chair.

“Okay, okay, next turn!” I pushed things along.

“Who’s the King?” We all called out at once and drew our sticks from Tutte.

“Oh, I’m the king this time!” Sacher raised his voice gleefully, holding up his stick. “What orders should I give? Hmm, all I can think of are things we do every day...”

Sacher prattled on, agonizing over his decision. Knowing Sacher, the only everyday activity occupying his otherwise vacant thoughts was weightlifting.

“Right, I’ve got it! Number three, here’s what you’re going to do to number one!”

Sacher’s words made my heart race, because I had the number three stick.

“Carry number one in your arms and run all the way to the new campus building and back!”

“I can’t do that!” I shrieked at him, slamming my number three stick on the table. After all, I wasn’t as athletically built as him, so running somewhere while carrying someone didn’t fit me.

“Huh? But I thought the king’s word was law. Those were your rules, Lady Mary,” he protested.

“Ngh, w-well, yes, but...”

“So, who’s number one?” Sacher moved things along as I stuttered. Eventually, one very red-faced Magiluka hesitantly raised her stick—namely, the number one stick...

“Lady Maaaary!” Sacher said viciously. “The king’s word is...?”

“Laaaaw!” I sprung into action, picking up Magiluka—who had gone red up to her ears and was covering her face with her hands—in my arms and bolting away.

With tears of desperation in my eyes, I ran over to the new campus building with her in my arms. I wish I could forget the way the students who spotted us all looked shocked and appalled.

This was how the King Game became marked in my memory as a very dark moment I would go on to forever deny and repress.



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The Invincible Little Lady: Volume 2  
by Chatsufusa

Translated by Roman Lempert  
Edited by Zubonjin

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Ebook edition 1.0: April 2023

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PtF by: traitorATZEN