



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

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Author's Note

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Chapter 1: When the Snow Falls

Ann looked up at the sky as something cold hit the tip of her nose.

Gray clouds hung low in the sky. Snow danced down from them as if overflowing drip by drip.

“Snow... It’s snowing already,” Ann muttered despairingly, rooted to the ground where she stood.

In contrast, a small fairy on the roof of the box-shaped wagon behind her did a little dance.

“Wa-hoo! It’s snowing, it’s snowing! I love snow! Isn’t it beautiful, Ann?”

The fairy’s blue eyes sparkled. The name of this fairy, who’d been born from a drop of lake water, was Mythrill Reed Pod.

“I can’t believe it...”

“It’s unbelievably beautiful!”

“This is the worst...”

Mythrill was over the moon, and Ann was in despair. Neither of them seemed to realize that their conversation didn’t match up. However, luckily there was

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another, rational person there with them.

“It’s all the same to me, but aren’t you going to give the customer her sugar sculpture?”

The fairy who lay on the driver’s seat with his long legs dangling off the side sat up.

At his reminder, Ann seemed to come to her senses with a gasp, and returned her gaze to the girl standing in front of her.

“Ah! I’m sorry. I was spacing out. So... Eh...?”

The girl, who wore a bushy fur cape, wasn’t even looking at Ann. She was gazing in the direction of the driver’s seat of the wagon with a captivated expression on her face.

Ann sighed quietly and turned to regard the object of the girl’s gaze.

---- Well, I guess it can’t be helped. With him around, you lose interest in looking at anything else.

The girl was looking at the fairy who sat on the driver’s seat. He had lightly tousled black hair and black eyes. The obsidian fairy’s appearance was coldly beautiful, just like the snow that had begun falling. The intermittently falling snowflakes landed on his eyelashes. Without thinking, Ann also lost her heart

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to that sight.

---- ...*How pretty.*

However, this fairy had a foul mouth.

“Scarecrow. Hurry up and hand over the sugar sculpture.”

Being called a scarecrow instantly wiped away all traces of Ann’s state of near-intoxication.

“Shall! I’ve told you not to call me ‘Scarecrow’!”

“Then hurry up. Dimwit.”

Saying only that, the obsidian fairy Shall Fen Shall laid back down.

Ann reclaimed her wits and called out loudly to the girl who was even now starrng at Shall in infatuation.

“Excuse me!”

“Ha-- Eh? Oh.”

The girl seemed to come to her senses at the sound of Ann’s voice, and focused her

gaze on Ann once more. Ann smiled with relief.

“Here you are. The price is two cres.”

Ann showed the girl the large, heavy sugar sculpture she clutched in both hands.

The design was of a bouquet of spring flowers of various colors. It was a flashy sugar sculpture. However, the arrangement and shading was cleverly devised to ensure that the various types of flowers wouldn't strike a dissonant chord with one another. Ann had made the sugar sculpture after receiving the girl's order one week earlier.

The girl had asked for “A beautiful sugar sculpture of more than ten different types of spring flowers gathered into a bouquet.”

Sugar sculptures made from silver sugar were used in a variety of ceremonies and events. They were said to repel bad luck and summon good luck. Silver sugar was a holy food that was also called “the sweet promise of good luck.” The more beautiful the form of the sugar sculpture, the greater the good fortune that would be bestowed upon its owner.

Ann was one of the sugar craftsmen and women who created these sugar sculptures.

The expression on the girl's face when she first caught sight of the sugar

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sculpture spoke volumes as to the quality of Ann's skills.

"It's magnificent."

The girl spoke the words of admiration as if she were surprised. Then she looked behind her at a fairy in the shape of a young man whom she'd brought with her.

The fairy had a gangly frame and was only a bit taller than the girl. Overall, he looked rather weak.

"You. Take the sugar sculpture."

The obedient-looking fairy took the sugar sculpture from Ann as ordered.

The fairy said in a voice heavy with admiration, "This is the best sugar sculpture that you've had made for your birthday in the past few years, mistress."

"Perhaps," the girl replied nonchalantly, thrusting out one hand towards Ann.

"Well, here's your payment. Take it."

With a cheap-sounding metallic clink ten copper coins were dropped into the palm of Ann's hand. Ann tilted her head.

"That should be enough, right?"

“But the agreed-upon price was two cres...”

“I ordered from you because I heard you were skilled. But you’re not even a silver sugar master, are you? On the market in this area, no one will pay more than one cres for a sugar sculpture made by anyone other than a silver sugar master. One cres is the most anyone would pay a regular sugar craftsman. Take it and be grateful.”

“But! A promise is a promise...”

The girl smiled sickeningly sweetly at Ann’s attempt to protest.

“Well, I suppose I don’t need to buy it...”

After being told this, Ann found herself speechless.

If the girl didn’t purchase the sugar sculpture, the silver sugar she’d used and the time she put into making it would completely go to waste.

“Hey, hey, hey! You, human girl! I’ve been listening and you’re being pretty stingy, aren’t you? I, Mythrill Reed Pod-sama, won’t stay silent any longer...!”

Standing on top of the roof of the wagon, Mythrill raised his voice and crossed his arms.

“Shut up, Mythrill Reed Pod. You’ll just make things worse,” Shall said,

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interrupting Mythrill. Then he sat up on the driver's seat once more.

“What was that?! Don't act so haughty when all you're doing is laying around!”

“You're not being any more helpful by raising a fuss.”

“You're rude to the core----!!”

Ignoring the shrieking Mythrill, Shall jumped down to the ground. The single wing on his back was like half-transparent silk. It flowed gracefully to the back of his knees. He moved slowly, as if it were a great labor to do so, and came to stand beside Ann. Somehow, there was something polished about even this listless movement.

“Are you going to take it back?” Shall asked Ann quietly. His voice was quiet, but it had an edge to it. Together with his voice, a cold silver shimmer spread across his wing.

“I can made her return it *and* still pay the two cres. What do you want to do?”

The fairy accompanying the girl must have sensed Shall's true power and his threatening aura. The single wing on the other fairy's back began to twitch anxiously.

“I'm not sure what your intentions are, but this isn't any way to treat

customers, is it~~?”

“We’re only matching our behavior to yours,” Shall retorted matter-of-factly.

Honestly, Ann didn’t want to sell a sugar sculpture to this kind of person. But this sugar sculpture had been made according to the specifications of the girl in front of her’s order. Ann felt that if she didn’t sell it to this girl and instead tried to sell it to someone else, she’d be pushing off an unsatisfactory product on that person. That would be rude to the person who bought it.

Furthermore, if they indeed matched their behavior to the girl’s as Shall had said, they’d be behaving as cowardly as she was, which was also distasteful to Ann. Finally, she shook her head.

“No... It’s fine, Shall.”

Right now, she needed every bit of money she could get. Ann turned back to face the girl and looked her straight in the eyes.

“What? So you have something to say?”

“No. I understand. One cres is fine. Thank you for your purchase.”

Under Ann’s straight-forward gaze the girl shrunk back for a moment. But then she promptly snorted derisively, as if to cover for her momentary

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weakness. Then she turned her back and briskly walked away.

Before turning to go the fairy who'd accompanied the girl timidly looked away from Shall. "I'm sorry," he apologized in a small voice, bowing his head to Ann. Then he quickly hurried after the girl.

Through the glimmering curtain of falling snow, the figures of the girl and the fairy disappeared off into the distance.

The direction they'd retreated in was lined on both sides by high red brick walls. It was a narrow alleyway. The alleyway was gently winding and sloped uphill. At its far end the alleyway opened up into a bustling city street. These streets were wide and paved with gravel, and lined on both sides with shops with broad frontage.

The girl from before seemed to have been the daughter of one of these affluent shopkeepers.

Starting about ten years ago, this area had begun to flourish economically as an intermediary in the distribution of woolen goods produced in the north. By now it had developed into a large, thriving city on the same scale as Lewiston.

This was Westhall, the capital of Sharmeigh Province.

It was adjoining to Harrington Province, where the imperial city of Lewiston was located. The nobleman who ruled this province, Earl Downing, was was a

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trusted retainer who had displayed outstanding ability and efficiency in service to the previous king.

Ann put the copper coins in her hand into the pocket of her dress. Then she shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

“It’s probably only natural that the competition would be severe for a sugar craftsman who’s not even a silver sugar master. Besides, this is the foothold of the Silver Sugar Viscount.”

“You’re right. Damn it! That bastard Hugh----!!”

Mythrill cast a glare in the direction of the bustling city street.

With a troubled look on her face, Ann muttered, “Um... But, it’s not as if Hugh’s done anything wrong, exactly...”

Hugh was the name of the current Silver Sugar Viscount. The Silver Sugar Viscount was a silver sugar master who exclusively worked for the royal family. You could say that the Silver Sugar Viscount stood above all sugar craftsmen, silver sugar masters included.

Due to a strange turn of events, Ann had become acquainted with the Silver Sugar Viscount, Hugh Mercury, two months earlier. He’d helped her in her mission to become a silver sugar master.

However, in the end, Ann hadn't succeeded in becoming a silver sugar master this year.

The spires of Westhall Castle could be seen rising above the tops of the houses lining the city streets. Those were probably lookout towers. If you turned your eyes to the west of those black stone spires, another nearly identical structure came into sight. However, these spires were made of white stone.

On the opposite shore of a small lake from Westhall Castle, where the provincial lord resided, stood an almost identical white castle. The name of this castle was Silver Westhall. It was the residence of the Silver Sugar Viscount.

“We won't be able to camp out tonight like we've been doing.”

This year would be over in only a month and a half.

Snow was falling incessantly from the narrow slice of sky visible above the walls of the alleyway. The ground below Ann's feet felt hard; it was beginning to freeze. The sun set early in the winter. Even now, their surroundings were beginning to grow dark.

Snow would likely pile up on the ground overnight.

Ann clenched the sides of the cape that she wore over her dress closer together. The lining of the cape had feather down carefully sewn into it. The outer layer

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was tanned leather decorated with a pattern of gilded plants. It was a high-class product, with exceptional heat-preservation abilities. The cape was a luxurious item that didn't match up with Ann's station in life.

“This cape has been a real life-saver. I'll have to remember to thank Cat.”

Ann had obtained this cape in Lewiston, just before coming to Westhall. She'd assisted a silver sugar master with the nickname of 'Cat,' whom she'd met by coincidence, with his work and received the cape in lieu of payment.

Thanks to this cape, Ann's travels had become much more pleasant.

The cold winter weather had no effect whatsoever on the fairies, who couldn't feel the cold. They would probably be fine even if they camped out in the middle of a blizzard.

However, it was impossible for the human Ann to camp out while it was snowing, even if she did have this remarkable cape.

“Let's go, Shall, Mythrill. We'll have to stay in an inn tonight. Hopefully we can find somewhere cheap.”

While speaking, Ann turned towards the old, worn out wagon.

This box-shaped wagon was the same one that she'd lost once to hijacking. However she'd later discovered it abandoned on the outskirts of Lewiston. This box-shaped wagon was the very embodiment of her memories of the 15 years she'd spent travelling with her mother. Even if it was old and shabby,

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the wagon coming back to her made her happier than anything else could have.

Without climbing onto the driver's seat, Ann took the horse's bridle in her hand.

The far end of the alleyway was a gentle downwards slope that widened bit by bit as it went. Ann lead the horse in that direction.

“Alright! We get to stay at an inn! I love watching from the window as snow falls outside,” Mythrill said cheerfully from the roof of the wagon. Ann smiled as well.

“Me too. If you're watching the snow from inside a warm room, you can concentrate on enjoying its beauty.”

Ann led the horses, slowly moving the wagon forward. Shall caught up with Ann, who'd already started walking, and asked, “What about the money? Do you have enough?”

His countenance was nonchalant. But Ann knew that Shall was well aware of how little money she had left and was worried about her.

Ann's income was meager at best. There weren't many customers willing to buy sugar sculptures from a 15 year old girl who wasn't even a silver sugar master. There were customers who knew her skill and would place orders with her from time to time. Even so, her fees were often haggled down like they'd been by the girl just now.

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“Don’t worry about it.’ ...Is what I want to say, but I don’t have quite that much money. So we’ll have to stay somewhere cheap.”

It wasn’t that Ann particularly wanted to indulge in luxury. As long as she could get out of the cold, she didn’t care where they stayed.

---- But Soul Ascension Day is just over a month away. And right after that it will be the end of the year...

From here on out, the temperature would drop by the day. It was necessary to secure a room in an inn where they could stay out of the cold for the winter. Furthermore, Ann would soon need to start working on the sugar sculpture with which she’d send her mother off to heaven on Soul Ascension Day. If possible, she wanted to find a place to stay and then relax and take her time making a splendid sugar sculpture.

Afterwards she wanted to spend the new year’s holidays at the inn.

It was for the sake of Shall and Mythrill, who travelled with her. She wanted to give them even a little bit of a treat, and let them spend the holiday comfortably. Ann wanted the three of them to celebrate the new year together pleasantly.

---- Well, before you can get anything else, you first need to have money.

Remembering how much money she currently had in her possession, Ann

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suddenly felt ashamed of herself.

“Why don’t I earn some money?” Shall said suddenly.

Ann widened her eyes at this unexpected statement.

“Earn money? How?”

“There are various ways.”

“You’re not thinking of doing something dangerous, are you?!”

“Do you really think I’m that violent? Do I look as if I would go around robbing people?”

Ann was fixed with an unpleasant glare.

He looked perfectly capable of going around robbing people without a second thought. However, instead of saying this, Ann responded with a stiff face, “I wasn’t thinking anything of the sort. It’s just, your special ability is your physical strength, so...”

“If you looked for some humans with too much time and money on their hands and offered to lend me to them for a night, you’d be able to earn a lot of money.”

Shall spoke the outrageous suggestion as if it were no big deal. Ann grew even

paler.

“W-w-what are you saying?! Do you even understand the meaning of what you just said?! That’s the same as selling your body!!”

“Indeed.”

“No, not ‘indeed’!! I’d die before asking you to do something like that, so you must never do it either!!”

“Why not?”

Asked directly, Ann felt herself start to blush. It wasn’t a question one should ask a purehearted 15 year old girl.

What kind of state must Shall’s sense of virtue[1] be in to suggest such a thing? After living for more than a hundred years, he must have tossed those notions aside long ago. Just trying to imagine it, Ann paled once again. She didn’t want to think of such things.

At this Mythril, who wore a triumphant expression, waved a finger at Shall reproachfully.

“‘Why’?! Shall Fen Shall, there’s no way a guy like you who doesn’t know the first thing about women’s hearts could do it with a human partner.”

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“Whether you understand them or not, what you *do* with them is the same either way.”

“No way---- It’s totally different.”

“It’s all the same.”

“In any case! That’s not the point at issue here, you two----!!!” Ann shouted with all her strength.

“This is a matter of dignity! For the time being, I will worry about the money. You don’t have to worry about such things, Shall. ...Rather, don’t worry about them! Please!”

At Ann’s forceful words, Shall made a slightly stunned face.

“You sure are stubborn.”

This was a bit different from simple stubbornness. Ann felt the strength leaving her body.

If Shall had offered to make and sell bread, or repair shoes to earn some money, Ann might have asked for his help. However she had the feeling that all of his ideas for methods of making money would be equally ridiculous. She was too afraid to ask.

They reached the bottom of the hill. A few brick buildings stood here and there.

The spaces between the buildings were wide. In these open spaces everything from broken wagons to old farm tools were piled together in giant trash heaps.

As Ann looked around, her eyes came to rest on one building in particular.

That building was horizontally long. It was two stories tall, and off to the side stood a stable with a simple roof. Furthermore, a wooden sign with a picture of a hat and boots carved into it was hung from the brick wall. That was the symbol for an inn.

There was no doubt that this was an inn, but there was an air of extreme dilapidation surrounding it. Half of the tiles had slipped off of the slanted roof, and those that remained seemed as if they would come falling down in an avalanche at any moment. But, Ann was in no position to be fussy.

Ann pulled the wagon to a stop next to the stables. Then, accompanied by Shall and Mythrill, she entered the inn. The air in the combination bar and dining room on the first floor was heavy with dust and the stench of old cooking oil.

On the other side of the counter stood a boney, balding innkeeper. When Ann asked him the price to stay, he responded that it was 30 vine per person per night. Then he stared at Shall bizarrely.

It would cost 90 vine for the three of them to stay one night. The cres that Ann had just received would all but disappear.

After that, she'd only have two cres and some odd change left.

Even so, there was no way they could camp out in the snow. With the money she had now, they could spend three days at the inn. Deciding that it would all work out if she could earn some more money during that time, Ann took the room.

The room that they were lead to was dark. The wood-shuttered window was nailed shut and wouldn't open.

Furthermore, the room contained only one bed, which filled it completely. The room was so tiny that, standing shoulder-to-shoulder looking down at the bed, Ann and Shall couldn't even have changed places without touching.

“You can't see anything from the window...” Mythrill muttered, sounding depressed.

“Sorry, Mythrill. If I earn some money, we can stay in a nice inn next time,” Ann said, looking around the room. The dead body of a giant spider lay under the bed. Ann shuddered slightly in disgust.

Just then, a hesitant knock sounded on the door.

“Yes?”

Following Ann’s response, the door slowly opened. An old woman timidly peaked her head in. The old woman wore a plain woolen shawl draped over her head. She seemed familiar to Ann.

“Granny. You’re the person from a few weeks ago, aren’t you?”

Not long after they’d arrived in Westhall, this old woman had come to order a sugar sculpture from Ann.

She’d placed her order two weeks before the merchant’s daughter who’d come to pick up her sugar sculpture today. Ann had promised to have the sugar sculpture ready for her two weeks ago. And yet the agreed upon date came and went without any sign of the old woman.

Thinking that it couldn’t be helped, Ann had left the sugar sculpture she’d made inside her wagon, where it was still sitting now.

“I saw your wagon outside. The innkeeper told me that you were staying in this room. I’m sorry for taking so long to come for the sugar sculpture, young lady.”

The old woman pulled ten copper coins from the pocket of her threadbare dress.

“It’s all here. One cres, just like we agreed.”

“Wah! Thank you, granny.”

Ann gratefully accepted the coins that were held out to her.

“I’ve got your sugar sculpture in my wagon. Granny, let’s go down to the first floor together. You two come down with us. After I give granny her sugar sculpture, we can have something light to eat.”

Thanks to the unexpected income, Ann felt the tension in her heart ease a bit. She’d been planning to just eat some dried berries and go to sleep tonight, but with the money she’d just made they could probably afford to at least have some soup.

There were only two or three groups of customers currently seated in the joint bar and dining room; it was all but deserted. Ann had the old woman and the two fairies wait there while she brought the sugar sculpture in from her wagon.

“How’s this? As requested, I created a pair of winter cranes.” [2]

Ann placed a sugar sculpture of an pair of birds on the table.

The two white birds had slender, delicate legs. Their long necks were gently lowered, and their beaks were close together, as if the two birds were whispering to each other.

Winter cranes were migratory birds. At the beginning of winter, they migrated from the continent to the kingdom of Highland. Once these birds chose a mate, they would spend their entire lives as a pair. As such, winter cranes were a popular motif among lovers and married couples.

The innkeeper and the other patrons all seemed surprised by the sugar sculpture that Ann had carried in. The detailed workmanship on the birds' wings was eye-catching.

The old woman nodded several times, apparently highly satisfied.

“How lovely. Yes, it's beautiful. My husband was always asking me to have winter cranes made for him. It's perfect.”

“Is it your husband's birthday, or something?” Ann asked without thinking. The old woman smiled sadly.

“No, this sugar sculpture is for Soul Ascension Day. Since long ago he was always telling me that he wanted to be sent off with a sugar sculpture of winter cranes. But all the sugar craftsmen told me it was impossible to have something like that made for less than one cres. So I sold my wedding ring in order to obtain the necessary one cres. It wasn't worth nearly what I'd hoped it would be. I'm sorry for being so late with the payment. Even so, you were the only person who would take the order for one cres. They all said that one cres was the absolute rock-bottom price for a sugar sculpture in Westhall.

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Furthermore, you've created such a beautiful sculpture. Thank you."

Hearing that one cres was the absolute lowest price for a sugar sculpture on the market in this area, Mythrill clucked his tongue indignantly.

"That rich girl! How dare she lie so that she could buy Ann's sugar sculpture for the absolute lowest possible price?!"

At the old woman's words, Ann also realized that the merchant's daughter had pulled a fast one on her.

However, Ann was more concerned about the present situation of the old woman who was staring at the sugar sculpture lovingly.

The sleeves and hem of the old woman's dress were threadbare and the entire garment was covered in stains. Her woolen shawl was likewise thin and worn out. Even though she was in such a state, she'd held on to that ring all this time. It must have been precious to her. And yet she'd said she'd sold that ring in order to buy this sugar sculpture. For the sake of her now dead mate.

The old woman's hands, which had been warped by time and hard work to resemble dried tree branches, looked painful. From the sight of her slight frame, it was easy to guess that she didn't have much to eat.

"Well then, I will take this sugar sculpture and be on my way."

The old woman stood to go. Hurriedly Ann pulled five copper coins from the pocket of her dress.

“Oh, I forgot. Wait, granny. Here’s your change.”

Ann forcefully handed the copper coins back to the old woman. Surprised, Mythrill said in a loud voice, “Ann?!”

Clutching the sugar sculpture to her chest with one arm, the old woman looked back at Ann in astonishment.

“No, I’m pretty sure I only gave you one cres...”

“I made a mistake calculating the amount of silver sugar I’d need to make this sculpture. It only costs five vine.”

“Eh? But for such a big sugar sculpture... And besides, one cres is the rock-bottom price...”

“I’m not even a silver sugar master, so I don’t make such expensive sugar sculptures. Nor am I a sugar craftsman from Westhall, so the market prices here have nothing to do with me. Here, take your change.”

At Ann’s cheerful smile, the old woman finally seemed to catch on. After guiltily putting the coins into the pocket of her dress, she mumbled, “Thank you. I can buy enough flour to last me a month with this.”

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After watching the old woman slowly hobble out of the inn, Ann took a seat at the table. She was divided between thinking that she'd done something very foolish and being glad that she had.

Shall was sitting in the chair directly across from her. Looking at his face, she got the impression that he wanted to say something.

“What?”

“It's nothing.”

Seated with his legs crossed and his elbow on the table, resting his chin on his hand, Shall suddenly looked away.

---- He probably wanted to say something like 'Idiot' or 'You really don't think, do you?'

Ann looked up at the ceiling. She was convinced that she'd done the right thing, and that was enough for her.

However, such was not the case for Mythrill. He leapt up onto the table with his eyebrows drawn up in indignation.

“Ann! Why did you cut the price in half?!”

Ann shifted her gaze to Mythrill and smiled.

“It’s not like that. That sugar sculpture really cost five vine.”

“You’re lying, you dummy! If you keep doing things like this, you’re the one who’s going to be left out to dry!”

“It’s fine. I’ll make sure to get full price from the people who can afford it.”

“It’s not fine!”

Mythrill decisively thrust his tiny pointer finger out towards Ann.

“I’ve been telling you since a long ago to be aware of your own financial situation, haven’t I? Are you really in a position to be worrying about that old woman? I’d be surprised if you even had three cres to your name----”

Suddenly Mythrill was cuffed on the back of the head, cutting off his complaining mid-sentence.

The one who’d smacked him was Shall.

“Ow! Just what do you think you’re doing, hitting people’s heads with the back of your hand?!”

“If you don’t like the back of my hand, I could flick you instead.”

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“Given the difference in our sizes, if you flicked me I’d die for sure!”

“Probably.”

“You said so, knowing I’d surely die?! You demon!!”

“So you say. In any case, your voice is too loud. You’re going to stir up trouble.”

Now that Shall pointed it out, it was certainly true. Ann was also taken aback. With a severe expression on his face, Shall was warily eyeing the inn’s proprietor, who stood on the far side of the bar counter.

An unpleasant smile appeared on the innkeeper’s face. He put the glass he’d been wiping down on the bar, came out from behind the counter and approached the table where Ann was sitting.

“Say, customer. You do have enough money to pay the lodging fees, right?”

Unlike his previous efficient and professional demeanor, his current tone of voice was far too casual.

“Of course I do. Since the rate is 30 vine per person per night, the total for three people for one night is 90 vine.”

“That’s not right. Like I told you from the beginning, the rate is five cres per person per night.”

Ann was dumbfounded by these words.

“I heard no such thing. I’m sure you said 30 vine per person per night.”

“Then you must have misheard. The rate is five cres.”

“It’s got to be illegal to charge such a ridiculous price!”

“Oh, don’t you know? The rate at high class inns is always four or five cres. Therefore, this price is perfectly reasonable. This rate isn’t far enough outside the normal parameters that I would be punished even if you petitioned the ruler of this province.”

“Then I won’t be staying in such a ‘high class inn.’ I’m leaving.”

“That’s fine, but in that case I’ll have to charge a cancellation fee. You’ve already entered the room, after all. The cancellation fee is five cres.”

Infuriated, Ann stood up suddenly and called out in a harsh voice, “If you say such cruel things, I really will petition the ruler of this province!”

The innkeeper shrugged his shoulders.

“Go ahead. You’re the one who misheard the price. I have every right to charge a cancellation fee. You, however, will most likely be punished for trying to stay in an inn even though you didn’t have enough money to pay. You might even be thrown in jail.”

Why was the innkeeper saying such outrageous things? Ann couldn’t understand it.

Even so, his evil intentions were abundantly clear.

Ann glared at him with all her might, and the innkeeper chuckled heartily.

“Don’t make such a scary face, young lady. I’m not a bad guy. I’ll do you a favor and overlook the fact that you misheard. I’ll even let you stay here tonight as planned. But, in exchange, give me that pet fairy you’ve got there. If you do that, I’ll waive your lodging fees for tonight.”

While speaking, the innkeeper turned his gaze towards Shall.

Shall’s facial expression didn’t change one bit. He merely regarded the innkeeper scornfully.

At long last, Ann caught on to the innkeeper’s true intentions.

Shall was like a jewel of the highest caliber. There was no doubt that the

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innkeeper had been calculating from the moment they'd first stepped through the door how much money he could get by selling Shall.

The other person was a defenseless little girl. He'd just need to threaten her a bit; it would be a piece of cake. Likely that had been the innkeeper's plan for getting his hands on this pet fairy.

So he'd hit Ann with lodging fees that pushed the boundaries of common sense. Although the proposed lodging fees were just barely within the realm of reason, the innkeeper knew from listening to Mythrill that Ann couldn't pay them. And in the unlikely event that Ann really did bring the issue up before the provincial lord, the innkeeper would likely be able to escape punishment by claiming that the rate he'd demanded was within the usual sphere.

Shall expressionlessly held out the palm of his hand below the table. Particles of light were already beginning to gather there. Because Shall's appearance was terribly beautiful people often misunderstood, but he was no pet fairy. His fighting skills were so impressive that he'd been sold as a warrior fairy. Brandishing the sword that he could create out of light, even if he were attacked by a group of ten humans he'd be able to fend them off easily.

The sparkling light particles gathering in Shall's hand were the beginning stages of the process by which he created that sword.

Anger was welling up inside of Ann uncontrollably at the cowardice of her opponent.

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---- He wants me to “give” him Shall? What does he think Shall is?

Just then, the hem of Ann’s dress was ruffled by a sudden gust of cold air. However, Ann’s heart was too preoccupied to spare a thought for the source of that breeze.

Only Shall calmly glanced towards the front door of the inn, from where the wind had blown in. Then he frowned slightly, and as if suddenly remembering something he lightly waved his hand, dispersing the particles of light. Shall had stopped preparing to summon his sword. Even so, he continued to sit calmly at the table.

“I get it now-- I’m on to your scheme! But, it’s too bad for you. He doesn’t belong to me, or anything like that. So, in the first place, I couldn’t ‘give him to you’ even if I wanted to! He goes where he wants to and doesn’t go places he doesn’t want to!”

Ann slammed the palm of her hand down on the table forcefully.

“I won’t forgive you for talking about him like an object!”

“She’s right! If you use a fundamentally no-good guy like him, you’ll regret it until the day you die!” Mythrill shouted, trying seriously to help in his own way.

“What are you saying, young lady? What you’re saying makes no sense. In any case, hand over that pet fairy’s wing.”

“I don’t have something like that. Shall’s wing belongs to him.”

“Stop screwing with me, girl, and take it out!”

Finally showing his true colors, the innkeeper took a menacing step towards Ann.

“That’s far enough.”

A voice as hard as steel rang out from behind the innkeeper. Then a gently arching sword was pressed against the innkeeper’s throat.

The innkeeper gulped in fear at the sight of the sword that had suddenly appeared against his throat.

“W-what?! What do you think you’re doing?!”

Ann glanced over the innkeeper’s shoulder, equally shocked.

Standing behind the innkeeper holding the gently curved sword to his throat was a dark-skinned young man with white hair and silver eyes. His frame was lithe, calling to mind a giant feline. There was no way Ann could forget someone with such a unique appearance.

“Ah... You... You’re Salim-san, aren’t you?”

Mythrill, too, was staring up at the dark-skinned young man in astonishment. Salim grinned faintly.

“Good evening. It’s been a while. And so we meet again, Ann.”

“Why are you here...? No, more importantly... The fact that you’re here means...”

Just then, Ann was tightly embraced from behind by a brawny arm.

“Yo! Long time no see, Ann! I see you’re stirring up trouble everywhere you go, as usual!”

Astounded by the sound of that familiar, cheerful voice, Ann craned her neck to look behind her.

“Hugh?!”

The young man embracing Ann ran his free hand roughly through his unruly brown hair. He wore a simple but finely tailored jacket. Mingling with the charismatic charm in his smiling brown eyes was a hint of something wild and untamed.

“You really are a scrawny little thing, aren’t you?”

While speaking, Hugh affectionately messed up Ann’s wheat-colored hair.

Ann was shocked into silence by the sudden appearance of these two unexpected characters.

However, it seemed that Shall had noticed them a short while ago. He sat calmly, propping his chin up with his hand.

“Coming strolling nonchalantly into a place like this, you must have more free time on your hands than I thought.”

Hugh smiled brightly in the face of Shall’s obvious displeasure.

“No, no, nothing of the sort. In the middle of a whirlwind of busy activity, I barely found the time to come running over here, you see. Shouldn’t you be at least a little touched and grateful, Shall? Even though you noticed us enter, you did a pretty job of ignoring us.”

While speaking, Hugh hugged Ann even more tightly against his chest.

“You’re going to break that scarecrow in half. Let go.”

“Oh? Don’t tell me you’re jealous?”

“Who’s jealous of whom?”

Shall was obviously displeased.

At long last, Ann’s brain started moving again, and she jumped slightly in shock. Hugh’s body was pressed tightly against her back.

“Wah! H-hugh?! Let me go!”

When Ann began struggle against him, Hugh released her without a fight. Then he said, in an obviously fake wounded tone of voice, “You guys really don’t have even the least bit of respect for me, do you~~?”

Ann flew to Shall’s side and grabbed onto the end of his sleeve while he sat and continued to observe with a serene expression on his face.

The innkeeper, with Salim’s sword still pressed up against his neck, asked in a shaky voice, “W-who are you people? Don’t tell me you’re robbers? ...I-if you do something like this, you’ll be caught by the provincial lord’s guards right away.”

“The provincial lord? Yes, I’m what you might call friends with that old guy, so it’ll be fine.”

Hugh came to stand in front of the innkeeper, losing all traces of his previous joking demeanor. His expression turned harsh, and he declared, “My name is

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Hugh Mercury. I hold the title of Silver Sugar Viscount.”

Hearing this name, the innkeeper grew even paler.

“That old acquaintance of mine is named Earl Downing. He’s very enthusiastic about maintaining the peace here in Westhall. The rumor that there’s a cruel innkeeper who has been swindling weak-looking travelers out of their possessions hurt him deeply. So he said to me, ‘If you find proof of such an evildoer, please administer the death penalty swiftly and surely.’”

Hugh grinned wickedly.



“Since I witnessed it personally, the old man will surely not object. Not even if I execute you right here and now.”

The other customers in the dining room stood up in fear and fled to the corner of the room.

The innkeeper’s legs began to shake.

“Do it, Salim.”

At the ice-cold tone of Hugh’s order, Ann unconsciously covered her mouth with both hands. Even so, her voice slipped out.

“You can’t do something like that!”

The sword slid across the innkeeper’s throat.

The innkeeper’s legs gave out and he fell to the floor. He didn’t move.

“It can’t be... No way. No matter how horrible he may have been, the death penalty is...”

As she muttered this, Ann too looked as if she would collapse at any moment. Standing up from his chair, Shall stood at her side, supporting her trembling body.

Ann heard Shall's voice coming from above her head.

“Scarecrow, look closely. He's just unconscious.”

At these words, Ann examined the fallen innkeeper. He'd landed on his face on the floor, and his eyes were rolled back into his head, but the wound on his neck was merely a scratch. It seemed he'd lost consciousness due to fear.

Ann clung to Shall's arm once more, this time in relief.

To Salim, who was still brandishing his sword, Hugh ordered, “Salim, go call the guards that are patrolling nearby. Hand this guy over to them. When you're done with that, come back to the castle.”

Salim nodded and disappeared through the inn's front door. Watching him go, Hugh shook his head lightly, as if to dispel his own severe demeanor. Then he turned back to Ann.

“I'm sorry, Ann. I ended up scaring you.”

“Hugh... What on earth are you doing here? You're also on patrol?”

“No... The truth is, I don't have the right to do that sort of thing. In the end, I'm only the Silver Sugar Viscount, after all.”

Continuing on, Hugh said, “I've seen this guy in action and know what he's

like, so I had to deal with him one way or another. In any case, a rumor reached my ears that a young girl selling sugar sculptures had appeared in Westhall, accompanied by a fairy of unparalleled beauty. Thinking that it might be little-miss-somebody, I came looking for you. Particularly because it's snowing tonight. I thought that, since you couldn't possibly camp out tonight, I'd be able to find you easily if I looked in all the inns in town."

Then, in a comically exaggerated gesture of chivalry, Hugh gave a sweeping bow.

"At last I've found you, Lady Ann Halford. Please allow me to invite you to Silver Westhall Castle."

Chapter 1 -- END

Translator's Notes:

[1] 貞操観念 - I translated this as 'sense of virtue' but in case that term sounds a little vague what she's really talking about are sexual morals. Shall nonchalantly offers to go off and do prostitution and can't figure out why Ann is horrified by the idea. This makes Ann think that, probably because of the things he was forced to do during his years as a slave, Shall must have long ago given up on society's conventional moral stance regarding sexuality.

[2] 冬告げ鳥 - I translated the name of this bird as 'winter crane' but the literal meaning of the bird's name in Japanese is 'bird that heralds the beginning of winter.' In any case, this is a made up bird that exists only in the world of this story.



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

Story by Mikawa Miri

Illustrations by Aki

Scans: Comizip

Translation: Raincraft

Proofread: Fallingwind & Mizouji

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Chapter two - Duke Philax's summons

Stretching out the window was the fourth floor balcony. Standing there, Ann thought out loud, "Amazing."

A faint dark forest. In its center was a lake with the surface of a black mirror. The scenery of the quietly falling snow on the dim evening forest felt solemn, as if rejecting the presence of man.

Ann had never seen a forest or a lake from such a high place before. As she glanced down at her feet, she felt a chill from the top of her head as though she might suddenly slip off.

Compared to the coldness of the balcony, the room was as warm as spring. Inside, plenty of wood had been thrown into the fireplace. The bed was so wide, it could fit four people Ann's size lined side by side, and it had pillars sporting from each of its four corners to construct a heavy-looking canopy.

Upon returning to the room, Ann looked the bed up and down and muttered half in shock, "Those nobles... Just how many people do they intend to share such a huge bed with? And to begin with, though the bed is indoors, is a canopy even necessary?"

Just before the day had come to a close, Ann, along with Hugh and the others, left the shabby inn.

Then, steering her box-shaped wagon to follow Salim's horse, they headed towards Silver Westhall Castle.

When Hugh said he wanted to invite her to his castle, Ann was taken aback. Why would he go to the trouble of finding and even inviting her? She couldn't

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grasp the true meaning behind it.

Still, she took him up on his offer. Frankly, she was grateful.

The city of Westhall stretched over a gradual slope, at its top becoming an open plateau, where a natural lake was located. On each side of the lake stood the identically shaped Westhall and Silver Westhall castle: black on one side and white on the other, though different in color.

The pair was of truly refined structure, with both the lake and the forest taken in by their scenery.

Both castles were new. They were built fifteen years ago, after the civil war, which was why the gates did not even have the stern portcullis necessary for battle.

Their purpose was to serve as a symbol of authority, and for the castle lord may live comfortably.

To Ann, who lived the life of a vagabond for the fifteen years since she was born, this was an unfamiliar world. Having never seen a castle this close before, she was overwhelmed by its enormous size.

Passing through the gate as urged, Ann entered the castle's outer block, where she entrusted her box-shaped wagon.

After passing yet another gate, the castle tower soared within the inner quarters. The stones of the tower's walls had been smoothly polished, beautifully displaying their chalk-white color.

Inside it, Ann, Shall, and Mythrill were each assigned their own room.

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The three had always slept where they could see one another, so when they were led to separate rooms, Ann felt slightly disheartened. But Shall was in the room next door, and Mythrill was in the one next to that.

I'm not lonely, she told herself as she entered the room.

"Is there anything you need? If so, I shall arrange for it."

The one who called out was a crisp-looking fairy the size of a child, and had the appearance of an adult woman. Upon entering the room with Ann, the woman immediately proceeded to brew some hot tea.

With the refreshing smell of dried herbs, it was incredibly delicious.

In the Kingdom of Highland where Ann lived, there also lived fairies. Born in nature, they wore a pair of wings on their backs, and some even possessed special abilities.

However, those fairies were miserable. They were being captured by humans and forced into labor. By tearing off one of the wings that was their life source and using it to threaten them, they could be controlled at one's will.

Ann didn't want to enslave a fairy like that. That's why to her, Shall and Mythrill were friends of equal footing.

The fairy crouched to grab more kindling to throw into the fireplace, lifting the heavy-looking wood with both hands.

Ann hastily rushed to her aid. "Wait, it's okay. I can do that myself."

"That's alright. This is my job, after all."

"But, however you look at it, I'm far stronger. Hard work should be handed to

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those who are strong."

The fairy stared blankly at having the firewood lifted from her hands. Then a moment later, she chuckled.

"You're quite the odd one."

"Eh? Really? Isn't this what they call 'the right person for the right job' [1]?" Ann replied while feeding the wood to the fire. The fairy smiled wryly.

"Well, I feel your way of using that is a little off, though. But I must say I envy those two."

By 'those two', she must mean Shall and Mythrill.

Both Shall and Mythrill had only a single wing on their backs. But the other wing that had been taken from them is currently in their possession. They are free.

Ann felt remorseful. Even if she could free a fairy or two, that was her limit. She couldn't save all the many fairies in their world.

"When I get more money, I could buy your wing back from Hugh, though."

"No. The viscount is a good master, and I am satisfied with my life here. I was just thinking that it must be nice to travel with someone like you. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No. Really, I'm fine. Thank you."

"If you need anything, please pull the bell string," the fairy said with a smile as she took her leave.

With that, Ann was all alone. The room was far too big.

She gently sat down on the bed in a reserved manner, and pricked up her ears to listen for sounds from the room next door.

—I wonder what Shall is doing. Maybe I should go take a look.

It had been over two and a half months since meeting Shall, and Ann was now becoming inadvertently aware of his every word and gesture.

Not being able to see him like this made her feel uneasy.

But it was his fault to begin with, she thought, for doing something like kissing her fingers after the sugar sculpture festival. What was his intention in doing something like that? She couldn't wrap her head around *it*, *but* she was too embarrassed to ask.

Somehow, deep inside, she could still feel the sweet shiver that rose in her chest as she was kissed. At times, she'd recall it, and the feeling would resurface. It was troubling.

In a rather shady looking manner, she climbed up the bed and pressed her ear flat against the wall that separated her room and the one next door.

For a while, she searched for signs of presence. Then,

"Hear anything?" someone asked from behind.

Subconsciously, Ann answered, "No. It's awfully quiet in... Wait, whoa!"

As she was about to tumble off the bed, the one to catch her by the arm and stop her fall was Shall.

Shall looked down at Ann, who was half sprawled across the mattress. His black hair gently touched her cheek.

"What are you doing?"

"N-n-nothing really."

Cold drops of sweat formed on her skin, and her ears turned red. Seeing that, Shall, whose one knee was placed on the bed, snickered nastily. "Feeling lonely in a room all by yourself?"

"What, I'm not a child you know."

"It's a big bed. I'll sleep with you."

She knew that sweet whisper was nothing more than a mean joke. Still, just hearing those words was enough to make her cheeks flare up.

"It's fine! I'll pass, thank you very much! Rather, what are you doing here!?"

She forcefully wound back her held arm while pushing herself away from Shall, then crawled backwards on the mattress to escape his hand's reach. With an amused expression, Shall climbed off the bed.

"You looked so helpless entering the room, so I came to see your lonely crying face."

"I'm not crying. And I'm not lonely."

While trying to act tough, she backed off all the way to the edge of the bed, where she reseated herself.

"Then, what was that just now?"

"That was... Um. Because it's such a finely-built castle, I wanted to examine the texture of the wall..."

She suspiciously averted her gaze, letting out a lame excuse.

Shall grinned. His deep black eyes seemed to have completely seen through Ann's thinking.

He couldn't possibly have noticed that the only thing on her mind was him, right? Thinking that he might have noticed made her incredibly embarrassed.

Shall turned on his heel and walked across the room. Looking as if he owned the place, he comfortably sat himself on the couch there and leaned against the armrest.

The gracefulness of that gesture made it seem like he naturally belonged in such a luxurious room.

"You're not surprised by the castle, are you, Shall? From the moment we arrived, you didn't seem too impressed, even though Mythrill Reed Pod and I are constantly amazed by its size," she said, trying to change the subject.

"All castles are built alike."

"You've been to a castle before?"

"For about fifteen years, I lived in one. Between now and a hundred years ago, there isn't much of a difference in structure."

"Is that..."

Suddenly, the area of her chest felt like she had sucked in cold air.

—Is that the castle you lived in together with that girl, Liz?

Just once, Shall told Ann about his past.

All fairies are born when the energy of, for example, a drop of water, a flower, a fruit, or a gem is condensed by the gaze of a living creature.

Shall was born from the condensation of the energy of an obsidian, brought on by the gaze of a lone five year old girl named Elizabeth. The girl, who was the daughter of a noble family, brought Shall back to her estate and hid him there, where they spent the next fifteen years together. However, she was killed by human hands.

Shall referred to Elizabeth by the nickname 'Liz.' Just that was enough for Ann to feel that she understood what kind of relationship they must have had.

"What is it?" Shall questioned Ann, who'd suddenly gone quiet. Startled by that question, she strained a smile.

"Ah, yeah... It's just, that—"

Is the castle you lived in for fifteen years, the same place you lived in with Liz? was what she was trying to ask casually.

But the words wouldn't come out. Ann, herself, was surprised at how upset she had become. She felt as though at some point, the scab of a wound she completely forgot about got peeled off.

"What's wrong?"

"Eh, um. Nothing really..." Thinking of Liz made her chest hurt. And she couldn't understand why.

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Being stared at by Shall's firm gaze had her overcome with the strong urge to run away.

At that moment, there was a knock on the door.

"Ah... Coming!"

At that heavenly salvation, Ann jumped off the bed and walked towards the door. She opened it to find the one standing there was Hugh.

"So? How are you enjoying the room so far?"

"Oh, Hugh. Thank you. It's terribly comfortable, and so gorgeous it makes me feel out of place."

Hugh laughed in response. He leaned his arm against the door and looked down at Ann.

"You'll get used to it after one night. It's hard for humans to adjust to severe conditions, but they get immediately used to comfortable ones. By the way, Ann," Looking into her face straightforwardly, he whispered as though partaking in a secret conversation. "there's something I want to show you. Mind tagging along? It's a place you can't bring Shall and Mythril to. Only you can come. It's still within the castle, though, so it shouldn't take long. Just killing some time till dinner's ready."

Ann wanted to get away from Shall's line of sight as soon as possible. Thus, she nodded without so much as a second thought.

"I'll go. Right now?"

"Yeah."

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Even while turning back to face the inside of the room, she made sure to avoid eye contact. "Shall, Hugh says there's something he wants to show me, so I'm going out for a bit."

After hurriedly leaving the room and shutting the door behind her, Ann felt relieved. And in her relief, she became curious as to where she was being taken. She quickly chased the sturdy back that had begun walking forward.

"What is it that you want to show me?"

"It's a surprise," Hugh turned smoothly and answered with a faint smile.

"I wonder what it could be. Nothing comes to mind... Ah, that's right! I still can't think of anything, but, that reminds me!"

She slightly picked up the pace and walked up next to Hugh.

"At Lewiston, before I came to Westhall, I was helped by a sugar craftsman named Cat. He's an acquaintance of yours, right? He said that if I happen to run into you, to tell you he sends his regards."

Hearing that, Hugh looked surprised.

"Cat did? Hmm, I see. That guy's been doing well, huh. But, it's him we're talking about. Rather than his 'regards,' his message to me was likely either 'drop dead!' or 'shithead bastard!'"

"W-well, something like that... He's a good person, though unusual. He gave me this cape."

"If it's his cape, that would make it first class goods. Looks like you got your hands on something nice."

Inside the tower was a spiral staircase, structured to make it possible to get on and off at each floor.

After climbing all the way down to the first floor, they advanced into the corridor directly connected to the entrance hall. At its innermost section, the corridor hit a wall where the path split left and right. In front of that wall, Hugh stopped.

A single door was inlaid into the wall's surface.

"This is it. Normally, no one goes in but me. Rather, I should say, no one is *allowed* to go in but me."

Upon opening the door, a chilling wind characteristic of a basement blew out. Immediately past the doorway, a narrow set of stairs continued downwards along the wall.

Hugh took out a lamp from a dent in the wall and, after lighting it, held it up as he climbed down the stairs.

"Sorry about this. It's much brighter during daytime."

After descending a mere twelve steps, they arrived in a round room.

The sound of trickling water resounded.

Hugh walked along the wall of the room that seemed to have had lamps installed on it at equal intervals, and sequentially transferred fire from the lamp he was holding into each of those.

"This..."

Ann's eyes widened at the sight of the lit round room.

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In its center was a worktable the width of three adult men stretching their arms wide side by side.

The walls of the room had dents made into them all around to be used as shelves for stocking colored powder.

The number of glass bottles containing colored powder could not be counted with one's two hands. It was a truly tremendous amount.

A ceramic pipe had been inserted into a break in part of the wall, from which clear water, likely groundwater, flowed without pause. The flowing water was caught in a jug, where it overflowed into a groove in the room's outer circumference that was turned into a mechanism leading outside.

Looking up, there was no ceiling.

Nothing but dark space continued higher and higher.

This place was likely one of the columns attached to the castle's tower that had been hollowed out from top to bottom. Far overhead, many window-like frames could be seen. It was likely designed so that during daytime, the light coming through the windows would fall down on this workshop.

"Is it really okay, Hugh?" she asked reflexively.

This was the silver sugar viscount's workshop.

Even to normal sugar craftsmen like Ann, their workplace was sacred. The workshop of the silver sugar viscount, nonetheless, would be equal to the church of St. Lewiston Bell that was home to the state religion.

This was where sugar sculptures were made for the royal family. Such a holy

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place must therefore bring magnificent happiness.

That was probably why, though it was a basement, it felt incredibly majestic rather than gloomy.

Soaked into the stone walls were the feelings and power of the silver sugar viscount. It felt like they were filling up the hollow tower.

On the work table was a large sugar sculpture in progress.

A huge lion reached Hugh's height with a bold composition and representation that looked roughly hewn.

It was by no means realistic, nor was it of fine craftsmanship. However, it was no mere roughness. Looking at the perfectly tailored overall balance made that clear. The representation of the coat of fur, like a vortex winded by stormy waters, gave the impression of a legendary beast jumping out of the raging sea.

It was full to the brim with force. It was a sugar sculpture that told of its maker's power.

Ann unconsciously approached the work on the stone worktable.

"Incredible. It's so powerful."

Hugh stood next to Ann. "Well, yeah. It's a sugar sculpture for his royal majesty's birthday celebration. It ought to be powerful."

Ann looked up at Hugh in admiration. "Incredible. Compared to this, something like what I made... Seems like mere child's play."

"Don't be so downhearted. Do you know why I brought you here?"

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"Why?"

"You can become an even better sugar craftsman. And after becoming a silver sugar master, you can become one of the best even among those. That's what I think, and what I'm expecting. That's why I wanted to show you this place."

"I'm glad to be praised, but can I really become such a good craftsman? Though I am making an effort..."

Hugh bent over and looked into Ann's face. Her features reflected in his strong-willed brown eyes.

"I believe in you. Are you questioning my judgement?"

"It's not that, just, realistically speaking—"

"It's hard for a fifteen year old girl to live on her own. Right now, you still have Shall, but without him, life would likely be dangerous. Polishing your skills while living such a life is quite difficult. Your strength may be used up just trying to pull through each day. I think that's a waste. Frankly, that's why, it has bothered me since the sugar sculpture festival. When I heard you were coming to Westhall, I thought of it as a sign and went looking for you. I want to make you a proposal, Ann."

"A proposal?"

"Until you are awarded a medal by the royal family at the sugar sculpture festival, stay in this castle. During that time, I'll look after you, and once you become a silver sugar master, join the Mercury guild. I'll give you a job as my assistant."

His words slowly sank into Ann's head.

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To put simply, Hugh was saying that he would support Ann unconditionally, and for the unknown period of time until she becomes a silver sugar master, nonetheless. That alone was surprising, but then he went as far as saying he'd guarantee her a job as his assistant.

To Ann, there couldn't be a sweeter deal. It was too good to be true.

Although, considering Hugh's personality and position, there likely wasn't a hidden catch to it. He seemed to sincerely value Ann's talent as a sugar craftsman.

However, Ann suddenly remembered the luxurious room she was in until now.

—If I get used to such a place, I may never be able to leave for the rest of my life.

The thought made Ann shiver.

She felt a premonition that the willpower to strongly live the life she was contented with would be completely deprived of her.

Throwing away her life of desperately moving forward while worrying over basic daily needs, and instead living a wealthy life where she need only think of sugar sculpting. That may also be a way to live. But.

—Should I choose such a life? Borrowing someone else's strength rather than using my own?

In some respects, a frivolous life like that is unreliable.

For fifteen years, she wandered about all over the country with her mother. She knew the hardships and the harshness and the pleasures of life. To Ann, a

life supported by Hugh felt lacking.

"I'm extremely grateful. Thank you, Hugh. But, it's alright. I decline."

"Why? What are you dissatisfied by?" Hugh asked in a gentle, comforting manner.

"How should I put it... I want to walk with my own two feet. If I lived without using my own strength, I'd become a complete sloth. That's why if you ask me what dissatisfies me, though nothing dissatisfies me, I'm dissatisfied."

Hearing that, Hugh stared blankly. But the next moment, he burst into laughter.

"Seriously, you! You're an interesting fellow!"

He stretched his folded knees, laughing loudly while bending his body backwards, then merely ruffled Ann's hair.

—*What was that, just now?*

Shall tilted his head at Ann's odd manner of leaving the room as if she were running away.

When he found her perking her ears like a child, she turned red and pale, and immediately after, her expression suddenly became blank like she had the wind knocked out of her.

As he was thinking about her strange behavior, shortly thereafter, Ann

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returned. Upon entering the room, she momentarily paused at the doorway, looking surprised to see Shall.

"You're still here, Shall. Hugh said it's almost dinner time."

Though with a slightly awkward feel to it, she informed him with her usual smile.

Then, walking up to the chair in front of Shall, she sat down demurely. "Hey, Shall, I've been thinking. How about we leave this place and set out to Lewiston tomorrow?"

"Lewiston?"

"Yeah. Because there are many silver sugar master shops in Lewiston, normally, the competition is harsh, isn't it? That's why we went north to Westhall. But Soul Ascension day is coming close, right? Because there's a need for many sugar sculptures for Soul Ascension day, supply can't keep up with demand in the highly populated Lewiston. That's what mama said a long time ago. If so, I think there'd be many people who'd buy a sugar sculpture even from a nameless sugar craftsman like me."

"If there's a possibility, you should go. I'll go anywhere."

"Great! Then, I'll go consult with Mythrill as well." Ann said happily, then got up from the chair and left the room.

Her appearance was the same as always. Shall felt her strange behavior from before might just be his overthinking.

After leaving Ann's room as well, he headed towards the room he was assigned.

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Upon opening the door, Shall stood in place. There was an intruder in the room.

"Hey there! Welcome back!"

Inside the room was Hugh. He was casually sitting in a chair, raising his hand towards Shall.

"Now, now, don't be shy. Come in. This may be my castle, but today the owner of this room is you, Shall."

At his words, Shall entered the room suspiciously.

"What do you want?"

He crossed his arms and looked down at Hugh.

"I came to consult you. It's about Ann. Will you hear me out?"

Shall gave a look signaling him to continue. Hugh kept going.

"Actually, I was thinking of looking after Ann till she became a silver sugar master, letting her stay in this castle while she polishes her skills. And after she becomes a silver sugar master, I'd like to hire her as my assistant. That's what I just told her but—"

"There's no way that girl would go and say 'Yes, please.'"

If Ann were the kind of girl to jump on such a proposal, she likely wouldn't have met Shall to begin with. He didn't think she'd be happily taken in by it.

"Precisely. She said she can't live a life that's not supported by her own strength. I want to respect her wishes, but the fact is, Ann's environment is

quite dangerous. You acknowledge that, don't you? Living like that and having her nature crushed—as a fellow craftsman, I feel that's a pity. That's why I came to consult you. I thought you could manage to get her to stay in this castle."

"If you want to persuade her, go to her."

He jerked his chin in the direction of Ann's room. But Hugh only waved his hand in front of his face in dismissal.

"No use. Even if I tried to persuade her directly, it definitely wouldn't work. That's why I came here. Shall, I think it would be better if you were gone."

Shall knit his eyebrows at Hugh's words.

"What do you mean by that?"

"The reason Ann is trying to live using her own strength is, ultimately, because you're there. Having spent a life traveling, Ann should know well what dangers await a fifteen year old girl traveling alone. But because you're there, Ann can travel safely. That's why if you were gone, I think she'd be able to accept my proposal."

"That girl was traveling alone before she met me. Whether I'm there or not, she would still travel."

"No. I don't think humans can return to how they were before losing something they once had. When they feel they've lost something, they become even more fearful than before." Hugh grinned.

That grin made Shall feel something begin to seethe in his chest.

"If being there means that girl can stick to her convictions, I won't leave."

"Do you feel indebted to Ann because she returned your wing? If that's so, that's all the more reason for you to disappear, so she could choose a safe life."

"It's not that I feel indebted, I just have nothing else to do. That being the case, I'll stay where I'm needed. That's all."

"There should be someone other than Ann who requires your abilities. And among the fairies of your own kind, nonetheless. There's no need to be so hung up on Ann, who's a human. Why are you so fixated on her?"

—*Why.....?*

He couldn't answer that question.

Back at the sugar sculpture festival, Shall himself decided he'd go with Ann. And as if drawn in by the scent of the silver sugar on her fingertips, he kissed her fingers.

It was a fact that at the time, he felt he was needed.

But even if Ann say she needed him, Shall should have had no obligation to answer to that need.

Still, he decided to go with her. Enquiring for that reason again, why was that?

He didn't understand it himself. At the time, that was simply how he felt. There was nothing else he could say.

Hugh's gaze cornered him. The seething in his chest turned into clear rage. Why should he be confronted by such a question? It was unreasonable.

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"I don't have to answer that. Leave." He quietly pointed at the door. Hugh shrugged.

"I thought you would easily see my point, but I guess I was being too naive."

In an easygoing manner, Hugh left the room. Shall glared at the door he left through.

The fact that he was feeling confused bothered him.

The next day, Ann, together with Shall and Mythrill, left Silver Westhall castle.

Stopping by inn-towns along the way, she sold a few cheap sugar sculptures. With those earnings, they somehow managed to stay at an inn.

Then, three days later, they arrived in Lewiston.

Lewiston was located to south of Westhall. Though it was slightly warmer than Westhall, it was still not on a level that allowed camping out.

After renting a room at an inn called The Wind Vane at the outskirts west of the capital, they set out to the marketplace starting the following day.

Lewiston had three markets, with the largest one standing to the west of the royal palace.

The street passing through the west castle gate was the second widest in the entire capital.

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Filling the street left and right were shops of narrow frontage. They were so condensed that the shopfront canopies overlapped with each other.

Alongside the cluster of shops, during daytime, cloth tents painted with tallow fat were lined up. People went from shop to tent, tent to shop, weaving their way through the gaps between them as they did their shopping.

When gathered, the shrill voices of the peddlers and the shouts of quarrels made the atmosphere swell up.

The west Lewiston market: the most bustling and rumoredly expensive place in the country.

At the farthest place from the west gate of the royal palace, nearly cut off from the rest of the shops, was Ann.

She set up a small stand in front of her box-shaped wagon and placed a white cloth over it. On top of that, she lined about five of the sugar sculptures she made. Beside the sugar sculptures, Mythrill sat cross-legged.

On the wall surface of the box-shaped wagon's luggage carrier, she set up a wooden plank she had cut at a sawmill. On the plank, 'Taking sugar sculpture orders,' was written in paint.

Little by little, customers stopped by. But seeing that the salesperson who made those sugar sculptures was a skinny little girl, most people looked at her dubiously.

Ann simply stood on her feet while absentmindedly watching the people passing by.

Today was the second day. Yesterday, there were five customers who said

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they'd "consider it."

But there was still no official sugar sculpture order.

"Though I went through the trouble of paying the five vine location fee to the market union..." she said while looking down at the dress she was wearing, thinking of how she might be reflected in the eyes of others.

"Maybe if I looked more grown up. Maybe I should try on one of mama's dresses."

"If you need a grown up, get Shall Fen Shall to do it. Let's make that lazy bum work!" Mythrill looked up at Ann, fully motivated.

"I wonder about that. If we did that, there would surely be people saying foolish things like wanting to buy Shall rather than sugar sculptures."

Shall was lying down on the coachmen seat. That must be his own way of life, avoiding the public's gaze like that, especially when many people were around.

"Wait, did you make these?" A middle aged man suddenly paused in front of the sugar sculpture stand.

"Ah, yes. That's right."

"They're well made. How much are they?"

Ann could tell from the man's tone that he wasn't just making fun of her. She felt encouraged.

"The ones over there are five vine. The larger ones are one cress."

"Do you have a bigger sample?"

"Yes. It's inside the luggage carrier, I'll go get it right now!"

It was the moment she said that while turning to face the door of the box-shaped wagon's luggage carrier.

"Hey, there. That girl. Isn't that the girl from the sugar sculpture festival?"

A young man's voice was heard nearby. Looking in the voice's direction, a group of five, six craftsmen-looking young men were pointing at Ann. Among them was one familiar face.

"...Eh...Jonas?"

For a moment, she thought it was just someone resembling him. His cheeks were red like he'd been drinking, which must have been why, compared to his normally calm, well-mannered expression, he appeared to have let himself loose.

"Hey, Jonas. It's that girl, right? From the sugar sculpture festival."

At his comrade's question, Jonas's creamy and drowsy blue eyes focused on Ann's face.

"Huh, well what do you know. Yeah, that's her."

When their eyes met, Jonas smiled and tapped the shoulder of the young man next to him.

"There's no mistaking it. That girl is Ann."

"Hmm, so that's her."

"Jonas-sama! It's best you don't associate with such a girl anymore!" A high-

pitched voice came from behind Jonas.

"Hey, let's go over there, Jonas-sama! Jonas-sama!"

Saying that while desperately pulling the hem of Jonas's trousers was the labor fairy Jonas was enslaving—Kathy. When her eyes met with Ann's, she sternly scowled at her with strong willed eyes as if Ann had wronged her.

"Jonas-sama!"

"How annoying. Jonas, shut her up. She's your fairy."

In response to the words of one of his comrades, Jonas ordered harshly, "Kathy. Shut up. Do you want to be punished?"

At his words, Kathy released her hands while biting her lips.

Reeking of alcohol, the band of young men approached Ann, grinning. Intimidated, the man who was interested in Ann's sugar sculptures distanced himself from the place.

"Ah... Please wai—"

She tried to call out to the man who was about to leave. To keep her from doing that, one of the young men blocked her way.

"What's with you guys!? I'll take you on!"

Mythrill stood up in rage. The young men frowned in annoyance.

"Your opponent is me, Jonas!"

Ann hurriedly stood between them and the stand in order to cover for Mythrill.

"Drinking this early, Jonas? And not even doing any training."

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"Training? I am training. Today's just a breather. My training's been harsh. Thanks to being tricked by you at the sugar sculpture festival, I'm being worked to the bone."

She was riled by his words.

"When exactly did I trick you? *You're* the one who acted unfairly, remember?"

About two months ago, just before the sugar sculpture festival, the young man standing before Ann, Jonas, stole her entry work. In the end, because of that, her first chance of becoming a silver sugar master was completely wasted.

"You're not just going to let her say stuff like that, right, Jonas?"

The young men surrounded Ann, slowly narrowing the circle around her.

"As craftsman from the same Radcliff guild as Jonas, we can't keep quiet about this."

"Well then, what are you going to do about it?" A chilling question came from behind them. They turned around, startled by the bloodlust it contained.

There stood Shall. Easily breaking the young men's circle as if pushing his way through weeds, he walked up and stood in front of Ann.

"I asked, what are you going to do about it?"

"What's that, you..."

One of the young men snarled. But they didn't seem to have the courage to start a fight. They simply kept glaring at Shall.

The eyes of the people passing by were lured by the dangerous atmosphere

and Shall's looks, stopping one after another.

Before they knew it, a crowd of people had formed. Becoming aware of that, Jonas glanced at his surroundings.

"We weren't going to do anything, right, guys!?! We are honest craftsmen after all. We just wanted to let the townspeople know of this phony craftsman." Jonas smiled to flatter the onlookers.

"Don't be deceived, everyone. If you have a Soul Ascension day sugar sculpture made by the hands of this filthy craftsman, the dead surely won't be able to move on."



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"Stop saying baseless things like 'phony' and 'filthy!'" Ann couldn't help but shout. In response, Jonas turned towards her, showing a purposely astounded expression.

"They're not baseless. Everyone, surely there are people among you who have seen this girl before, are there not? This is the girl who was called forth by the king two months ago at the sugar sculpture festival."

Amongst the crowd, people started nodding here and there at the sudden realization.

"See? And there should also be people who remember my face as well, no? Because I'm the other craftsman who was called forth by the king."

Looking pleased with the crowd's reaction, Jonas continued.

"Don't you find it strange? Why would a sugar sculpture so small it couldn't be distinguished by the audience be called forth to his royal majesty? It's simple. This girl seduced the silver sugar viscount and had him recommend her. Accepting that recommendation, his royal majesty called her forward. But however you looked at it, it was not a work worthy of the royal medal. However, there was another sculpture... As a matter of fact, it was mine. My work was about to be awarded the royal medal when this girl went out and said she was the one who made it, sowing confusion in the place. Feeling offended, in the end, his royal majesty left without choosing anyone to become a silver sugar master."

Ann was stunned. And the next moment, she completely lost it. "That's a complete lie!!"

"How is that a lie?" said someone from the crowd.

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"I went to see the sugar sculpture festival. It looked to me like things happened just as that young man explained."

Voices saying "It's true" in agreement rose along with his voice.

Looking from afar, one wouldn't be able to hear the conversation that took place. It was possible that it indeed looked the way Jonas had maliciously explained.

As soon as Ann realized that, frustration welled up inside her. The back of her eyes became hot. She was about to cry.

The young men grinned as they watched her, Jonas included.

—As if I'd cry. If I did, I'd lose. Admitting defeat will make them think what he's saying is true.

"His royal majesty told me he liked my work. That is fact."

Saying only that, Ann picked up the sugar sculptures that were on the stand, and began to place them in the wooden box by her feet. Guessing what she was up to, Mythrill jumped off the stand and quickly cleared the white cloth. She placed the cloth Mythrill handed her inside the wooden box and lifted it.

"My, what are you doing, Ann?"

In response to Jonas's flagrant question, Ann smiled sharply.

"Due to terrible interferences, I'll be closing down today. Move!"

"Are you running away?" Jonas smiled teasingly while clearing the path.

Ann gritted her teeth as she passed through them, and headed towards the

luggage carrier.

"Going to cry to the silver sugar viscount again?"

"Though the silver sugar viscount sure has some sick hobbies, getting off on such a runt! Or could it be she provides some incredible service we can't even imagine?"

The young men headed towards Ann, who was trying to place the wooden box inside the luggage carrier, jeering and laughing foolishly.

She wasn't up to countering every single one of them, so she firmly endured it. The more Ann made a fuss about it, the more pleasure they'd derive from it. And with the place in utter confusion, that was exactly what they were hoping for.

"Shut up."

Tension fell over the place.

Before they knew it, Shall had gripped his sword and was pointing its tip at the young men. "I won't allow any more of this."

Both the young men and the people in the crowd gulped. Those black eyes contained such anger that seemed ready to attack at any moment.

Ann was surprised, but more than that, she felt ashamed. She was disappointed in herself for making Shall result to such an action.

"It's okay, Shall, stop. Put your sword away. No matter the circumstances, if you hurt someone, you'll be captured by the authorities."

However, Shall did not move. His glare was fixed on the young men,

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measuring the timing to attack, all the while overpowering them with his stern coldness.

"Please."

Hearing Ann's nearly imploring voice, Mythrill jumped. He climbed up Shall's shoulder and whispered, "Ann is asking you. Though I know how you feel, withdraw your sword, Shall Fen Shall."

He rubbed his eyes with the palm of his hand. After glancing at Mythrill, Shall slowly lowered his sword as it turned into particles of light that gradually disappeared.

"That guy's not crying. So don't you cry."

Saying just that, Shall turned his back to the young men. He came up from behind the luggage carrier and helped place the wooden box inside it. Ann turned towards Shall and Mythrill with a smile.

"Thank you both."

She placed the stand in the luggage carrier and took down the wooden sign before mounting the coachman's seat.

Feeling triumphant, the young men loudly laughed in mockery. Ann turned her back to them, grabbing the harness. She left that place and returned to the Wind Vane.

At the top of the Wind Vane's discolored roof stood a rusty unmoving Wind vane.

The building was old, and the staying fee was accordingly cheap. But the

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owner was a chubby, kindhearted woman, so Ann could stay there calmly. But considering her financial state, two more nights were her limit.

Saying as little as possible, the three entered the inn.

At the bar and dining room on the first floor, they came across the owner, who was busily cleaning up the tables.

That morning, while declaring to the owner, "Today I will definitely get a job," Ann had left the inn in high spirits. Upon seeing her return in the afternoon so dejected after saying that, the owner looked surprised.

"What happened, young lady? Did you get a job?"

"It was useless. To begin with, there were barely any customers, and I got harassed on top of it."

Hanging her head downheartedly, she sat down in a nearby chair. Suddenly, Ann slumped her face over the table.

The owner was taken aback. "What happened!?"

"Ugh, this is so frustrating!! What's with them, they're the worst!! Jonas, too, hanging out with those guys and even drinking!! He's becoming more and more of a delinquent! I'll never ever ever forgive them! I'll go become a sorcerer's apprentice and put a curse on them!!"

She raised her head instantaneously.

"Owner! Do you know any sorcerers!?"

What happened earlier was completely mortifying. She thought she was going to cry from their insults.

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But once she calmed down, she realized there was no need to cry. Because those were merely baseless accusations, there was no need for her to get depressed over that.

She should just let her pure fury seethe and rage as much as she possibly could.

Seeing Ann's glittering eyes, both Shall and Mythrill were relieved for some reason.

"Unfortunately, I don't know any sorcerers... What on earth happened?" The owner, though surprised, smiled honestly.

"Some sugar craftsman, probably from Radcliffe, harassed me! Drinking in the middle of the day, despite their social status... Why'd they have to harass someone like me who can barely even sell any sugar sculptures!?"

"They're the fellows that had been drinking here till a while ago, aren't they? They drank quite a bit, saying it was to give themselves a boost."

The owner pointed at a messy table, then smiled at Ann sweetly.

"I may not know any sorcerers, but I can give you some good information."

She sat down before Ann, who was blinking in surprise.

"Why do you think the craftsman from Radcliffe needed a boost?"

"...No clue."

"Connected to the south of Harrington province, in Rockwell province, is a port town called Philax that is directly under the control of the royal family, did you know that? Ruling it is Duke Philax. Though when speaking of that nobility, you'd call it 'the last flashpoint of the kingdom,' won't you."

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"If I remember correctly, Duke Philax is the head of the house of Alban, of Grand King Cedric's lineage, isn't he? He's undoubtedly of high nobility, sharing the same blood as his royal majesty."

In Highland, there was a legend of Grand King Cedric, the hero who led the humans to victory against the fairy king. This Grand King Cedric had three sons.

Each of those three left behind their own lineage.

There were three houses: The house of Millsland, the house of Chamber and the house of Alban.

In the past, Highland was in a state of rivalry between lords that stood in each region. It was formed one hundred years ago through the three houses carrying Grand King Cedric's blood's allying and uniting many small scale countries.

The one who became the first king of Highland was King Aaron of Millsland.

The other two houses, Alban and Chamber, were made from King Aaron's vassals.

The current king of the kingdom of Highland was King Edmond II, of the house of Millsland.

Put simply, the house of Alban was on the same level as the lineage of the current king, the house of Millsland. It was said to be a noble bloodline rivaling that of the royal family. And therein laid the reason it was called the last flashpoint of the kingdom.

"Exactly. It seems that duke is searching for sugar craftsmen. 'Being a silver sugar master or not doesn't matter. All outstanding sugar craftsmen are invited.

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They will stay at Philax castle, and if they can create one sugar sculpture to the duke's liking, they will receive a thousand cress as payment.' Or so it seems."

"A thousand cress for one sugar sculpture!?"

"Yeah, outrageous, isn't it? Furthermore, if it's a sugar craftsman acknowledged by Duke Philax, who carries the blood of Grand King Cedric, they're sure to gain prestige, no? It seems the craftsmen from Radcliffe are going to Philax castle for the sake of the thousand cress and the honor of being acknowledged by Duke Philax. That's why they had that drinking bout as a boost."

Shutting one eye, the owner continued, "If you go to Philax, you may be able to beat them and earn a thousand cress in one go."

If she had a thousand cress, Ann's financial condition would improve immediately.

Spending new year's eve in the Wind Vane would easily become possible.

And the honor of having duke Philax acknowledge her skills—to Ann who wasn't a silver sugar master, this was a once in a lifetime chance. If she were awarded such an honor, it would definitely make selling sugar sculptures easier than now.

The possibility of obtaining those was not zero. After all, Duke Philax purposely claimed, 'Being a silver sugar master or not doesn't matter.' No doubt she'd be allowed to compete with her abilities alone.

"What do you think? Shall, Mythrill?"

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Mythrill, who was standing on the table, was staring enchantedly into midair, likely imagining a thousand cress in gold coins.

"A thousand cress, must be nice... The way things are now, no matter how hard Ann worked, she wouldn't be able to make that much. A thousand cress, a thousand cress huh..."

Actually, Ann recently learned that Mythrill apparently really liked money. She then directed her gaze to Shall.

"Well, it's more constructive than becoming a sorcerer's apprentice," he said with a shrug.

—That's right. I'm a sugar craftsman. That's why I'll fight with sugar sculptures.

Ann clenched her fist.

[CHAPTER 2//END.]

Translation Note:

[1] Japanese saying meaning to each their own suitable task, properly assigned according to individual characteristics and/or abilities.



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

Story by Mikawa Miri

Illustrations by Aki

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Chapter 3: Castle by the sea

The capital of Rockwell province was Heilberg. It was ruled by Earl Richards, who was rumored to be a sworn friend of Earl Downing's.

Facing the sea and possessing an old harbor, Rockwell prospered through continental trades.

Philax city, the harbor town, served as the gateway for said trades.

Philax was under the direct control of the royal family, which served the dual-purpose of securing a strategic military position and monopolizing the profits from the trades with the continent.

Under the direct control system, another member of the aristocracy separate from the provincial lord would be dispatched to rule the special administrative district. This aristocrat would be chosen from within the royal family's bloodline and would be bestowed with the title of Duke of the area over which they were appointed to govern.

Currently, the title of Duke Philax was held by William Alban.

The very same Alban, Duke of Philax, who was currently recruiting sugar craftsmen.

"Plenty sits still, hunger is a wanderer... Was it?" Ann muttered with a sigh while steering the horses from the driver's seat.

Mythrill, who was seated between Ann and Shall, looked up at her and tilted his head.

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"What's that?"

"A saying? Or something like that, that people say in a faraway continent. I heard it a long time ago."

"What about it?" Shall asked, urging her to continue.

"Nothing really. It just came home to me that I move from place to place often."

"You do wander about a lot," Shall immediately affirmed without hesitation. Furthermore—

"You could also say plainly, completely poor!" Mythrill pressed on as well.

Though she knew they meant no ill will, and what they were saying was true, Ann became gloomy.

"That's right huh~? I'm a wandering pauper, right~? It sounds kind of cool when you put it in a proverb, but in plain words, that's how it is, isn't it."

Ann had departed the day after learning of Duke Philax from the Weather Vane owner.

From Lewiston to Philax was half a day's time. They borrowed a farmer's barn for lodging the previous night, and at dawn, they dashed on the box shaped wagon.

Thanks to that, they arrived in Philax by noon. The city of Philax stretched along a loose arc-shaped bay, with red brick houses clustered across the coastline.

"Well, I like traveling, and I'm not troubled. But if possible, I'd like to at least calmly spend the end of the year in a warm inn. For that, I have to do something."

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Beyond their gaze lay Philax castle.

The huge, sternly-built castle stood atop a cape that was jutting into the sea at the eastern end of the bay. It was three times the size of Silver Westhall castle, with an extending rampart and passageway. Not a single decorative intent could be detected in either the castle tower, the watchtower, or the castle gate. It had a structure like that of a fortress.

With just one glance, you could tell the castle had been standing for a long time and withstood many battles.

As it was built at the tip of a cape, it didn't have a moat surrounding it. Hence, the polished rampart would occasionally bask in the sunlight reflected by the sea, and—unsuited to its rugged appearance—would become clad in spots of sleek blue light.

Steering her box shaped wagon, Ann arrived before the stern castle's gate.

The gate to Philax castle opened, and there she announced her occupation and purpose to the gatekeeper. Then,

"Do you currently possess a sugar sculpture you yourself have made?" he asked her.

Answering that she did, the gatekeeper then took a look inside the luggage carrier for confirmation. After seeing that the sugar sculpture was indeed there, she was easily allowed through.

:After hearing that Duke Philax was looking for sugar craftsmen, craftsmen from all over the country were expected to come on a daily basis. To pass through the gate and get to meet Duke Philax, one must first have a self-made

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sugar sculpture prepared.

That was a given. They couldn't let all the coming craftsmen in and have them work there. Only those who show promise could be given the chance to make their sculpture. In order to assess their potential, it was necessary that one bring their own piece.

Carriages were instructed to wait outside, and Shall and Mythrill were made to wait along with them. Only Ann, with her work in hand, continued forward. The soldiers took her inside, heading towards the castle tower.

She was guided into a small waiting room that appeared to be followed by a hall.

There was a previous visitor in the waiting room: a lone man who looked like a sugar craftsman. The gloomy looking man wouldn't talk to Ann at all.

Before long, the door opposite to the one Ann came in through opened quietly.

A page-looking boy wearing livery came in. He faced the two and announced, "Bring your sugar sculptures and come this way please."

The hall had the same rugged atmosphere as the exterior of the castle. Its walls appeared to be made of nothing but stone, and unlike Silver Westhall castle, they weren't decorated with any plasterwork. But that stone in itself told of its history. It was in no way shabby. Rather, it appeared to bear great pride. The hall's innermost section was a step taller and had minutely woven tapestry at its rear. In front of it was a massive throne-like chair, with a woolen fabric placed on the floor facing it, which seemed to mean 'kneel here and wait.'

"Duke Philax will see you soon," said the page, then withdrew himself to the

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end of the hall. Ann and the man knelt on the woolen surface.

Close to the floor, the atmosphere was damp and cold. The large furnaces on either side of the hall had no trace of fire.

Feeling disheartened by the awfully chilly space, Ann restlessly looked around her. While doing so, she felt a sense of discomfort.

—There's something wrong with this castle. What is it? It's somehow different from Hugh's castle and the city.

"H-hey!! You!"

Albeit in a low voice, the man kneeling next to Ann called out to her urgently.

"Eh...? Me?"

She turned her head in the man's direction. He was bowing down. She tilted her head, wondering what happened.

"There is no need to lower your head."

A voice sounded from a high place. Surprised, Ann looked forward.

Before she knew it, a young man had sat down in the chair in front of her.

It seemed that Ann had been looking about restlessly without noticing him enter the room, and the man next to her was trying to warn her of that.

Though he said there was no need to bow down, Ann wasn't bowing to begin with. She did nothing but stare at the pale young man in front of her. But he didn't seem to mind her rudeness.

Not out of tolerance, but likely out of indifference. What made her feel that way

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was that she couldn't sense any sort of feeling in the young man's dark green eyes.

He appeared to be in his late twenties. His pale blond hair was neatly done, and his simple coat that had elaborately embroidered rims was both refined and elegant.

His entire atmosphere seemed calm.

But cold. That's what Ann felt. All due to those eyes that harbored no emotion.

"I am Alban, Duke of Philax," he introduced himself in a monotonous voice.

—This person is Duke Philax. The head of the Alban house known as the last flashpoint of the kingdom.

As a commoner, Ann wasn't very familiar with the kingdom's politics. But just the name Duke Philax and its standing, she knew of. It was a famous story not only Ann, but anyone living in Highland knew about.

That the Alban house was the last flashpoint left in the kingdom, that is.

Three bloodlines were left behind by the sons of grand King Cedric, the hero that led the humans to victory in the fight against the fairy king: the house of Millsland, the house of Chamber and the house of Alban.

After the founding of Highland one hundred years ago, Millsland ascended the kingdom's throne, and the other two houses became Millsland's vassals. However, Chamber and Alban possessed huge territories to which Millsland's rights could not extend.

Thus, there were two extraterritorial territories left in the kingdom of Highland.

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It became a flashpoint fifteen years ago.

When the previous king, Edmond I, passed away, the current king, Edmond II, was a twelve year old child.

And at that time, the head of Chamber, Stewart, being the ambitious person that he was, raised the following question:

"Having a little king of twelve years is not very reliable. To begin with, the three houses share the same blood, therefore shouldn't the most suitable person from among the three houses be made king?"

So he argued. Moreover, some of the vassals who felt uncertain of a twelve year old king agreed.

That was the beginning of a civil war known as the Chamber Civil War.

Ultimately, the Chamber Civil War ended in Millsland's victory.

All members of the house of Chamber—including infants—were executed, and their lineage died out.

After the civil war, the key figure in setting up a firm centralized authoritarian system for the sake of the twelve year old king was Earl Downing, who exhibited his shrewdness since the previous king's generation.

The remaining one of the three houses, Alban, had cooperated with Millsland during the civil war.

However, "A country should not have two rulers," so proposed earl Downing, and with that, their territory was revoked. Their private army troops were also dismantled, leaving only a few soldiers as guards. And the head of Alban was

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made to live in Philax as the administrator of the area directly under the control of the king.

It was quite the harsh treatment. But Earl Downing advised Edmond II to take even more drastic measures:

To exile the head of Alban.

He argued that it was a lineage that could become a flashpoint at any moment. That even if the ones in question had no such intention, there was a possibility that a traitor may rise to power. And as such, these afflictions should be cut off.

The head of Alban at the time was Thomas, father to William, the current Duke of Philax.

Thomas was apparently a very calm, intellectual man.

Edmond II idolized Thomas's personality, and because of that, Edmond II disregarded Earl Downing's opinion solely on this matter, and did not exile him.

Instead, Alban was assigned two duties.

First: all collected trade-related taxes would be paid to the royal family. Of the payment to the royal family, a fixed amount would be paid to Alban. It was a humiliating duty, equal to receiving allowance from the king.

Second: once a month, the head of Alban would have to visit the capital city of Lewiston and give his greetings to the king. This duty was to ensure they swear eternal loyalty.

It seemed that even after it became the generation of Thomas's son, William, Alban had solemnly fulfilled these duties.

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However, Edmond II aside, it was said that the vassals serving under Millsland were still looking for a chance to bury Alban, with Earl Downing at their forefront.

Ann was acquainted with Earl Downing, who gave the strong impression of a gentle old man. If the gentle-looking Earl Downing was aiming for a chance of obliteration, she thought Duke Philax must be a frightening man. But contrary to her imagination, the young man before her was very quiet, only somehow clad in an odd coldness.

"Show me the sugar sculpture you're holding."

At Alban's order, a page took both Ann and the man's sculptures, and held them out in front of Alban. He glanced at the sculptures the page had in each hand, then grabbed hold of Ann's sculpture and announced, "The man there, leave. The girl, remain as is."

Puzzled by the far too quick decision, the sugar craftsman stared blankly. After returning the sugar sculpture, a page courteously prompted him towards the exit. The man left while looking over his shoulder with bad grace.

Alban stared at the sculpture in his hand.

It was something Ann had made while playing around, using Mythrill as a model. "This is for you, go ahead and eat," she had said to him, but he'd replied with, "That's like cannibalism so no way!" And with that, it was decidedly left uneaten. She had confidence in its making, so that made her disappointed.

Ann and Alban were left alone, facing one another in the wide space.

The room felt even colder.

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"Why did you make this?" Alban asked suddenly.

"The model for that is one of my friends who's travelling with me. I thought I'd make him a sugar sculpture so I made that."

"This is... A fairy, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

Alban stood up slowly and after stepping off the platform, he came up to Ann. He held out the sugar sculpture he had in hand in front of her with a look, urging her to take it. After she received the sugar sculpture, he then declared, "I'll allow for you to stay in the castle. Make me a sugar sculpture—a sugar sculpture that will meet my expectations."

"What should I make?"

Alban suddenly straightened his back and moved behind Ann.

Still kneeling, Ann followed him with her eyes. He headed towards the wall in front of the chair he was sitting in.

A large fabric was hanging over that wall, but behind it was the hall, so there couldn't be a window there.

Alban pulled the decorative string without hesitation.

The curtain quickly opened left and right, revealing a single portrait.

"Woah... It's beautiful!" Ann thought out loud, forgetting she was in the presence of a noble.

It was a portrait of a young woman. It looked life-sized, being only a little lower than Alban. White skin, silverish eyes with a mysterious shine, and pale blue straight flowing hair. Other than being good looking, what left the greatest impression was her expression, which showed a somewhat sad smile.

And what caught Ann's eye most of all was what was on her back.

"A pair of wings... This person is a fairy, isn't she," she asked without really asking, to which Alban nodded.

"I want you to make the fairy in this painting. Can you do it?"

Ann felt something like conviction being born inside her.

When she'd find something to be beautiful, she'd get the urge to capture that beauty in a sugar sculpture.

If she earnestly directed that urge at her creation, it would surely get bigger.

"I can do it."

Alban closed the window and returned to his seat, then explained apathetically, "In the inner ward is a building for the craftsmen. Make your sugar sculpture there. I'll have someone guide you. If you want to look at this portrait, there are several pictures of the same fairy hanging in the eastern tower of the outer ward. Look at those."

"Yes."

Ann nodded and looked at Alban. She still couldn't sense any feeling in his eyes, as if something was missing from them. While speaking to her, she was reflected in those eyes, yet he was indifferent to her existence as if he didn't

acknowledge her. That made her shudder slightly.

Alban took his leave, and in his stead came a young man named Dale to guide her. He was Alban's servant. Dale had a large bundle of keys attached to his belt. Because of that, he made a loud clattering sound as he walked.

Shall and Mythrill were given permission to stay. Apparently, when Dale went to confirm, the Duke had said, "No problem."

The castle was nearly touching the tip of the cape. The sound of the rolling waves was heard incessantly. With the blowing sea breeze and winding whirlpools above the rampart, they could see sea birds circling calmly above the rampart if one looked up.

Ann and the rest were guided to the inner ward of the castle.

There, it turned into a large plaza. Simple tenements were clinging all around to the walls surrounding the plaza. Those were likely the work rooms assigned to craftsmen.

The roof of the wooden two-storied building was mostly made of single roofing.

In the inner ward's innermost section were two towers. And as it was also the innermost section of the castle, it was a dead end.

The eastern tower should be adorned with portraits of that fairy.

"Currently, how many craftsmen are there?" she asked Dale who was walking in front, to which Dale turned around and answered.

"Currently, including you, six."

"That's it?"

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"It's because even though everyday one or two arrive, at the same time, two or three are thrown out."

"That many?"

"Yeah. Once a sugar sculpture is complete, it is presented to the Duke. That's where most craftsmen get kicked out."

"Hasn't there been a craftsman capable of making a sugar sculpture that satisfies the Duke yet?"

"If there was, the Duke wouldn't be looking for craftsmen anymore."

"I suppose that's true. But for what purpose does the Duke require a sugar sculpture? Is it for some sort of celebration, or a festival?"

In response to that question, Dale answered expressionlessly. "You should ask the Duke directly. We don't know. If it's the Duke's wish, we will follow it without asking for a reason. We have sworn loyalty to the Alban house since that man's father's generation. We are not Millsland's vassals, but Alban's vassals."

Ann was surprised at Dale's declaration.

All the humans living in the kingdom of Highland, nobles and commoners alike, serve the king of Highland. It's a sort of common knowledge that even the vassals under each noble don't serve those nobles, but the king reigning over them.

Yet Dale declared he was not the royal house of Millsland's vassal.

Normally, such words could be considered treason.

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But for the Alban house, it was probably allowed. Otherwise, you wouldn't carelessly let an unknown sugar craftsman hear something like that.

She felt like she caught a glimpse of the reason they were called a flashpoint.

"You take pride in serving Alban, don't you."

"Of course. That aside," Dale looked at Shall who was walking beside Ann, and Mythrill who was cheekily sitting on her shoulder, "You own two fairies? That's quite extravagant."

"They're my friends. I don't own them, we simply travel together."

Ann answered somewhat annoyed, having heard that all the time.

With an 'Aha,' Dale nodded in assent.

"That's why the Duke gave his permission, even though you brought two fairies."

"What do you mean?"

"The Duke hates enslaving fairies. There isn't a single fairy in this castle. The Duke will only allow a craftsman one labor fairy if it's necessary for the job. Owning two fairies should have made a bad impression. Yet, since the Duke said there was no problem, I thought it was strange."

"Ah, I see. Fairies. That's why."

Back in the hall, she kept thinking of the true nature behind her sense of discomfort. And now she realized.

There were no fairies in this castle. Fairies could always be seen somewhere in

towns, castles, inns and shops. But ever since entering the castle, she hadn't seen a single fairy.

Dale stopped in front of a tenement in the eastern rampart.

"Well then, this building is the room you'll be using. Five young craftsmen from Radcliff entered the building next door yesterday. Try to get along."

Hearing of the craftsmen from Radcliffe, Ann heaved a light sigh. They must be Jonas and his comrades.

"Yes. We'll try to get along as much as possible."

Once Dale left, Ann entered the tenement.

Inside was quite pleasant. It had floorboards set down, so it wasn't too cold. Climbing up a simple staircase with no footboards was the second floor, where five beds were lined up.

The building appeared to be a remnant from wartime. Long ago, during war, many craftsmen and technicians, and sometimes even livestock and farmers, were apparently allowed to reside in the castle.

The castle guards lived in the tenements constructed in the inner district. That was why currently, the ones who always lived in these tenements inside the inner ward were gone. With no sign of life, it had a lonely atmosphere.

"He said all I need to do is sculpt the fairy in the painting," Ann explained while bringing the luggage from her box shaped wagon's luggage carrier into the tenement.

Both Shall and Myhtrill helped her carry the luggage.

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"It's a really beautiful female fairy."

"But, can you remember a picture you've only seen once?" Mythrill asked while carrying in a pot.

"He said there are several pictures of the same fairy hanging in that eastern tower. After we're done bringing in the luggage, will you two go see it with me?"

"Nah, I'm tired. I finally get to sleep in a bed, so I'm going to take a nap."

Mythrill placed the pot by the stove with a yawn, then hopped up the stairs to the second floor while humming a tune. He must have been happy to have a bed after spending the previous night in a barn.

Surely, the only one who'd want to see that painting was Ann, who was about to start working.

"You too, Shall..."

"I'll go."

After placing down the luggage, Shall turned to Ann and jerked his chin.

"Eh!? You'll go?"

"What's with that, after inviting me."

"It's just that I didn't think you'd go."

When she said that, Shall seemed to sulk a little.

"I'm just interested."

"Why? Why are you interested in it?" she asked reflexively, but Shall ignored

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her question. Finally, they left the tenement.

"Ah! Wait, Shall!"

"Hurry up."

While chasing his back as he walked onwards, Ann realized that Shall wouldn't have any interest in seeing the portrait; he was simply accompanying her. That made her happy.

Once she caught up and joined him by his side, she looked up at him with a smile.

"That's a slovenly face you're making."

"I don't care. It's because I'm happy."

She didn't even mind Shall's bad mouth.

While directly heading towards the eastern tower, a group of five young men were coming from its direction. Ann was taken aback.

—*Jonas. I remember the others as well.*

Seeing them revived her rage, but it didn't end just there; that rage was gradually turning into willpower. As they reached a point where their faces could be discerned, Ann felt fighting spirit overflow inside her.

The young men were exchanging laughs as they walked on, but as soon as they noticed the human figures ahead, and that they were Ann and Shall, their jaws simultaneously dropped.

"What a coincidence, Jonas."

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She offered a cheerful greeting, surprising even herself with her composure.

Jonas's face looked as though he'd seen something terrible.

"W-what are you doing in a place like this? Did you follow me? Don't tell me you're out for revenge?"

"That doesn't sound half bad, but I don't have that much free time." She passed beside them while sticking her tongue out.

"You, just what the hell did you come here for!?"

At one of the young men's shout, Ann stopped and sternly glared back at them.

"Thanks to someone, my reputation as a craftsman was publicly destroyed. So in order to restore my honor, I responded to Duke Philax's summons."

She then declared, "If it's a battle of skill, I won't lose."

Their faces were bright red with anger, but at the same time, their eyes revealed anxiety.

Each of them was thinking about being the one acknowledged by Alban. Wanting that honor, there was no doubt they secretly swore in their hearts to kick down their comrades.

Furthermore, a powerful competitor had appeared. It seemed they couldn't hide their agitation.

This was a battle of skill. Even they should understand that. It was not as easy as relying on numbers in the streets to mock someone.

Seeing through their agitation, Ann could feel herself becoming ridiculously

fired up.

"Well, let's all do our best."

Saying just that, she set out along with Shall towards the eastern tower. Shall made a snorting smile.

"Well said. That you won't lose."

"It was 80 percent a bluff. I just don't want to lose. After all, a thousand cress are at stake, and I want to welcome a wonderful new year together with you and Mythrill."

The next day, Ann got down to work.

First, she decided the size of the sculpture. The biggest sugar sculptures were the ones used in festivals, and were about half of Ann's height. As the request was made by a Duke, the largest one would probably be best.

The portraits of the fairy in the eastern tower all had a similar composition. Some sitting, some standing, but on the whole, the slender figure clad in shades of light blue gave the strong impression of waterflow. She regarded that impression with importance.

She decided to pose it standing, with both arms gently extended forward. And as for the face, she opted to not make it too clear. If you give it the exact face, it becomes unpleasantly lifelike.

What Ann emphasized was the fairy in the portrait's atmosphere.

She placed a stone slab over a table on the first floor that was originally in the tenement. Set up around it were rulers and spatulas and such that filled up the

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table.

Bottles of colored powder and a container with cold water were arranged on the floor.

During work, Mythrill would be surprisingly helpful; He'd draw cold water from the well, get silver sugar from the barrel, and hand her bottles of colored powder.

Though they were small things, that alone raised the work efficiency.

On the third day, the rough shape was complete.

"Thank you, Mythrill Reed Pod. You really helped me out," Ann thanked him while shaking out blue powder out of a bottle.

"Hehehe," Mythrill laughed slightly boastfully.

"That's how useful I can be when I use my true strength. Though, something like this isn't enough to repay you. I aspire to repay you in a grand way!"

"It's fine already, with this whole 'repaying' thing."

"It is not. This is a matter of my pride as a fairy."

"So it was such a huge deal..."

"But of course! By the way, where did Shall Fen Shall go?"

"Who knows."

As opposed to Mythrill, whenever Ann started working, Shall would leave the tenement.

Everyday for the past three days, he'd aimlessly go out, and wouldn't return until

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Ann stopped working.

Assuming he'd probably gone out for a walk, she wasn't particularly concerned.

She closed the colored powder bottle with the lid, and placed it on the table. And while she was kneading the silver sugar with the added colored powder, Mythrill was mumbling complaints.

"What's with that guy, playing around on his own."

"Well, with you helping me out, there's nothing for Shall to do, is there?"

"Well, I guess so. As long as I'm here, he won't get his chance, huh."

Mythrill put away the bottle in a seemingly good mood.

"Since it seems even a ruthless cold hearted guy like that has some sentiment, I guess it's fine to let him immerse himself."

"Sentiment? Shall?"

"Three days ago, was it? It was when we first came to this castle. We had to wait with the carriages right? That time, Shall Fen Shall said he was 'feeling nostalgic.' When I asked him about it, he said a really long time ago, he lived in a castle like this one."

The hands kneading the silver sugar stopped momentarily.

—Feeling nostalgic? For the castle? Or perhaps for Liz who lived in the castle?

Right now, Shall's beautiful black eyes were probably fixed on the figure of that girl that died long ago. That was likely why he went out for walks on his own. Thinking about it again made her feel stifled.

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"It seems Hugh's castle is too new for it or something. This castle's old right? Apparently the castle he lived in was an old one. Was he owned by nobles? He wouldn't say more than that but... Ann? What's wrong?"

"Ah, no. It's nothing."

Realizing that she was being absent-minded, Ann looked at Mythrill and smiled.

That moment, Mythrill burst out laughing.

"Ann! Your nose is deep blue! There's colored powder stuck on it!"

"Eh!?"

She hastily touched the tip of her nose.

"Now there's more blue!"

Ann became embarrassed from being laughed at so much.

"I'm going to go wash it at the well."

She left the tenement and ran to the well. After drawing water from the well into a washbowl, she glanced at the water surface. Her nose was indeed blue. But more than that, she felt disappointed that no matter how she looked at it, she wasn't beautiful.

"We were always together. After fifteen years, Liz's hair became golden, and her freckles disappeared. She became a beautiful girl."

Shall said that to Ann before.

—After fifteen years. Meaning, when she was twenty, Liz was a beautiful golden-haired young woman, wasn't she. I'm fifteen, so in five more years I'll

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become beautiful?

She didn't really believe she would. She'd probably become a skinny, thin limbed, child-like twenty year old, with the awful balance of a scarecrow the same as now.

—Shall is so beautiful. Of course he'd like a beautiful woman. Like Liz.

When her thoughts reached that extent, she realized the true identity of the feelings that bothered her whenever she'd hear about Liz.

—Is this jealousy? Towards Liz?

She was foolish for feeling something like jealousy towards Liz, whom she'd never even met. Moreover, someone who's no longer in this world.

She became disgusted with herself.

Scooping up water from the washbowl, she desperately washed herself. Washing over and over with skin-tearing cold water.

—I have to stop thinking about unnecessary things. Right now I'm making a sugar sculpture!

"If you keep rubbing like that, your nose is going to come off."

Hearing a voice overhead, Ann raised her wet face in surprise.

"Shall."

Water was dripping down her chin. Shall knit his eyebrows. "Your dress is going to get wet."

After being told that, Ann realized she forgot something. "Ah, I forgot to bring

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a towel..."

She dropped her shoulders at her stupidity.

Shall unconsciously stretched out his hand, and with his fingertips, gently stroked Ann's face from the chin to her cheek. His fingers were cold.

Though she figured he was just wiping off drops of water, she was startled and pulled herself away.

The place he touched became burning hot, and that moment, she felt her face turning red.

"What is it?"

Shall tilted his head in wonder. From that gesture, she knew he wasn't just making fun of her like always. He was really just casually wiping the water drops off her face.

She knew she had to say something, but her head was blank.



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"Scarecrow?"

Shall gave Ann a sincerely inquiring look. His black eyes gazed intently at her.

She didn't want him to notice her overreacting.

"I-it's nothing!" Saying just that took all she had. Ann turned on her heel and ran towards the tenement with all her might.

—Though his fingers are so cold, how come his breath and wing are warm?

Remembering previously touching his wing and his sigh made her cheeks even hotter.

Even during dinner that day, Ann was somehow having trouble making eye contact with Shall.

The awkwardness was only gone the next day. She was grateful for having slept so well. For the moment, her feelings, both good and bad, relaxed about halfway.

It was when she had just finished breakfast and was about to get down to work that there was a knock on the tenement door.

Without it occurring to her who might be visiting, Ann opened the door while tilting her head.

"Yes?"

Standing there was Jonas, smiling.

Ann's expression suddenly became stern.

"What did you come for? If you're after a sugar sculpture to steal, it's not finished yet."

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Jonas frowned slightly at her scathing sarcasm.

"As if. I have no use for a sugar sculpture like yours. My sculpture's already done, see. All five of us finished yesterday."

"Eh...?"

Hearing that they'd completed their sugar sculpture the night before made her secretly flustered.

But, not wanting to be mocked by Jonas, she forced a smile. "Is that so. And? Have you presented it to the Duke?"

"We did last night. Except me, the other four were made to leave this morning."

Jonas was smiling ear to ear like he couldn't wait to say that.

Over Jonas's shoulder, she saw the figures of the four craftsmen, dejectedly carrying their luggage as they leave. They were looking over at Jonas's back in jealousy.

"After seeing my work, the Duke told me, 'It shows promise. Increase the accuracy.' And only I was allowed to continue staying in the castle. Sorry to break it to you, but the one who'll receive Duke Philax's one thousand cress will be me."

"You don't know that yet."

"Did you know? I'm the only one who has ever been allowed to remain in the castle after presenting a sculpture. Only me. Dale told me."

"Now, I will be too!"

"From now on, I'll be moving to a room in the castle tower. That's the privilege of the chosen craftsman. Well, do your very best, Ann," Jonas said triumphantly, then stepped down the entrance step while waving his hand. Ann vigorously shut the door, and returned to the table with rough footsteps.

"What did that guy come here for?! What? He wants to weaken my motivation?!"

Shall was sitting on the table, holding a dried nut in his palm. The nut shrank down until it finally disappeared. That was how fairies ate.

While enjoying one dried nut after another, Shall said, "I doubt that shallow man was thinking that far."

"What, then?!"

"He probably just came to boast. Since he can't do that in front of his comrades who are leaving."

"If that's so, then it's unbelievably annoying. If you want to boast, do it someplace else, for god's sake."

Fuming, she cleared up the surface of the table, then moved the unfinished sugar sculpture that was at the corner of the tenement to the table and removed the cloth that was covering it.

"But I think your sugar sculpture is turning out really well," Mythrill said in admiration, looking up at the sugar sculpture from atop the table.

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's beautiful. Right, Shall Fen Shall?"

Having been asked, Shall looked over the sugar sculpture as well. After gazing at it for a while, he nodded.

"It's well made."

Being praised made her simply happy. Pulling herself together, Ann got down to work.

Since meeting Shall and Mythrill, Ann began to like sculpting fairies. Hence, she was enjoying her work, and had confidence in her workmanship that was steadily gaining shape.

"It's done, I think."

Ann heaved a huge sigh, and as if tired of even just standing, sat down on a chair with a thump.

It was the third night after Jonas transferred to a room in the castle tower.

With two lamps placed on the table, Ann had been working till midnight.

Mythrill went to sleep long ago, and Shall was sitting down with his back towards Ann. While adding wood to the furnace, he was making sure not to interfere with her work.

Him going out for walks during the day these past few days was also so he wouldn't bother her.

Ann seemed to sometimes get upset when Shall was around. He realized the

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cause was likely something he said or done, but he couldn't very well understand what it was exactly that made her that way. In order to not disrupt her concentration, he determined it was best to stay away.

"How about it, Shall? Won't you take a look?"

At her call, he got up and stood behind her chair.

Like waterflow, the young woman's hair flowed down from the top of her head to her waist, and was gradually shifting from dark to light indigo. Her wings were jumping up like silk fanned by the wind. Her expression with her outstretched arms was very gentle. The structure of her face was only slightly uneven, but it made one wonder if that expression was truly smiling. A gentle air wrapped the sculpture.

"Well done," he answered after taking a good long look. However, Ann did not react.

"Hey?"

Suddenly feeling that her reaction was strange, he peeked at her face.

"...What..."

Sitting in the chair, Ann was making wheezy sleeping breaths.

These past three days, she'd put her all into this sculpture. She must have been quite exhausted.

Shall moved the finished sugar sculpture to the floor in the corner of the tenement, and like Ann always did, sheltered it by placing a soft fabric over it.

Meanwhile, Ann was still sleeping. He wondered whether he should wake her

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and have her go to the bed on the second floor.

He stood before her, and looked her down. That soundly sleeping face looked so defenseless it made him wince a little. He remembered when they first met, how she'd nervously sleep while embracing his wing into her chest.

Now, after returning his wing, she probably trusted him as a friend.

—Still, she's too defenseless.

Did she think he was her guardian or something?

She likely forgot that to begin with, Shall was a shameless warrior fairy that had been alive for over a hundred years. He had done many things she couldn't even imagine. She might fear him if she'd learn even a single thing he's done. She might scorn him.

He held up the sleeping Ann. She was thin and light.

Climbing the stairs like that, he laid her in the frontmost bed and tucked her in.

The sea breeze rang over the rampart like always. He felt a draft at his feet.

He looked down at Ann's face, who showed no signs of waking.

'Why are you so fixated on Ann?'

Like the sound of the wind, the question Hugh posed suddenly revived in his ears.

If he left her to Hugh, Ann would be able to attain a safe, comfortable life. He understood that. But for some reason, that was no fun.

—I don't want to entrust her to Hugh.

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After thinking that, he was puzzled by his own thoughts.

—Entrust? Even though she doesn't belong to me or anything?

Even though she wasn't his, he didn't want to give her away. What were those selfish feelings?

The moment he saw the sugar sculpture, she felt that something swayed in Alban's emotionless eyes.

Alban stared intently at Ann's sugar sculpture. However, that emotion-like glimmer slowly disappeared. In its stead, he let out a murmur that could be taken as disappointment.

"...It's wrong."

Those words turned her pale.

That morning, she'd reported to Dale that the sugar sculpture was complete. And after doing so, an order had come instructing her to go up to the hall in the castle tower with her sugar sculpture immediately, whether she finished having breakfast or not.

After going up to the hall, unlike last time, she wasn't made to wait very long.

Alban came in restlessly, and with his own hands, removed the cloth covering the work, and took a look at it.

He then murmured, "It's wrong."

Alban sat down in a chair, and for a while, remained silent.

—He didn't like it... Even though both Shall and Mythrill complimented me saying it was well made...

She couldn't help feeling depressed.

"However, the atmosphere is fine," Alban said with a sigh.

"Huh?"

Ann instinctively raised her head. Alban wasn't looking at her. He was looking at the sugar sculpture.

"The atmosphere is better than Andres's. Increase the accuracy, enough to satisfy me. You'll be transferred to a room in the castle tower."

After saying all that, Alban then said to Dale who was in waiting by his side, "There are two craftsmen. There is no need for any more, is there."

Alban gave the simple order, then took his leave.

Ann was dumbfounded, but Dale tapped her shoulder with a bitter smile.

"Come now. Gather your luggage from the tenement and call your friends. I'll prepare a room for you in the castle tower."

"Um... Does this mean the Duke liked my sugar sculpture?"

"I'd say he moderately liked it. About as much as he did Andres's, it seems. Looks like he's leaving the sculpture-making to you and Andres, since he told me no more craftsmen are needed."

"T... Thank you very much."

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Realizing that she had been acknowledged, for the time being, she was relieved.

But the reason she couldn't openly rejoice was likely because of that 'moderately liked.'

What does 'moderately' mean? And how does she 'increase the accuracy'?

Her doubt was too big for her to rejoice.

For now, Ann gathered her luggage from the tenement, and moved to the castle tower.

She was told the room she'd be using was in one of the four columns of the castle tower. At the top of the one located southwest. Meaning Jonas's room was below hers.

When going up the column, she'd pass by his room. But with the door closed, she couldn't see what was going on inside.

To Ann, the castle tower's structure was too complicated. One couldn't readily go out.

She'd go up and down stairs many times until she'd get to her assigned room in the southset column from the hall. Many thin corridors twisted and turned. That alone drove her sense of direction crazy.

As soon as she arrived in her room, more than five barrels of silver sugar were delivered to it. It seemed they didn't care how much she used.

In exchange, she was ordered by Dale to get to work immediately.

She was told to pull the bell string hanging in the room when she thought she was done. A bell would apparently ring in the servants' room, where it would

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be arranged to inform Alban of the sculpture's completion.

Unlike in Hugh's castle, Ann wasn't treated as a guest, but simply as a craftsman. It was a simple room, with bare stone walls. And there was only one bed. Being much smaller than the tenement, it was inconvenient.

In exchange, there was no need for them to prepare their own food. Twice a day, food would be delivered from the castle's kitchen: once in the morning and once at night. Even hot water for making tea will be delivered if she asked for some.

As soon as she moved into the room, Ann placed the sugar sculpture on the work table and began to look it over.

"He said the atmosphere was fine, right. And to increase the accuracy. I wonder if I can add in details without breaking the whole structure. But when making fine workmanship, the piece as a whole becomes cluttered."

As always, Shall left the room.

Mythrill was sitting by the window, patiently waiting till he could help Ann.

"Ann!?"

An astonished voice came from behind.

She turned around to see Jonas showing his face through the entrance door.

"I thought I heard sounds coming from above. Why are you here?"

"I was also told to move here."

"You too..."

In place of the stunned Jonas, a voice sounded by his feet.

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"As if you're a match for Jonas-sama! Right, Jonas-sama!?"

It was Kathy. She was glaring at Ann. Encouraged by her, while stiff, Jonas smiled.

"W-well, yeah. I'm not going to lose."

She responded with determination. "I have no intention of losing either."

END OF CHAPTER.



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

Story by Mikawa Miri

Illustrations by Aki

Scans: Public

Translation: Raincraft

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Chapter 4 - A False Goodbye

A bell rang downstairs.

The night Ann transferred to the tower room, Jonas rang his bell. Perhaps he was in a hurry because Ann arrived. She heard someone immediately come to his room and then leave.

What would she do if Duke Philax acknowledged Jonas's sculpture that was completed first? She was anxious. But morning came with no further movement downstairs, and the order for Ann to cease working and leave in light of Jonas's sculpture being acknowledged didn't come.

So Ann continued working since morning, and by then, the sun was already high up in the sky. While working together with Mythrill, the sound of a bell coming from downstairs surprised her, and she raised her head.

"That's Jonas's bell, right? He's ringing it again after he completed his work and rang it last night? Is it that he fixed some parts that were pointed out to him or something? Or maybe he just got ahead of himself..."

At that point, Ann was considering ringing the bell to signal her work's completion soon. Naturally, she was in a hurry.

Seeing Ann so anxious, Mythrill stood up.

"Alright! I'll help out!"

"What will you do?"

"I'm going to go peep."

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Contrary to gallantry, Mythrill tied a handkerchief he took out of his pocket around his head, and sneakily left the room.

Ann wondered how it would turn out. Wanting to know soon, she was impatiently waiting for Mythrill when Shall returned from taking a walk. In his right hand dangled a violently wriggling Mythrill.

"Let me go! Let go! Shall Fen Shall!"

"Shall, why are you holding Mythrill...?"

Ann stared wide-eyed as Shall released the nape of Mythrill's neck. Mythrill fell to the floor with a flump, letting out a screech.

"When I returned from my walk, I came across this guy trying to sneak into Jonas's room. He looked like he was going to do something weird and cause trouble, so I caught him."

"I wasn't thinking of doing anything weird! I just thought I'd pull a little prank by ringing the signal bell!"

Mythrill snorted and looked away from Shall while sitting cross-armed on the floor.

"When you said you were going to peep, you were going to go play pranks!?"

She raised her voice. Jonas may be a despicable person, but she didn't agree with getting back at him. Mythrill stood up somewhat in a hurry.

"No, wait, Ann! Don't get the wrong idea! I really was just going to peep, but I got happy seeing that guy so depressed, I thought I'd just give him the final blow."

"Got happy, 'final blow'... That's even worse, isn't it..."

As Ann murmured, Shall spoke from behind her.

"Right. Rather than such a prank, if you're gonna do something, you should be more aggressive."

"What do you mean 'be more aggressive'!? Though the same goes for pranks, as people, isn't being more aggressive an even greater wrong?!"

Mythrill and Shall exchanged looks. "We're not people," they said simultaneously.

Heartbroken, Ann held her hand against her forehead.

"Ah, that's right... That's enough..."

She gave up on admonishing the two fairies.

"But Jonas being depressed means the Duke must have not liked his sugar sculpture," said Ann, to which Mythrill nodded with folded arms.

"I'm positive that's what happened. Also, that guy had a bruise showing on his face. Guess he had a lover's quarrel with Kathy or something. That's quite the wonderful situation."

Hearing Mythrill's words, Shall made a dubious expression. Ann too, tilted her head.

"Would Kathy do something like that?"

She didn't think Kathy, who considered Jonas her number one priority, would lay a hand on him. Perhaps he'd fallen down the stairs or bumped into

something in the room.

"So, is your sugar sculpture finished?" asked Shall. Ann looked at the sculpture behind her.

"Yeah. I think it's good enough."

"Shall I ring the signal?" Mythrill grabbed the string cheerfully.

Truth was, she felt that she didn't quite understand the meaning of the Duke's words when he said, 'Increase the accuracy.' She was captured by the notion of making the workmanship more detailed, and increased the drape of the fairy's dress, and added a watermark pattern to the hem.

"Please."

Mythrill pulled the string and the sound of a bell rang in conjunction inside Ann's room, out in the corridor, and then somewhere far away.

Soon after, they heard hard footsteps climbing up the stairs.

Without a knock, the door to the room opened.

"Your grace...?"

It was Alban, Duke of Philax, in the flesh. Though a page came following behind him, she never thought the man himself would suddenly come to such a sorry room. Normally, that would be impossible.

Ann quickly knelt on the floor and bowed her head, but her figure didn't seem to penetrate Alban's eyes. He advanced straight towards the worktable and looked at the sugar sculpture.

Trying to see his reaction, Ann slightly raised her eyes while keeping her head low.

She saw the Duke's hands; they were tightly clenched, as if holding back anger.

"It hasn't changed," Alban murmured.

"Eh..."

Ann raised her head, unable to comprehend his words.

Alban was looking at her with a hint of anger in his eyes.

"Were you not listening to me? I ordered you to give form to the fairy in the portrait. And yesterday, I ordered you to increase the accuracy. This is the same as yesterday. Nothing's changed. Both you and the craftsman downstairs understand nothing," he said, and with that, quickly turned on his heel and left. Ann was dumbfounded.

"What does that mean?"

—What is he not satisfied with?

Shall Fen Shall leaned against the wall, gazing at the sugar sculpture Ann made.

Ann was worrying over what was wrong with her sculpture and had been sitting in front of it since noon without moving. After barely having any

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dinner, she once again sat down in front of it, and only seemed to come to when Mythrill turned on a lamp for her when it became dark. She thanked him, but then immediately returned to gazing at the sculpture.

Shall understood Ann's bafflement.

As far as he could tell, the first sugar sculpture Ann finished was of near perfect workmanship. Its accuracy couldn't go any higher. It had a perfect form. If you added or took anything from it, its balance would collapse.

He didn't understand what Alban was unhappy with.

Mythrill too, had been sitting on the windowsill with a serious expression, patiently waiting for Ann to gather her thoughts. But it seemed he couldn't win against his drowsiness and dozed off.

"Maybe I should try a different approach..."

It was past midnight when Ann murmured and stood straight up.

"Tinkering with this will make the whole thing break, meaning I can't increase its accuracy. So making something else... Something more realistic..." she muttered while grabbing a lamp from the table, and was about to leave through the door.

"Do you want to get lost?"

He called out to her, and as though startled back into her senses, she turned towards him.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to go look at the portrait of that fairy again. If I remember

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correctly, there should be one in the hall. So I'm going to go look at it again, and then I'll make the sculpture in a more realistic approach."

"So, you can reach the hall safely?" he asked, and after looking surprised, Ann hung her head.

"Right... I forgot..."

She looked at Shall apologetically.

"Though it's the middle of the night, will you go with me? Is it okay?"

"I'll go."

He pulled his back away from the wall and took up the lamp from Ann's hand. Taking the lead, he headed towards the hall.

Naturally, the hall was pitch black, so he held the lamp's light over the portrait.

The air was so cold; Ann embraced her shoulders in her arms and her breath turned white.

As Shall gazed at the gently smiling fairy in the portrait, a thought occurred to him.

"Maybe Duke Philax isn't looking for something extraordinary in a sugar sculpture?" he said, and Ann looked up at him in wonder.

"What do you mean?"

"If he just wanted an extraordinary sugar sculpture, your sculpture should've been enough to satisfy him."

"But the Duke isn't satisfied. What I made isn't what he wants."

Ann returned her gaze to the portrait, staring at it fixedly as if it were challenging her. The profile of her face right then looked more mature than usual.

Starting the next day, and for the next five days, she made a new sugar sculpture.

Though the size was the same as the previous one, the representation changed drastically.

She visited the portrait time and again, driving the face shape into her head until she'd attained every detail, and sculpted it in a realistic representation as though to solidify the portrait as it was.

She felt that, unlike the previous sculpture, the atmosphere had diminished somewhat. Instead, she emphasized the vivid color scheme and the sharpness of the lines as befitting a realistic representation. Otherwise, as a sugar sculpture, it would just give a vague impression with no determined focus.

With that, she felt it was perfect. But in order to confirm one more time, she decided to go see the portrait.

The past five days, she made round trips from the hall to the room dozens of times. Thanks to that, she was able to come and go on that one path even without Shall's escort.

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"I'm going to go look at the picture for a bit," she said to Mythrill, who was cleaning up the table, and left the room.

Shall was out on a walk as always.

It was evening. There was a small window by the spiral-shaped stairway circling the interior of the tower. From there, the sea breeze blew in, along with the light of the setting sun and the smell of the tide.

As soon as she left the room, the chilly air stroked the nape of her neck and she sneezed. Shivering, she began climbing up the stairs.

Then, as if predicting the moment Ann would pass by, the door to Jonas's room opened.

Jonas's face peeked out with an exhausted expression.

She hasn't heard the sound of a bell coming from downstairs for the past five days, so Ann assumed Jonas was busy fixing his sculpture as well.

"Ann."

He hailed her and she halted. Being hailed by him was surprising.

"What?"

"What are you doing?"

"What am I doing? I'm going to go see the portrait of that fairy."

At that, Jonas made an unbelieving expression.

"Are you perhaps making a sugar sculpture?"

"Of course I am. Aren't you?"

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"I can't make one. I don't understand a single thing that guy says. I want to quit already..."

Jonas's complaining surprised her.

"What are you saying? Well, it would help me if you quit though."

"You can only say that now!" he suddenly yelled in anger and shut the door. The moment he did, she saw the blue bruise on his left cheek.

"Jonas?"

Jonas's cornered behavior concerned her. To purposely hail Ann as she walked by despite her being hostile towards him and complain like that... Something must have happened.

Was he perhaps turning to Ann for help? If that was the case, should she try to hear him out and consult him? She thought to herself for a while.

But after remembering what he did to her in Lewiston, she thought herself to be a complete softhearted fool. And with that, she headed towards the hall.

After confirming with the portrait one more time, she returned to the room and rang the signal. The one who appeared was, as expected, Alban himself.

He scrutinized the sugar sculpture for a while, then glared at Ann.

"What is this you made?"

"It's the fairy painted in the picture."

"Wrong. This is completely wrong."

Those words surprised her. She never thought he'd go as far as saying it was

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‘completely wrong.’

She made it more realistic than the previous sculpture. It couldn't be wrong.

—*It can't be. I made it a spitting image of her. What are you saying is wrong?*

She was baffled. Reflexively, she asked, "Then, what is wrong? Please tell me."

"Everything."

"What do you mean? I confirmed with the painting over and over and made it exactly the same. I increased the accuracy with fine workmanship while adjusting its balance as a sugar sculpture."

"There is no meaning nor nothing! Everything is just wrong! This is just a fake look-alike! I don't even want to look at something like this!" Alban shouted, and all of a sudden, he beat the sugar sculpture off its stand to the ground.

For a moment, she stopped breathing. The sugar sculpture shattered on the floor.

Ann couldn't move. She was frozen by the shock of having the sculpture she spent five days making break, and the terror of having caused Alban to burst with anger.

"Give her form. You will give her form!"

Alban spoke as if spitting out the words, and with that, he left the room.

Fatigued, Ann sank to the floor on the spot. The stone floor must have been cold, but she couldn't feel it.

Mythrill quickly ran up to her and hit the dumbfounded girl's cheek.

"Ann, Ann! Are you alright? Pull yourself together, Ann!"

"...The sugar sculpture..."

Tears gradually welled in her eyes.

"What happened here?"

A voice came from the entrance of the room. She slowly turned her head to see Shall, back from his walk. Seeing Ann slumped on the floor and the shattered sugar sculpture, his expression turned grave.

"Did Duke Philax do this?" Shall asked Mythrill, and Mythrill nodded. From that, he seemed to infer the situation.

He slowly walked up to Ann and got down on one knee.

"Did he lay a hand on you?"

His voice was monotonous, but his concern came across perfectly.

"...No."

"Duke Philax wasn't satisfied with that, was he?"

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Ann nodded, and Shall heaved a light sigh. He began speaking quietly, "What Duke Philax is looking for is likely something not you nor anyone can understand. I don't think he can be pleased by having a sugar sculpture made. You should withdraw."

"...Eh?"

"There's no need to obtain that one thousand Cress and the honor. You should withdraw and leave this place."

"You mean, to quit this job midway?"

"Yes."

"But, I... I accepted it. I said I can do it."

"There are things you can't do."

Mythrill then agreed as well.

"That's right, Ann. I also think you should quit this job. It's a shame about the one thousand Cress though..."

—*Quit the job?*

Saying she couldn't do it and abandoning the job she'd accepted—that was basically saying, 'I can't complete the sculpture because I don't really understand what you're asking for, so it's your fault.'

—*I don't want to.*

Deep in her heart, contrary to reason, moaned something like obstinacy.

—*I don't want to say I can't do it.*

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"I'm the one at fault for not being able to do it. I'm the one at fault for not understanding what the Duke is looking for. It's only natural to make what the client desires after all. I'm being spoiled by not understanding that."

Strongly influenced by the shock, her voice was tearful.

"His wish may be something abnormal. It may be something that can't be made into a sugar sculpture."

—Does he really desire something that can't be made?

She recalled Alban's words and expressions thus far. As she thought, her feelings of agitation subsided, and for just a moment, Ann remembered an expression Alban showed her.

"It can't be something that can't be made."

She suddenly raised her head.

"It has to be something that can be made into a sugar sculpture. Because when the Duke first saw my sculpture, for just a moment, he looked happy. But after looking at it closely, he said it was wrong. I don't think he would've have made that face if it weren't something that could be represented in the extent of a sugar sculpture."

Hearing those words, Mythrill said in amazement, "In short, you're saying you'll keep working?"

"I don't want to quit. I know the two of you are worried about me... But..."

"You're the one making it. You're the one to decide," Shall said curtly while standing up.

"I'm sorry Shall, Mythrill Reed Pod, for making you tag along."

"You're the only one entertaining enough to kill time with by tagging along, so I don't mind."

All the while saying hateful things, he took Ann's hand and pulled her to her feet.

"Well, I know that Ann is an idiot, so I'm not surprised."

Mythrill too, nodded with an amazed expression.

She didn't want to abandon the job.

It was obstinacy. She didn't want to voluntarily raise a white flag and run away. To Ann, there was nothing she wanted to do other than to make sugar sculptures, nor did anything else have any value to her. For that reason, she felt that if she abandoned something even just once, her weapon would slip right out of her hand.

However, even if she decided to obstinately continue working this way, what sort of sugar sculpture should she make? The fact that she didn't know still had not changed.

For that night at least, she decided to get a good rest.

Her hands didn't touch the silver sugar. It was preparation for calming her mind and grasping something new.

Having finished her supper, she sat by the table and drank some hot tea to warm up her body before going to sleep.

She gave Shall some tea as well. With his one hand resting on the table, he

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placed his palm over the steaming cup to enjoy his tea. Shall seemed to like the aroma of matured tea floating in the room. Occasionally, he'd partly close his eyes, and at the same time, his wing would shine a light green color.

As for Mythrill, it seemed his exhaustion from working these past few days had piled up. After dinner, he immediately crawled into bed. Seeing him breathing so loudly in his sleep made her feel bad. She was so immersed in her work that she didn't notice how tired he was.

Since moving to this room, Mythrill and Ann had been using the bed. Shall would sleep on a leather mat on the floor, using a sheet for a blanket. That bothered Ann as well.

"Shall, use the bed tonight. I'll sleep on the floor over there."

"Alright, but I'm kicking Mythrill Reed Pod off. His teeth-grinding is annoying."

"That's horrible! Don't do that!"

"Then I'll sleep on the floor. It's fine that way."

Ann went limp. In the end, Shall just didn't feel like using the bed. Yet by strangely choosing to avoid saying so, she was the one getting tired from having to properly respond to every single thing.

"Shall, when on earth did you become so twisted?"

"If there's someone who's lived over a hundred years and isn't the least bit twisted, I'd like to congratulate them."

He looked at Ann over the table, then grinned maliciously. "Though even if

you lived a hundred years, I doubt you'd change inside."

"What do you mean by that? Really, how un-cute... Though a hundred years ago, perhaps even you were cute~"

"A hundred years ago, perhaps."

"You were cute!?"

She couldn't imagine it. But like Ann had her time as a baby, Shall must have had such a time as well. What kind of expression did Shall have when he was born? Did he smile innocently like a child? She wanted to see it. Liz must've seen it.

—*Liz.*

The jealousy resembling feeling once again reared its head. Wanting to swallow it down, she gulped on her tea that had begun to cool. The tea passed through her throat, but the unpleasant feeling she wanted to swallow remained.

Seeing the calm profile of Shall's face, the urge to ask about Liz welled in her throat.

"How about going to sleep?"

It seemed as if Shall mistook her silence for sleepiness.

However, far from being sleepy, her feelings had cooled down and her head became clear.

"Liz..."

At last, that name came out of her mouth. That was a mistake, she thought to herself.

But she couldn't stop her next words.

"What kind of girl was she? Was she pretty?"

"Pretty?"

Shall didn't even seem to question why Ann was asking something like that. Perhaps he thought they were just continuing their small talk.

And as if seeing Liz's figure there, he stared into empty space.

"She was pretty, I think."

"What color were her eyes? Was her hair long? Was she gentle?"

"She had blue eyes. Her hair was long, because she hadn't cut it since she was five. As for gentle... Rather, I'd say she was mature. She was quiet and thoughtful."

—A pretty, mature, quiet and thoughtful young woman.

As for herself, she wasn't pretty. She was childlike and noisy, and many other things that weren't worth mentioning—such abject thoughts sprung to her mind one after another.

—I'm jealous...

She was so, so jealous that she couldn't stand it. Surely, ever remaining beyond the gaze of Shall's black eyes, was Liz. Seeing the profile of his beautiful face, that thought ate into her chest.

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Shall suddenly looked Ann's way, and his eyes widened slightly.

"What's wrong?" he asked. She didn't understand what it was he was surprised by.

Drip.

A drop of water fell on her fingers and she realized. She touched her cheek—she was crying.

"Ah... What's this, I..."

Though she tried, she couldn't stop the overflowing matter.

Shall was looking at her with an unusually perplexed expression.

These past few days, she had been constantly worrying over her sugar sculpture, and that day, Alban shattered it.

Is that why? Though she was determined to continue working, her feelings had become unstable due to fatigue and shock. Normally, she wouldn't cry over something like this. To begin with, she wouldn't do something as foolish as ask about Liz. Her own tears made her finally realize the extent of her foolishness.

Not wanting to show her face, she turned her back to Shall and remained this way without moving.

What would she do if he asked the reason for her tears?

"Did I say something that offended you?"

"No..."

She shook her head, but she couldn't raise her face. As he spoke to her, her tears overflowed even more.

After a while, she sensed Shall getting up and, likely out of consideration towards her, he left the room.

Ann intensely regretted what a fool she was. She wiped the tears that had finally subsided with the sleeve of her dress. No doubt she made Shall feel unpleasant. Those tears weren't Shall's fault. She had to tell him that. Then, she would return to her room and get some rest—sleeping would also make her feel better—and starting tomorrow, she would once again get down to work.

That way she'd be able to immediately forget these unpleasant feelings.

With a lamp in hand, she left the room and headed towards the stairway.

Lighting the top and bottom of the stairs, she tried calling, "Shall? Shall, are you there?"

But there was no answer.

Whenever he'd go wandering on his own, he'd often be on the roof of the tower. She climbed all the way to the rooftop, but with only the strong wind blowing through the dark, there was no sign of him. Just in case, she tried the hall as well, but he wasn't there either.

If she tried going anywhere else on her own, she'd get lost. Reluctantly, she returned to her room.

When she came up to the room's entrance, the door was slightly open. She was certain she closed it properly. Thinking *maybe*, she opened the door in a hurry.

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"Shall!?"

The one there was someone else.

"Jonas?"

"Hey there, Ann."

He had an unusually nervous expression.

"Why are you in my room?"

"Just got something to take care of. Hey, do you know what this is?" he said, raising his right hand to show what he was holding.

It was a fairy's wing the size of a palm.

"That wing—"

Taken aback, she looked at the bed, and saw Mythrill sitting there with his head hanging low.

Apparently noticing Ann's gaze, Mythrill raised his head, looking like he was about to cry.

"Ann, I'm sorry. While I was fast asleep... That guy stole my wing..."

Mythrill had a single wing on his back. Ann returned to him his other wing that had been taken away by fairy hunters, but it could not return to his back. That's why Mythrill would coil his wing around his neck and wear it as a scarf. That wing he wore around his neck was gone.

"Jonas, why are you doing this? Return his wing. If you don't like me, you should just do whatever you want to me directly."

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Her voice trembled with anger.

"I wasn't thinking of doing anything to you. But there is something I want you to do," said Jonas, lacking the composure of someone who had the upper hand. His eyes looked desperate, like he was cornered by something as well.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Right now, you're going to make a request from Shall. You're going to say, 'I no longer want to be with you, so leave this castle.' And, 'Don't ever show your face to me again.'"

"Why!? Something like that—!?"

"Can't do it? That can't be right..."

Jonas tightly gripped Mythrill's wing with both hands.

Mythrill screamed and rolled off the bed.

"Stop it!!"

She tried jumping him, but he nimbly dodged her and held the wing up high.

"I'm going to take Mythrill with me and return to my room. I'll be leaving Kathy here. If you properly do as I told you and drive Shall out of the castle, I'll give the wing back. But if you tell anyone about this, Kathy will hear it. She'll immediately come to let me know, and I'll tear this wing up."

"Jonas, you..."

"Come now, Mythrill."

With a side-glance at Ann who was glaring at him, Jonas hurriedly left the

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room.

When Mythrill passed by her as he was leaving, he apologized by saying, "I'm sorry."

She didn't understand why Jonas was doing such a thing. Her eyes were blinded with rage. Taking Mythrill hostage was too cowardly.

"I'm watching you, Ann."

A voice came from the window's direction. Kathy was sitting cross-legged on the windowsill and looking at Ann with a faint smile.

"If you say anything unnecessary, I'll immediately report it to Jonas-sama," she said and, starting at the tips of her feet, the color began to fade from her. She gradually became transparent until she could no longer be seen—making herself disappear was her special ability.

"Why, something like this..."

She was intoxicated with rage. But at the moment, she had to do as Jonas said. That much she understood.

Why did Ann start crying? He didn't really understand it.

He thought all he did was answer plainly according to her questions when she asked about Liz.

Yet Ann started crying.

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Thinking about it, of the fifteen years he spent with Liz, there were about five years from when she was fifteen until she died when at times he couldn't understand what she was thinking. Like Ann, Liz would suddenly start crying or get angry. Back then, Liz definitely said, 'It's because I love you.'

Shall felt the same. That growing child was so lovely and wholeheartedly dear to him.

That was why he'd often think of the best way to make her happy. Even if as a result they'd have to be separated, it couldn't be helped. Rather than being unhappy with him, he'd rather entrust her to someone who'd definitely grant her happiness. That way he'd be at ease. He was satisfied with that.

However, Liz cried. As she repeatedly said, "It's because I love you," he answered that he did as well. But Liz had said, 'Your love and my love are different.'

He didn't understand. And during his confusion, Liz was killed.

For twenty years after she died, relying on his hatred and anger, he carried out his revenge.

However, once that was over with, he fell into a state of lethargy.

His anger and hatred towards humans smoldered deep in his chest, but nothing mattered anymore. And so, in that empty state, nearly eighty years had passed.

Thinking carefully, other than the fifteen years he spent with Liz, he had no experience communicating with neither humans nor fairies. It was likely the same as the fifteen-year-old Ann, or perhaps even less.

He knew hatred, anger, and resignation well.

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But anything other than that, he didn't quite understand. That was why inferring Ann's feelings was difficult for him.

He remained atop the rampart's passageway till after midnight. In the pitch black space, the strong wind carrying the smell of the tide kept blowing incessantly. It was perfect for cooling one's head.

The stars were high in the sky, shining bright like in midwinter. Estimating the time by the stars' position, he figured Ann would be asleep by then, and headed towards the room.

In spite of everything, after Ann got a full night's sleep, it would be like nothing happened. Even if something like before happened again, once Ann slept and morning came, everything would work out.

He entered the room to find Ann, surprisingly awake. She was sitting still in a chair with a lamp placed on the table. Noticing Shall's presence enter the room, she raised her head with a start, looking stiff.

As he approached her, she cast her eyes downward, seeming eager to run away.

"Shall... Please, I... want you to leave."

"You want me to sleep in a different room?" He returned the question, to which Ann shook her head.

"No. I want you to leave the castle. And... Don't ever return, to where I am."

The meaning of those words didn't enter his head immediately, but slowly, it sank in.

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"You're saying you don't want me to stay with you?"

Without raising her head, Ann nodded deeply.

—*What is she saying all of a sudden?*

Something like anger welled inside him. But unlike anger, without turning into excitement, it simply grew bigger and pressed against his chest. It was irritating.

"Your reason?"

He had to ask, for he felt the irritation would not stop otherwise.

But Ann only shook her head.

"Your reason," he asked again, to which she then answered in bits and pieces.

"It's not your fault... It's mine. I'm sorry. So, don't ask."

That seemed to be the best she was capable of, and with her head still hanging low, she stopped moving. Her shoulders trembled in fits.

It was the same as when she started crying before. He didn't understand it in the slightest, but no doubt she had her own reason.

Suddenly, something cold pierced straight through his chest, like wind blowing in through a crack.

—*Is there a need for me to stay when I'm not needed?*

The feeling of lethargy he'd gotten used to for eighty years returned. In two and a half months, he'd completely forgotten it.

—*Perhaps this is how everything is, abruptly ending.*

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He thought it was useless to try and ask Ann any more questions, and he saw no reason to keep asking stubbornly.

When he swore he'd go together with Ann, he definitely felt he was needed. Because he had that, he went with her. That was all.

If he was clearly told otherwise, whatever he asked was unnecessary.

Shall turned his back to Ann and started walking. The lethargy returned, but inside his chest amassed the irritating feeling of having swallowed a foreign object. That uncomfortable feeling was a first for him.

Shall left the castle.

Hearing Shall's footsteps as he left, she couldn't hold back her tears.

With her head still lowered, the tears dripped onto her knees.

"Looks like you did well."

The reappeared Kathy jumped down from the windowsill, then up the table.

"Are you crying?"

Ann wiped the tears with her cuff and turned her face away from Kathy.

Kathy snorted, looking unamused, and left to call Jonas.

She rejected Shall. With that, everything—including her anger towards Jonas—left her body, and weariness took over. She senselessly leaned against the back of the chair.

—How Shall must see me now... He definitely thinks I'm selfish.

And he must have been relieved to be away from her. With that, he was truly free.

To begin with, she didn't really understand his reason for staying with her. He probably felt obligated to her for returning his wing. But after being rejected by her this way, he must be leaving gladly. Surely, he left the castle feeling refreshed.

Thinking that, tears once again welled in her eyes.

"Good job, Ann."

As Jonas entered the room, Ann forcefully held back her tears.

She didn't want him to see her cry. She stood up and drew closer to him.

"Now, return Mythrill Reed Pod's wing."

"Not yet. Tomorrow, you and I are going to meet Duke Philax. You mustn't oppose anything I say. All you have to do is agree with everything."

"What are you planning to do?"

"Anyway, just do as you're told. I'll let that Mythrill come back to this room. Just having that annoying fairy's wing is enough," said Jonas, and with that he left the room.

What is Jonas trying to do? No doubt he was trying to do something to his advantage like when he stole Ann's sugar sculpture two months ago.

But unlike last time, there was not a hint of joy in him. However gaudy the means, when doing something beneficial for himself, he couldn't hide his joy. This time, she couldn't detect anything like that joy.

After a while, Mythrill returned to the room with his head lowered dejectedly.

"...Ann. I'm sorry, I..."

"Mythrill Reed Pod!"

Overjoyed with seeing that figure, she ran up to him to take him in her arms, and embraced him.

"Are you alright? Did he do anything to you?"

"Ann, you did what Jonas told you? Shall Fen Shall left? I'm sorry, it's my fault. That you were forced to do something like that..."

"It's not your fault. Jonas is to blame."

"But, even though you like Shall Fen Shall, telling him to leave... It must have been incredibly painful, right?"

Being told that so suddenly, Ann blushed. But even while blushing, the pain of seeing Shall's back once again filled up her chest. Tears were about to fall out, but she held them back.

"What are you saying? Something like me liking Shall, that's..."

"Even if you try to hide it, I can tell, Ann. Who do you think I am? I'm the

great Mythrill Reed Pod. I'd be bothered if you lumped me together with a potato head like Shall Fen Shall."

Though her eyes were still teary, Ann snickered upon hearing Mythrill call Shall a potato head.

"Shall would get mad if he heard you call him a potato head."

"But he is, isn't he? Even though it's so obvious, why doesn't he understand how you feel?"

Now that he mentioned it, perhaps it was true. She was blushing, running away, and crying at his behavior. A normal man would at least think 'maybe.'

If it were Jonas, he'd be convinced she'd taken an interest in him ages ago.

"You like him, don't you?"

Having her obvious behavior pointed out to her, Ann gave up on trying to hide it and nodded honestly.

"Yeah. I guess so."

Mythrill briskly rubbed the bottom of his nose and, somewhat regretfully, laughed with a 'heh heh.'

"Ah. Yeah, well. That's right, huh. I knew it after all."

"But it's no use. Because Shall left..."

Ann sat down on the bed with Mythrill still in her arms.

"What is Jonas planning to do by separating us from Shall?"

Her anxiety grew bigger. With Shall gone, she was all the more anxious. She

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felt as helpless as though she'd been forced out naked into the cold.

That's when she noticed her lavishness of shedding tears over hearing about Liz.

—I'm a fool.

It didn't matter whether or not Shall was always gazing at memories of the past. The fact that in reality he was with her was the most important thing that she should be happy about.

Forgetting that, she thought more and more.

Hugh said it before, didn't he?

That 'it's hard for humans to adjust to severe conditions, but they get immediately used to comfortable ones.'

Without realizing it, Ann had gotten used to having Shall by her side.

—I want us to be together. Just that is enough. Whatever Shall may be gazing at, just having him by my side is enough. Shall. Shall.

There was no way he could hear her, but she couldn't keep herself from calling his name over and over in her heart.

END OF CHAPTER



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

Story by Mikawa Miri

Illustrations by Aki

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Chapter 5 - Captive

—*Where should I go?*

Morning glow dyed the eastern sea a light purple.

Shall Fen Shall was at the base of the cape where Philax Castle stood.

In order to prevent the ocean winds from plowing the road, the evergreen forest along the coastline had been preserved. He rested in that forest till dawn, and rose with the morning sun.

He began walking along the road, but with no purpose; his gait was slow. The night before, falling snow had mixed with the strong ocean winds, covering the narrow road in a thin layer of ice.

He walked idly while listening to the regularly resounding sound of the waves. The irritation that felt like swallowing a foreign object persisted still, annoying him.

Suddenly, he sensed a thirst for blood coming from behind. Standing his guard, he turned around.

There stood three men, carrying long swords at their hips. They slowly walked his way, as though evaluating him. Behind them, standing a head taller, were two fairies with rough red-black skin. They both had a single poorly crumpled wing fluttering on their backs. They were warrior fairies owned by the three men.

The men were fairy hunters, likely in the middle of their hunt. Many fairies were born in the morning, so fairy hunters rose with the sun and started hunting. The three men walked up to a point where they could clearly discern Shall's face, then halted.

"Well, if it ain't a beauty walking all alone. Must be our lucky day."

One of the men smirked. The other two rounded Shall from behind and to his left.

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One of the warrior fairies went right, while the other stood in waiting behind the man who spoke.

"What do you want?"

"Looks like a high class pet fairy you don't normally see in this area. Who's your owner?"

"I asked you a question first. Answer. What do you want?"

"What a spirited fellow."

The fairy hunters laughed in amusement.

Even without them saying it, Shall knew what their aim was. They were planning on hunting him.

Or, perhaps it was more accurate to say that they were planning on *stealing* him.

Fairy hunters hunt fairies and sell them. But some nasty fairy hunters stole fairies that others own and sold them arbitrarily.

Of course, one of the fairy's wings would remain in the hands of the original owner. But another would still be on the fairy's back. A stolen fairy was enslaved by having a sturdy string tied to the base of the wing on their back, like a rein.

If the fairy acted up, the string was pulled, and the wing came off. If a fairy lost both their wings, even if the wings were unharmed, they became weakened, and shortly thereafter, they disappeared. It was an absurdly savage enslavement method.

However, from the start, a stolen fairy couldn't be owned for long, because the original owner still had the fairy's wing in their possession. If that owner thought the fairy had run away and disposed of their wing, the fairy would die at that moment. It wasn't strange for a stolen fairy to suddenly die.

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Yet many were satisfied with buying a fairy cheaply and owning it for a short time—especially pet fairies, as one wouldn't be too troubled with or without them. They were easy to sell, saying it was enough to just temporarily enjoy them.

Shall had a single wing on his back. Normally, he would indeed be owned. No doubt the fairy hunters thought he was as well.

But with Shall's appearance, even stolen, he'd sell for a high price.

"Fairy, won't you come with us for a bit?"

Shall showed a wisp of a smile at those words. He gently opened the palm of his right hand, where he began amassing energy. Particles of light gathered by his palm.

"What would you do if I don't?"

The pesky irritation made Shall belligerent. He smiled fleetingly, feeling he was about to enjoy this.

One of the warrior fairies spoke with a nervous voice, "Boss, please be careful. That guy isn't a pet fairy."

"What's it look like to you other than a pet fairy?"

"The same as us. A warrior fairy."

"What?"

By the time the man looked at Shall with a face saying, 'It can't be,' Shall was already gripping his sword in his hand.

He kicked against the ground and charged straight at the man before him.

The warrior fairy jumped in front of the stunned man, and whipping out the hatchet-like sword he carried on his back, he repelled Shall's thrust.

"You bastard!!"

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Aiming for Shall's back as he dodged, the other two fairy hunters came at him with their swords.

He lowered his body to avoid the attack just in time, and pushing his bare left hand against the ground, he used his arm's recoil to jump aside. Leaving a few paces' worth of distance, he stood facing the fairy hunters.

One of the warrior fairies spoke in a groan-like manner.

"Boss, this guy's impossible. Let's withdraw."

Shall grinned. The wing on his back tensed, making a buzzing sound and taking on a glossy bluish tint.

"You were the ones who invited me. I'll have you entertain me."

"...Of course. It's not like we could let such an expensive-looking fairy get away, after all. And you, don't go saying stupid things! We're going to hunt him!"

The fairy hunters' leader pulled out his sword, raising his guard while slowly closing in.

The remaining two fairy hunters and warrior fairies, reading the leader's intention, slowly surrounded Shall.

The two fairy hunters returned their swords to their hips and grabbed a chain that had a weight at its end. They split into rear and front, and while spinning the chain, aimed for Shall's arms and legs.

As expected, they didn't group together to hunt fairies for nothing. They had no openings. These five didn't seem to be opponents that could be defeated easily. Shall felt a thrill of enjoyment.

With a strong air-piercing sound, the weighted chain flew from front and back simultaneously. Where he tried to dodge to, the warrior fairy swung down his sword. Breaking his posture, Shall jumped to the side, but the chain wound around his ankle. Having his ankle forcefully pulled, his right hand hit the ground. Using that recoil, he aimed for the man holding the chain that caught

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his ankle, and came at him while remaining in a low posture.

Swinging the sword from the area of his knee, he aimed for the wrist of the fairy hunter that was holding the chain.

The fairy hunter let go of the chain at once and jumped out of the way.

Heading towards the fairy hunter whose posture had collapsed, Shall lunged an attack with his ankle still tangled in the chain.

"That's enough, Shall Fen Shall!!"

Shall started upon hearing his name being called.

The fairy hunter that escaped Shall's blade by a hair's breadth retreated backwards in a crawling fashion.

"As you might expect, a fairy that kills a human, no matter the reason, will be disposed of."

The fairy hunters that had stopped moving looked puzzled at the sight of the young nobleman that came calmly riding his horse from the direction of the road. Behind him, on horseback as well, was a young man with brown skin that looked like a guard. Following them were several cavalry soldiers.

The fairy hunters didn't know the young nobleman's status, but it seemed they determined it was safest to act obedient. They each returned their weapon to their hip.

Shall undid his posture and went to meet the young nobleman with a cold expression.

"You sure do have a lot of free time, Silver Sugar Viscount."

"Haven't I been saying how incredibly busy I am? You're as uncute as ever. Aren't you at all happy at our chance reunion?"

Hugh advanced up to Shall on his horse, where he climbed off. Salim climbed off his horse as well and slowly walked behind Shall. With the faithfulness of

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protecting his master, he placed his hand on the handle of his sword and stood on the lookout for Shall.

Hugh declared to the fairy hunters, "I am Hugh Mercury, the Silver Sugar Viscount. Were you trying to steal this fairy?"

"That's absurd. None of us were thinking such a thing."

The leader of the fairy hunters pliantly lowered his head. Hugh waved his hand in displeasure.

"I'll pretend I didn't see anything, so hurry up and leave."

After warding off the fairy hunters, Hugh looked around. "You're alone? What about Ann and Mythrill?"



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The question made Shall feel incredibly unpleasant. He looked away from Hugh.

"What happened to them, Shall? They're not with you? Did something happen?"

Answering was also irritating.

He suddenly felt like he did the other night when he faced Ann.

"What about you? Why are you in a place like this?"

"I have some business in Philax Castle. So, weren't you there with Ann? I heard this rumor in Lewiston that you guys headed to Alban's castle."

With his face still turned away, Shall remained quiet. Hugh shrugged.

"Don't feel like answering, huh. Well, that's fine, though. By the way, Shall—" With a casual gesture, Hugh suddenly reached for Shall's chest. It was a quick move with the characteristic smoothness of a sugar craftsman. As his face was turned, Shall's reaction was late.

He was startled by that hand's movement. While simultaneously pulling himself back, Hugh took out a leather bag the size of a palm from the breast pocket of Shall's coat.

"You bastard!"

Hugh sprung back from Shall, who was about to create his sword.

"Woops, what's wrong? That's unlike you, Shall. You're full of openings."

Hugh held the leather bag up high while laughing. Shall grinded his back teeth with a grunt.

"The Silver Sugar Viscount, acting like a mere pickpocket?"

"I've been told that if I didn't become a sugar craftsman, I could become a pickpocket. It's my special skill. Even so, I didn't think I'd be able to steal from

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you. But you've been strangely full of openings just now. Could it be that you trust me? I'm so happy, Shall."

There was something wrong with him. What was he distracted by, and how could he be so careless? Or was it rather, he just then realized, that he unconsciously let his guard down around Hugh?

It might be that in the few months he'd spent with Ann, her trustfulness had rubbed off on him. For the first time, he became conscious of Ann's influence over him.

"This is your wing, right?"

Folded inside that bag was indeed his wing that Ann returned to him.

"In Highland, when you find a fairy that isn't owned by anyone, the first one to get his hands on that fairy's wing has the right to own them. Well, those are rules that humans thought up. So, for a fairy, I guess it means whatever but..."

Hugh grinned.

"It looks like I'm your owner now, Shall Fen Shall."

*

When morning came, Jonas came over to Ann's room.

"I asked Dale for a meeting with Duke Philax. We'll be able to see him later. I'm having you come as well, Ann." Jonas looked horribly nervous.

The other night, with Shall's leaving, Ann had somehow lost her strength.

She was anxious, but she didn't think there could be anything worse than Shall leaving after rejecting him herself. That was why, no matter what Jonas was scheming, she didn't care. She had such a 'so-what' feeling.

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"Your face is pale, Jonas," Ann said coldly, and Jonas sternly glared at her in return.

"You, stay quiet. Okay? Just stay quiet!"

His reaction lacked composure. Looking worried, Kathy got on Jonas's shoulder and patted his cheek. "Don't worry, Jonas-sama. It will go well, I'm sure."

Contrary to their behavior, Ann herself was surprised. That wasn't the behavior of someone with the upper hand.

Dale came to pick Jonas and Ann up and led them not to the usual hall, but to what looked like Alban's private chamber.

It was a suit of rooms, with the bedroom in the back of the living room. Ann and Jonas were led into the living room.

With a fire burning in the fireplace, the room was warm.

It was a simple room, with only a single couch in front of the fireplace and a large office desk by the window. A long-haired carpet was placed in the middle of the room, but as it was made of wool, it wasn't particularly luxurious.

From a noble family with Grand King Cedric as their ancestor, the simple room told of how the Alban house had their corresponding authority taken away.

The King who lived in the towering castle in Lewiston and Alban—they were so different; one wouldn't think they shared the same blood.

—I wonder what it feels like, having to go to Lewiston every month for a courtesy visit, she suddenly thought. If Alban were a genuine fool, he might feel no pain whatsoever. However, if he had some degree of pride, no doubt it was an awful humiliation.

Alban was lying on the couch, wistfully gazing at the flames.

Prompted by Dale, Jonas and Ann knelt on the spot.

Once Dale announced their visit, Alban glanced their way and said, "Craftsmen.

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I don't believe you're here because the sugar sculpture is already complete. What did you come for?" He said to Jonas and Ann in an emotionless voice.

Jonas licked his dry lips many times, but—looking like he'd made up his mind—he opened his mouth.

"Ah, I. I mean, I¹, want you to allow me to quit this job."

Alban slowly got up and turned his body in their direction.

"Quit? Six days ago, you said the same thing, didn't you?"

"Ye... Yes."

"Back then, what did I say?"

"That you won't allow it."

—*The Duke said that?*

Ann looked at Jonas's face in surprise. Jonas couldn't afford to look her way.

"That's right. Have you forgotten? If you've forgotten, I'll remind you of the pain from six days ago. You two are being monitored. If you try to escape, you'll be caught and chained up. I believe I said that as well."

Ann was shocked by the words Alban further added.

—*Monitored!?! Chained!?! What is he saying!?!*

Alban stood straight up and grabbed the slim sword that was propped against the couch.

Without placing his hand on the handle, he simply gripped part of the sheath and walking their way in a brandishing posture.

Startled by that behavior, Ann pulled back.

Then, she finally realized the cause of the bruise on Jonas's cheek.

—*The Duke hit him.*

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Six days ago, Jonas had completed his work and called Alban. However, without being acknowledged by him, as Ann was, Jonas had been undoubtedly baffled. That was when Jonas must have said it. That he wanted to quit. And, having angered Alban by saying that, he was hit.

—He said he even had us monitored. Meaning, after finally getting his hands on craftsmen he likes, the Duke won't allow us to quit.

For the first time, Ann felt the strength of that obsession firsthand.

Alban, approaching with a sword in hand, radiated killing intent. While in the warm room, that entirely hardened cold figure felt clad in a bluish atmosphere.

Would blue be the color of madness? A chill ran down her spine.

—This man is serious.

Jonas further prostrated himself.

"I² can't do it. It's true. Please forgive me!! But she can do it. She is many times better than me. Even the Silver Sugar Viscount acknowledged that. If you have her, you don't need me! She doesn't mind staying in the castle until she makes the sugar sculpture you want. I got rid of her escort yesterday, so even if she wanted to quit, she has no way of leaving. I'm begging you, please let me go!"

Hearing the words Jonas rattled in one breath, Ann couldn't believe her ears.

In order for him to escape, Jonas had presented Ann to Alban.

That was why he distanced Shall from her.

"Jonas, you!"

She tried to shout, but as though he'd forgotten about her existence, Jonas remained flat on the ground, shivering. She was so frightened; she hesitated to yell at him.

With his apathetic eyes turned lurid and a sword in hand, Alban didn't look sane. It wouldn't be odd if he pulled out his sword and came slashing at them

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at any moment.

"Please let me go. I'm begging you. Please let me go. Please let me go..." Jonas repeated in a trembling voice. Seeing his strenuous figure, Ann withdrew her complaints.

She even felt pity for the completely frightened boy.

—But... What Jonas is saying might be true. If he's this scared, it's impossible for him to make a sugar sculpture.

Jonas had a place to go back to. If he returned to Lewiston, as one of the craftsmen of the Radcliff guild, he would probably get jobs. Furthermore, if he wanted to be even more spoiled, he could return to his birthplace of Knoxberry Village, where there was a sugar sculpture store he was meant to succeed, and where his parents were.

There was probably no need for someone like him to obstinately make a sugar sculpture for such a dreadful client whose request wasn't clear.

On the other hand, Ann had no place to return to. No money. And now, no Shall.

In that situation, she felt she had no choice but to stay and make the sugar sculpture.

Furthermore, Ann had already accepted the job. No matter the reason, she couldn't abandon it. She didn't want to throw away her only weapon.

Alban was approaching slowly.

With a sword in hand, the man in front of her whose next action was unpredictable made her well up with terror.

But her only path was here. She instinctively knew that.

She gulped, and kneeled between Alban and Jonas to interrupt them.

"It's as this man says. I will make the sugar sculpture. So please let him go. I

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will make it."

Alban halted, and Jonas raised his head in surprise. Alban knit his eyebrows.

"You're saying you'll make it?"

"Yes."

"Do you have confidence?"

"Yes."

"I won't let you leave the castle until you make a sugar sculpture that satisfies me. If you can't do it, you'll never be able to leave."

"I don't mind."

Having said that much, Ann raised her head.

"I promised from the beginning. That I can do it. So I'll make it. If I can't ever make it, that is my responsibility. I'll keep working forever."

For a while, Ann and Alban stared at each other. Ann endured, trying to absolutely not divert her line of sight.

Then, Alban slowly removed his gaze. He lowered the poised sheath of his sword, and his eyes returned to their usual apathetic calmness.

"Very well. I'll allow it. The craftsman there, leave the castle."

"Thank you very much."

Ann lowered her head once again.

As though with that he'd lost his interest, Alban turned his back to them and returned to the couch. Placing the sword beside him, he once again directed his eyes towards the flames. Silence fell upon the chamber. The sound of the popping wood in the fireplace resounded loudly.

Jonas was in a daze, looking like he'd lost all his strength.

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Prompted by Dale, Ann and Jonas took their leave.

Dale brought the two of them back to the tower's staircase, and told Jonas to quickly gather his luggage and leave the castle on his own. However, towards Ann, he directed a severe glare.

"You won't be allowed to leave the castle. As you've heard, you're also being monitored. It's pointless to try running away."

"I know. But Dale, are you alright with just faithfully carrying out your master's orders like this? Is that really what a loyal serving retainer is?"

She couldn't go on without saying it. Alban's way of doing things was too despotic.

As a retainer, it was natural to admonish an erratic and obsessive master—even more so if you took pride in serving the Alban house.

She looked up at Dale, prepared to at the very least be beaten. As she did, Dale suppressed a laugh.

"Well, aren't you being cocky. But, what you're saying is correct. We also advised him a little. But, that man... He probably can't withstand it anymore. Because we know that, we make it our number one priority to grant the Duke's wishes."

"Withstand?"

"That has nothing to do with you. Understand? The Duke desires a sugar sculpture. Make it."

"I promised, so I won't run away. I'll make it," she said clearly, and started climbing the tower's stairs to return to her room.

As she walked up to the room, Jonas came running after her.

"Ann!"

Ann turned around and abruptly held out her hand.

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Jonas blinked at the silently held out palm.

"W-what?""

"Mythrill Reed Pod's wing. Give it back."

"O, oh. Right."

Jonas hurriedly searched his chest pocket, took out the wing, and placed it in Ann's palm. Once she received it, Ann felt relieved. She softly wrapped her arms around the wing.

"Thank goodness," she murmured, then turned her back to Jonas to enter her room. As she did, he grabbed her shoulder.

"Wait, Ann! Why did you say those things!?"

"Those things? I don't believe I've said anything you should be complaining about." Frowning, she turned back around.

"I'm not complaining. Why did you actively speak for me to be allowed to leave? Saying something like that unexpectedly... Why... For my sake..."

"It wasn't for your sake. It's because, looking at your state, I really thought that you're in no condition to make a sugar sculpture. So even if you stayed, it would be no use. That's all."

"But, then, you're saying you're going to make a sugar sculpture for that Duke!? Whatever you make, he's never satisfied, and all he says is completely incomprehensible! Yet, he says that if you can't make something he likes he'll lock you up forever!?"

"I said I'll make it from the beginning. That's why I don't want to run away halfway. So I'll make it."

Jonas released Ann's shoulder, raising his voice like a spoiled child. "Ann, are, are you an idiot!? What are you saying!? In this situation, that's weird!"

"But, right now, other than making a sugar sculpture here, I have nothing else

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to do."

Those were, in fact, her true feelings. Jonas's lips trembled.

"You really are an idiot!" he yelled, then ran down the stairs.

"That's right, huh. I really am," Ann heaved a sigh and muttered to herself. "But other than that, there is nothing else I can do."

Even if she quit like Jonas and left the castle, Shall was gone. She would never see him again. Thinking that, her chest ached like it was being squeezed.

She didn't want to think about it. Instead, she'd think about the sugar sculpture.

That moment, she suddenly heard the words Shall once said in her ears.

'Make a sugar sculpture. There is something you can do.'

—Sugar sculpture... That's right. I should make a sugar sculpture.

She would make the sugar sculpture Alban desired, and then she'd obtain the money and the honor.

When she had the one thousand Cress, she could travel fairly safely by staying at inns, and wander around the kingdom in search for Shall, whom she'd parted with. If she met him, she'd explain that saying she wanted him to leave wasn't what she had really felt, and that she was only threatened into saying it. That she really wanted them to be together.

She raised her head, tightening her expression.

"There is something I can do."

*

"I thought about it carefully, but your looks are really wasted, aren't they."

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The oldest inn in Philax was a three-story brick building facing the harbor. On the top third floor were only three rooms, wider than the ones downstairs.

Apparently, Hugh had reserved the entire third floor.

One room for himself, and the other two for the six escort soldiers accompanying him. It seemed he'd just now arrived in Philax, and was wearing simple travel clothes.

After entering the room and cleansing himself with a hot bath, he put on formal attire.

As it seemed he wasn't accompanied by a labor fairy, Salim was the one helping him with changing clothes. Shall was in Hugh's room. As his wing had been seized, he had no choice but to do as told.

However, he didn't really care about that.

He felt that, no matter what Hugh was thinking by seizing his wing, he could do whatever he wanted.

The room had six extravagant chairs that had a unique fabric native to the continent used for the seats.

Shall, wearing a sullen expression, was sitting cross-legged on one of those chairs with his back leaning against the backrest. That attitude, which showed no sign of leaving, had not a shred of cuteness.

"I'm your owner, you know? Shouldn't you be a bit more amiable towards me? I won't ask to snuggle, but at least do something about that sour face."

Hugh came out from behind the partitioning screen while fixing the cuff of his wrist and sat opposite of Shall across the table. Shall gave him a piercing glare.

"Did Ann leave you for making such a scary face?"

Angered by those words, he raised one leg and plumped it down on the table.

Hugh beat the tip of the boot aimed at him. "What's with this?"

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"My leg feels heavy."

"I get it. I get that you're irritated. Honestly, what happened?"

He didn't feel like answering. Hugh then asked calmly, "Is Ann still in Philax Castle? If so, it'll be bad if we don't get her out. If I fail to persuade Alban, Philax Castle will experience imminent military action."

Hugh seemed pleased by Shall's reaction, who had knitted his eyebrows.

"Come. I'm going to go to Philax Castle and meet Alban now. As you're my warrior fairy, I'm bringing you along as my escort."

"I don't feel like going," he answered. Hugh then inserted his hand into his inner chest pocket.

"I have your wing here. It's not a hobby of mine, but if you don't feel like listening to what I say, I don't mind hurting you."

"You bastard, are you even human?!"

Shall groaned.

Stretching the wing and pulling it with the strength to tear it causes the particles that bind a fairy's entire body to twist and the body's bond to burst, which gives them a taste of the pain and fear of dispersing at once.

It was a pain and fear that humans couldn't understand.

"Sorry, but I'm a genuine human. If you understand, come."

As he got up, Hugh ordered Salim, "Preparations are complete. We're heading towards Philax Castle. Arrange the carriage."

It seemed that Hugh had rushed from Westhall to Philax in quite a hurry.

As it took time to move by carriage, he rode on a horse himself, taking only Salim and six soldier escorts with him, and came to Philax.

Apparently, the rumor that Ann had entered Philax Castle passed through

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Lewiston and reached his ears.

"That's why I was in an extra hurry..."

Having rented a luxurious four in hand carriage that was apparently owned by traders, Hugh headed towards Philax Castle. It seemed that no matter the circumstances, the Viscount visiting the Duke on horseback would have a bad appearance.

Riding inside the carriage were Hugh and Salim, and Shall as well.

Directing his eyes at the ocean spreading outside the carriage's window, Hugh muttered, "This past year and a half, Alban, Duke of Philax, hasn't shown his face in Lewiston once."

—*Not once?*

Shall inadvertently looked back at Hugh's face.

He didn't care about things like the power struggle in the human world, but regardless of your personal interest, if you lived in Highland, you heard about the complications regarding the royal family.

Of course, he knew about the royal family of Millsland, the relations with the Alban house, and what position the head of Alban held.

Hugh looked his way and nodded.

"Even you know what this means, right?"

The head of Alban was the last flashpoint of the kingdom. In order to make sure that flashpoint remained obedient, all trade related taxes were paid to the royal family, and once a month, the head of Alban headed to Lewiston for a courtesy visit. Those two were their obligations.

It was a ritual with the purpose of showing submission and proving there was no intention of disobeying the King.

One of these obligations had been neglected for a period of a year and a half.

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"Before I became the Silver Sugar Viscount, I was often called by Alban. I'd make him... Or rather, I'd make the woman at his side, many sugar sculptures. I know the Duke's character. That's why I also know very well that he's a man who's indifferent to ambition. But Earl Downing is different. Earl Downing has always been aiming for an opportunity to annihilate the Alban house. The Duke's character doesn't matter. The mere existence of the head of Alban is unpalatable for him. Because the taxes are paid, it didn't become a problem immediately. His Majesty, Edmond II, is defending Alban as well. However, it's been a year and a half. If he neglects the greeting obligation for a year and a half, even the King can't suppress Earl Downing's opinion. Alban has ignored repeated summons. I don't know why he suddenly stopped coming to Lewiston, but..."

He took a short pause, then continued.

"This is an opportunity for Earl Downing. He probably won't wait anymore. Even His Majesty, King Edmond II, unable to protect him constantly, gave Earl Downing permission to subjugate him. Earl Downing is bringing soldiers from Westhall Castle and coming to Philax."

—To extinguish the flashpoint, huh.

It was a human-like approach. Completely ruthless. But it was probably because they were like that that the humans won against the fairies.

"If Alban goes to Lewiston before that, it would still be alright. His Majesty, Edmond II, can protect him. But there's no time. Earl Downing moves well for his age. It'll be fine if I can persuade Alban before then."

Hugh once again directed his gaze outside the window with an awfully worried face, uncharacteristic of him.

"Why did you come to persuade him? Was it the King's order?"

"His Majesty isn't the kind to work behind the scenes in order to revoke a permission he'd granted. This is my decision. I have an old debt towards Alban.

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Because I don't want him to die, I want him to at least only quickly go to Lewiston for a greeting. Though, since I've become the Silver Sugar Viscount and became unable to make sugar sculptures for anyone other than His Majesty, we've become distant... What happened during that time?"

Concerned about his friend, Alban, who'd been strangely still and obsessed like he'd been possessed, Hugh came. It was surprising. Was that man worth worrying over?

Upon arriving at Philax Castle, the carriage entered the gate with no trouble. Apparently, a previous notice had been given. Hugh headed towards the castle tower, bringing only Salim and Shall with him.

Upon setting foot inside the tower, Shall became concerned with their surroundings, thinking whether or not Ann's presence would be there. Though he wanted to see her, he also didn't want to see her. If he saw her again, would he be able to hear the reason for being rejected?

The place they were led to was not the hall. It was Alban's private chamber—probably because it wasn't an official visit, and because Hugh and Alban shared a close relationship.

Alban was sitting on the couch in front of the fireplace. Upon sensing the door open, he looked their way, but wouldn't get up. Looking bored, he murmured, "I was wondering who it was. Mercury, huh. It's been two years."

"Long time no see, Duke."

While greeting him, Hugh's face couldn't hide his surprise. "You've... lost a lot of weight... You look tired."

"I have no business with the current you who can't make sugar sculptures for anyone other than the King. What did you come for?"

"To give you an invitation. Won't you go on a trip with me? The destination is Lewiston. Well, it'll be a round trip lasting three, four days."

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"You're saying that too, huh. Dale would sometimes say that as well. I have no intention of going to that place."

"It'll be fun."

"Like hell it will."

"It'll be fun. Lady Christina should come as well. She likes the lively Lewiston, doesn't she? Where is she?"

Alban returned his gaze to the fireplace's flames and stopped moving.

"Duke?"

"Leave."

Hugh shrugged, changing his thus far carefree demeanor. Walking briskly, he approached Alban's side, and kneeling by his feet, he looked up at him.

"Duke, for a year and a half, you have neglected to offer your greetings to His Majesty the King. You should know what this means, right? Right now, Earl Downing is preparing soldiers and heading this way. His Majesty gave permission for your subjugation, but that's not His Majesty's real intention. If you show submissive behavior from now on, His Majesty will protect you. He is fond of you and your late father. The same goes for me."

"Leave."

"Duke!"

"I told you to leave!"

Suddenly, Alban stood up and gripped the sword that was placed beside him.

Hugh himself stood and retreated a few steps back. Salim quickly blocked the way in front of Hugh, placing his hand on the handle of his sword. Shall stood on guard as well, examining the situation.

"What... happened to you, Duke?" Hugh, who seemed unable to hide his shock,

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let out his voice.

Alban, still gripping his sword, said in a intimidating manner, "No one will order me. No one will tell me what to do. Including you, Mercury."

"...I understand." Hugh nodded with a light sigh.

"We'll go. But, I have a request. A sugar craftsman named Ann Halford should be staying in this castle. I want to take her back with me."

"I know nothing of it."

"It's the girl who entered this castle with the fairy waiting over there."

"Several craftsmen entered this castle with fairies, but I kicked them all out. There isn't a single sugar craftsman in this castle."

—*That can't be.*

Until the night before, Shall had been looking over Ann, who was here. As he was near the castle till that morning, he'd immediately know if she'd left. Ann was in this castle. To prove it, Ann's box shaped wagon was still being kept by the castle's outer wall.

"Are you sure?"

While confirming with Alban, Hugh questioned Shall through his eyes, 'Is what the Duke saying true?' Shall shook his head slightly, saying, 'No.'

"This is tedious. Leave, Mercury."

Saying nothing more, Alban once again returned to the couch. He threw his sword on the floor and entwined both his hands' fingers in his golden hair, hanging his head as though enduring a headache.

Hugh silently bowed before Alban who wasn't looking at him and turned on his heel.

Salim followed after, and Shall left the room as well.

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Before closing the door, Shall turned back once more. Alban was still in the same posture.

He was keeping her in the castle and hiding her presence. Just what was Alban seeking in a sugar sculpture? Whatever it was, Shall was only concerned with Ann. What was that petite obstinate girl doing at that moment? Had something happened to her? His impatience gave him the urge to go look for her. However—

'Don't ever return, to where I am.'

He remembered Ann's words.

Why was he thinking about going to look for her even though he'd been rejected?

He didn't feel indebted to her. Nor did he have any obligations towards her. Then why did he want to find her? Why was he so impatient, worrying only about her? Regardless of her behavior, he sought her out.

*

Jonas had left the castle.

Ann was in the hall with Mythrill. They came there straight after seeing Jonas off from the tower's window, and she continued gazing at the portrait of the fairy on her feet.

The coldness of the atmosphere made her fingers and toes numb.

Mythrill sat on the floor, letting out a big yawn. Despite that, he perseveringly accompanied Ann. She told him he could go back to the room, but he said he would stay with her and wouldn't comply.

The sun was setting, and orange light shined diagonally on the floor from the

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hall's window.

"Why is it this portrait?"

Having continued to gaze at it, she was tired. That tiredness suddenly made her inadvertently speak those words.

"Why, isn't it because it's a nice picture?"

Myhtrill looked up at the portrait as well, in a manner suggesting he didn't quite understand.

"Why? If you wanted a beautiful picture, there are countless in this world. Why this one?"

"It's not the picture, is it? In the eastern tower, there are lots of similar pictures, aren't there?"

"Yeah, that's right. The Duke wants to give shape to the fairy painted in the picture, not the picture, right? But why this fairy?"

The rays of the setting sun shining through the window gradually grew longer. Crawling on the floor and reaching Ann's feet, they illuminated the portrait she was facing.

The evening light illuminated the back of the fairy in the portrait. Brightened by that light were a pair wings.

"Oh!!"

Instantly, she was astonished.

Why didn't she notice it till now? No, she noticed it. But she didn't think it was important. Though thinking carefully, it was really strange.

"Two wings... This fairy has two wings on her back. She wasn't owned by anyone."

"What about it?"

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"Why is there a portrait of a fairy like that? A fairy born in nature, without being owned, mingling in the human world. That's not considered normal."

"Now that you mention it, I guess that's true."

"Why does the sugar sculpture's model have to be this fairy? I haven't heard the reason for that. What if this fairy is special? The Duke has special feelings... Because he has those feelings, he didn't like my sugar sculptures. If I ask about it, I might be able to understand the foundation for making the sugar sculpture."

That's right. One night, Shall too, muttered while looking at this portrait, didn't he? *'Perhaps Duke Philax isn't looking for something extraordinary in a sugar sculpture?'* That was exactly it. Ann hadn't noticed the hint Shall gave her.

It was not that, from Ann's eyes as a craftsman, the sugar sculpture needed to be perfect and extraordinary. It was that she needed to make what Alban was looking for by looking through his eyes.

"Have you lost it, Ann?" Mythrill shuddered. "Even Jonas ran away in fear. If that Duke is displeased, he's quite capable of hitting even a woman like you... Heck, while he's at it, he might even kill you."

"But if I don't ask, I won't understand."

Still, she wasn't confident that she could make something that would please Alban. She was up against someone who was nearly losing his mind. It could be dangerous.

"Hey, Mythrill Reed Pod." Ann crouched before Mythrill, peeking into his face. "You should leave the castle too."

"Don't joke with me! As if I could run away on my own." Mythrill stood up in anger.

Ann gently held both his little hands with her fingertips in a pinching manner.

"But, thinking that you may face danger, I can't be at ease. After all, this is a

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job I started, so it's my responsibility. Staying here, too, is of my own volition. That's why I don't want to get you involved."

"Ann..."

Ann smiled sweetly.

"It's okay! I'll make that sugar sculpture. So, if you'll say you'll wait for me, wait somewhere in Philax city. Because I'll definitely get that one thousand Cress and leave this castle."

Mythrill looked at her as if exploring her feelings. He seemed to have realized that she didn't declare that carelessly.

It was Ann's job. Staking her pride as a sugar craftsman, she couldn't give it up.

"I understand."

Mythrill nodded. His blue eyes took on an earnest color.

"I'll leave the castle. In exchange, until you get out of the castle, I'll look for Shall Fen Shall. I'll tell him you weren't serious by saying those things and bring him back."

"You'll do that? But Shall may already be far, though."

"I'll look for him. I'm the great Mythrill Reed Pod, after all. Leave it to me."

With his chest puffed up with pride, the little fairy raised his chin. Just hearing him say that made her happy.

"Thank you. I'm counting on you, Mythrill Reed Pod," she said, from the bottom of her heart.

Translator notes:

¹Jonas first uses the informal 'Boku' for 'I', then corrects himself to the formal 'Watashi'.

²He goes back to 'Boku' from here.



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

Story by Mikawa Miri

Illustrations by Aki

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Chapter 6. The fairy from his memories

After Mythrill Reed Pod escaped from the castle, Ann came to Dale with a request.

"I would like an audience with His Grace."

"For what purpose? As he is now, the Duke would be displeased to be bothered unnecessarily."

Dale's attitude towards Ann, the last remaining craftsman, was harsh. His tone of voice was clearly different from when she was one craftsman out of many. She sensed he was determined to have her make a sugar sculpture that satisfied Alban at all costs.

"It's an essential matter. I request an audience with him between just the two of us, if possible."

Ann's earnestness seemed to have convinced him, as Dale prepared the arrangements for the meeting.

The sun had completely set, and the temperature was dropping further. Outside the window, snow mixed with the raging winds.

Ann was led into Alban's heated chamber.

Alban was sitting in the same place he was that morning, in the same pose. He had probably remained this way the entire time, and most likely spent his days the same way.

That lethargic, empty state—Why was he so obsessed with a sugar sculpture as

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he was?

No, what Alban was obsessed with wasn't a sugar sculpture. It was the fairy in the painting.

Ann wanted to know the reason behind that obsession. Then, she'd try to give shape to the object of his desire.

That was Ann's job as a craftsman.

"Thank you very much for granting me this meeting."

She kneeled. Alban didn't even glance her way.

"What is the purpose of this meeting?"

"There is something I wish to inquire about. It's for the sake of making the sugar sculpture. Would that be alright?"

"If it's for making it, you may ask."

"Then..."

She quickly regained her breath, then asked, "Could you please tell me the name of the person in the painting?"

Perhaps it was a rather unexpected question, as Alban turned to look at her. It seemed that, for the first time, Ann had entered his sight.

"Why is her name necessary?"

"It's for the sake of giving her shape. I feel I must know. The painting doesn't fully depict her."

"With that, will you be able to make it?"

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"I don't know."

Alban suddenly grabbed the sword he had propped up beside him. He smoothly drew it out of its sheath and stood up with the naked blade in hand.

Ann resisted her body's subconscious need to run away. Her knees slightly trembled from forcefully subduing her fear.

With the sword in hand, Alban stood before her.

"That question just now is a question that invades my memories. Are you prepared for what you're asking? If you can't make it after prying into and disturbing a person's memories, I'll have you compensate with your life. Are you prepared for that?"

"I cannot be prepared to die. I won't die. I've made a promise to a friend, and there's someone I wish to see. Therefore, I won't die. As I have this resolution, I will definitely make it. So please tell me—Her name."

They stared at each other. Alban placed the blade of his drawn sword on Ann's shoulder. She winced at the cold and heavy feeling of the iron.

"...Christina," Alban said quietly.

"Is that her name?"

"Yes."

"But fairies have an original name. Are you aware of that?"

"Realis Seal Erill."

By hearing the name promptly leave Alban's mouth, Ann was convinced.

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—As I thought, she's special.

Fairy owners wouldn't care about something like a fairy's original name. The only humans who would care are those who see the fairy as an equal, and those who regard them as special.

Ann understood that well. She too, knew that same feeling.

"Why don't you call her by her original name?"

"That's what she wished for. She wanted a human name, so she asked that I give her one."

Alban withdrew the sword he'd placed on Ann's shoulder and sat down in a nearby chair. Suddenly fatigued, he seemed as if he could not stand any longer.

"Where did you meet? You and Lady Christina." Ann purposely called the fairy by her human name. She felt she should, having learned of her wish.

"By the sea. On a beach below the castle's cliff."

"What was Lady Christina doing there?"

"She had just been born. She was sitting absentmindedly, gazing at the wave crests she was born from."

"If she remained there that way, she would have been found by fairy hunters, wouldn't she?"

"That's why I took her back to the castle."

"Why is that?"

"I pitied that she might be captured by humans and get hurt."

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"Did you spend a long time together?"

"Three years."

"And what of Lady Christina now?"

"A year and a half ago... She disappeared. That was her lifespan," Alban murmured, staring at a single point on the floor.

—He loved her.

She saw her own feelings overlap with Alban's figure. Somewhere in her heart, Ann was still calling the name of a single fairy. Alban too, must have been calling a fairy's name the same way.

"She had always said that water fairies themselves didn't know their own lifespan. That while some may live for centuries, others will disappear in a few years."

—That's why he had so many pictures painted?

All the paintings decorating the hall and the tower—it was as though he had been trying to hold onto her, not knowing when she'd be gone. He must have had many, many pictures painted because he was afraid of her disappearing.

The fairy smiling in the painting somehow seemed deep in thought. Perhaps she'd been worrying over what would become of her lover once she disappeared.

At last, Ann could see the outline of their feelings.

Why hadn't she tried to hear those feelings from the beginning?

She felt she'd taken quite the roundabout. And she became aware of her own

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inexperience. If it were Hugh, no doubt he'd have asked Alban why he desired a sugar sculpture in the first place.

Ann thought only of making a beautiful sculpture that could satisfy herself.

She hadn't understood what the client truly wanted.

What Alban wanted wasn't an extraordinary sculpture. He wanted a portrait that reproduced Christina's remnant as it was, as a memento for reviving his memories.

When making a sugar sculpture, no matter how realistic, one needed to adjust the colors, the shapes, and the balance of its form in order for it to look good. However, Ann shouldn't have done that.

Without those adjustments, a sculpture might be completely raw and unrefined.

But that was what Alban wanted.

The desire to make it overflowed within her. She wanted to shape and show Alban the portrait of the fairy in his heart, whom he had been seeking the same way she herself sought Shall.

"Would you mind if I brought the sugar sculpture here?"

At Ann's question, Alban slowly raised his head.

"What?"

"I'll bring the sugar sculpture here. I'll carry out my work in your presence, and while listening to you, I'll give her shape. Lady Christina's hair color, skin color, eye color... Her expressions and gestures... I'll make them all while listening to you."

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*

"This is bad."

Upon entering his room in the inn after having returned from Philax Castle, Hugh tossed his coat over the table and plumped down on a chair. Shall was standing with his back leaning against the wall, and his face turned in the direction of the window.

Outside, the sky was already pitch black, and snow danced violently in the strong wind.

"Rumor has it he's been acting strange, but to that extent... And it bothers me Lady Christina wasn't with him."

"His lover?"

At Shall's question, Hugh brushed up his forelock while exhaling a sigh and looked up at the ceiling.

"That's right. Well, she's a fairy, though."

Caught by the word 'fairy,' Shall knit his eyebrows.

"A blue-haired fairy?"

"Yeah, have you seen her in the castle?"

"I saw a painting. That guy ordered craftsmen to make a sugar sculpture using that painting as a model."

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"Not her in person, but a painting as a model? Why?"

Hugh then turned to Shall, looking startled. "Shall, do you know what an ocean-born fairy's approximate lifespan is?"

"Ocean-born fairies are water fairies. Their lifespan varies. Some live for centuries, while others only a few years."

Water fairies themselves didn't know their own lifespan. From the moment they were born, they lived in anxiety.

Mythrill was a water fairy as well. He, too, must have been aware of the fact that his life was unstable. The way he always acted arrogant was most likely an effort to try and blow off that apprehension. He hadn't told Ann about his life, and even if he did, he'd probably act tough by baselessly saying, *'I will definitely outlive Shall Fen Shall!'*

"What about sugar sculptures? If they kept eating them, a fairy could prolong their lifespan, right?"

"Sugar sculptures with the power to prolong a fairy's lifespan are rare. Your sugar sculptures might do it, but that too, would probably only add between a few weeks to a few months. There'd be no point unless they kept eating them."

"I see... Then, she disappeared. That's why the Duke is..."

Shall sneered at those words. "You're saying that man is in such a state because his fairy lover disappeared? As if humans would be bothered by a single pet fairy disappearing. They'd be satisfied just by buying another one as a replacement."

"She isn't a pet fairy. No one could replace her." Hugh clenched his fists over

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the table. "The House of Alban never rebelled against the House of Millsland. Not only that, but during the Chamber Civil War, they fought for his majesty, Edmond II. Yet, how about that? As he is now, does he look like a man in a noble position who carries Grand King Cedric's blood? Moreover, does that look like the heroic family that fought to build the current King's reign?"

All trade-related taxes are siphoned off by the royal family—of which they receive a stipend—and they're obligated to make a courtesy visit once a month. That's the treatment they receive after the Chamber Civil War that should have earned them praise for their service. The Duke would have been twelve or thirteen years old at the time. How angry had that boy approaching adolescence been at the treatment they received? It must have been a great shock for a mere child. However, he and his father obeyed. Holding back their anger, prioritizing the stability of the country, they resigned themselves to accept those obligations. But no one could heal those distorted feelings and that anger. No one but her."

As to rebound Hugh's sharp gaze, Shall smiled with just the corner of his mouth. "A companion for easing his pent up anger? That fairy must have been happy."

"Yeah. I think she was." Hugh glared at Shall so as to challenge his sarcastic words. "Before becoming the Silver Sugar Viscount, I made the Duke many sugar sculptures. I hear he gave them all to her, and in fact, she told me herself that she wanted to prolong her life by even a little. For him."

—Prolong her life? for him?

The fairy in the painting that always wore a smile tinged with sorrow. What was that sorrow for?

"She was probably worried this would happen," said Hugh, before falling silent.

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The strong winds shook the windows.

Just then, Salim came into the room and declared hurriedly, "Viscount, a report came from the watchman stationed at the highway. It appears Earl Downing has entered Philax with a cavalry of over three hundred men. They'll soon arrive at Philax Castle."

Hugh stood up, clicking his tongue. "That old man. I wish he'd act more like an old man and take it easy," he said, then glanced at Shall.

"We're going to Philax Castle again. That old man has little patience. If the Duke doesn't surrender obediently, he'll launch an attack. There should be two or three hundred of Alban House's guardsmen residing in the castle. If it becomes a rough-and-tumble battle, Ann will be in danger too."

Was it alright to go and help Ann? Considering he had been rejected, he wavered. However, unable to sit still, Shall headed towards Philax Castle along with Hugh.

The sea raged with the strong winds, and the sound of the breaking waves resounded loudly. The snow falling on his cheek was like fine pebbles bursting against his skin.

Philax Castle's shadow flickered in the raging night storm. Standing at the cape were three hundred men holding up torches, and fanned by the wind, their flames swayed the castle's shadow left and right.

"Earl Downing!"

Tents stretched from the highway to the sloping road that lead to the cape. They

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flapped in the strong wind, bending considerably, but without flying away.

Earl Downing looked surprised to see Hugh's figure rushing towards those tents.

"Mercury?"

"Has Philax Castle surrendered?" Hugh asked while catching his breath.

Earl Downing's lips curved into a sarcastic smile. "The gate is barricaded shut. I requested their surrender, but a messenger came asking that we wait a while. The time limit of this 'while' is unclear. Mercury, it seems your persuasion attempt has failed."

"You knew?" Hugh smiled wryly, looking embarrassed.

"It's because I know full well that you have a relationship with the Alban House that you were made the Silver Sugar Viscount. I thought I'd at least let you go persuade him."

Earl Downing then gave Hugh a severe look. "However, I will tolerate nothing further. Don't you get in the way. The last flashpoint of the kingdom must perish."

"I won't get in the way. But Ann Halford is in the castle."

"Halford?"

"She's the girl that competed for the royal medal in the previous sugar sculpture fair."

"Ahh... Her..."

For a moment, Earl Downing's eyes widened, but he immediately shook his

head lightly. "How unfortunate. We can only pray she hides well during the fight."

Even Earl Downing wouldn't want to allow an innocent girl to die on his watch. But he had a mission. In order to fulfill that mission, he determined that forsaking the life of a single girl was unavoidable. He was an old retainer that had experienced the civil war and worked for the sake of securing the country's stability. He wouldn't even weigh the life of a single girl against his mission.

"But—"

Still trying to confront Earl Downing, Hugh bent over the table the Earl was sitting at.

With a sigh, Shall turned his back to Hugh and left the tent. However much Hugh insisted, he knew it was futile. That old retainer wouldn't yield no matter what was said to him.

The wind raged on. Beyond a curtain of snow, one could see the castle's vague shadow.

Gazing at it, Shall clenched both his fists. "That girl..."

He had to go to the castle and get her out immediately.

But Shall might be the only one she'd refuse to be helped by. He shouldn't be the one to go. He should bow his head to Salim and beseech him to penetrate the castle before the battle starts and get her out.

Just as he thought that, Salim came walking from the direction of a herd of Earl

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Downing's soldiers. In his hands hung a small handled can.

Having located Shall outside the tent, Salim headed straight towards him.

"It seems one of the soldiers caught this, this evening," Salim said suddenly, without so much as a greeting, and held out the can to Shall. It was a can for carrying food rations such as bean stew that soldiers hung at their waist.

Unable to grasp the meaning of it, Shall knit his eyebrows, to which Salim then urged him by adding, "I remember seeing this. It might be an acquaintance of yours. Open it."

Shall didn't get it, but he took the can and removed the lid as urged.

Fitted completely inside it was a small fairy. Shall couldn't believe his eyes.

"Mythrill Reed Pod?"

"Shall Fen Shall?"

The two momentarily stared at each other at the highly surprising reunion.

"It seems that fellow ate all the soup that was in there. The soldier that found him apparently closed him in as revenge and was going to sell him to someone. As I was passing by, he approached me asking if I wanted to buy him," Salim explained indifferently.

"What are you doing? You left the castle and ate the soldiers' food?"

Hearing Shall's amazed words, Mythrill shabbily crawled out of the can to protest.

"No, that's not it! That is it, but that's not it! I was properly fulfilling my role!"

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But I got hungry, so I thought I'd get something to eat for the moment. Though I don't know why, there were lots of soldiers, so I thought no one would notice if I ate a little."

"You left the castle alone to snatch the soldiers' soup? What about that girl?"

"That's right! Ann!" Mythrill flapped his lone wing and nimbly jumped onto Shall's shoulder.

"Ann stayed in the castle. The Duke plans on keeping her there until she makes a sugar sculpture he likes, so she told me to wait outside."

"So you left on your own as told?"

"Well, it's because I felt I had to go find you." Tears gradually welled in Mythrill's eyes. "Because Ann is calling you. Because she wants you to come back."

Those audacious words upset him.

"Are you an idiot? What are you saying? She told me to leave, she couldn't be calling me."

"*You're* the idiot!

"Being called an idiot by you pisses me off."

"Then I'll say it over and over!! Idiot!! Idiot!! idiot!!"

Mythrill violently pulled at a lock of Shall's hair.

"You think Ann would seriously tell you to leave!?! *That* Ann!?! That bastard Jonas snatched my wing and threatened her into saying that. After separating

you from Ann, he offered her to Duke Philax and ran away!"

"...What?"

Shall's mind went blank with disbelief.

—*She was threatened by Jonas?*

"I'm telling you, Ann only drove you out because Jonas threatened her into it!"

—*It was after she started crying, so...*

He was uncharacteristically dumbfounded.

Though it had stirred his feelings so much, in truth, she had only been threatened into it.

"Then, now... What is she doing?"

"I told you, didn't I!? She's making a sugar sculpture. She said herself that she won't leave the castle until she makes a sugar sculpture Duke Philax acknowledges. She's intent on making it at all costs."

Shall's dumbfounded state was momentary. Mythrill's words made him seethe with impatience.

—*That idiot! Even now she's still making sugar sculptures instead of running away!?*

Shall grabbed hold of Mythrill, who was annoyingly clamoring and pulling his hair on his shoulder.

"W-what?! Hey, Shall Fen Shall! Let go!"

He shoved the screaming Mythrill into the can and forcibly handed it to Salim.

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"Hold on to that! I'll be back for it later!"

And then he took off.

Salim shrugged, looking down at the canned Mythrill in disinterest.

"Why do I have to hold on to this thing?"

"What do you mean 'this thing'? I am the great Mythrill Reed Pod! Rather, first of all get me out of here—!" Mythrill screamed from inside the can.

*

One barrel of silver sugar, kneaded into balls, then piled up to form a rough human shape. It turned out slightly taller than Ann.

Seeing that, Alban murmured, "Craftsman, what are you trying to do?"

Ann turned to him with an earnest expression.

"What was Lady Christina's approximate height?"

"Height?"

After thinking for a while, Alban got up. He stood in front of the pile of silver sugar that was becoming vaguely human shaped, and pointed at the area of his chin.

"Around this height."

"Then, that's what I'll do."

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Straightening her back, Ann once again set her hands into the silver sugar. It could be said to be an odd size for a sugar sculpture, but she was certain that size was necessary.

"I'm asking you what you are trying to do, craftsman."

"I'm making it the same. Everything. Her stature, her face, her expression. I'll make them all exactly the same. When picturing Lady Christina, what is the strongest impression that comes to mind? If I were to imagine a certain someone... It would likely be him looking down at me in a seemingly bad mood, though."

Thinking for a moment, Alban gently cast down his eyes and smiled. "Calmly standing against the wall. Looking at me, smiling."

"Understood."

That was not a pose she should use if she wanted to make a good-looking sculpture. But it was about giving form to the Christina Alban sought. It didn't matter whether or not it could attract people's eyes as a sculpture.

Having decided the fairy's pose, Ann got down to the details.

Five barrels of silver sugar were carried into Alban's private chamber.

Other than that, there were also a single barrel filled with cold water and a worktable. Additionally, more than a hundred bottles of colored powder that had been brought over from Ann's room were lined on the floor.

Ann kneaded up the sugar sculpture over a stone slab placed on the floor. That probably wasn't something one should do in a nobleman's room, but Alban allowed it.

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She had a solid grasp of the colors and atmosphere.

When she had showed Alban her first sculpture, he had said to “leave the atmosphere as is.” The atmosphere she read from Christina in the portrait wasn't wrong—she sculpted while keeping that in mind. She'd made a sculpture with the exact facial features before, as well. All she had to do was make sure not to make it conspicuous nor influenced by her own style.

Taking in her hand a wooden spatula with a brush-like finely cut end, she stood on her tiptoes to sculpt the hair flow. With just the strength level of combing hair, she quickly carved down from the top of the head to the waist in one stroke. Finely, finely, she repeatedly carved hundreds and thousands of times.

She carved persistently, so that when looking at it, one could almost feel its silky touch.

Alban attentively observed Ann, who continued sculpting, and the fairy that was being created by her fingers.

She couldn't tell how long it had been, but it was certainly already deep into the night.

Still, Ann continued sculpting. Alban didn't sleep either.

It was when the wind became awfully loud that she suddenly stopped working.

"Duke." The door opened to reveal a nervous-looking Dale.

"A cavalry of over three hundred men has besieged the castle. They're Earl Downing's men."

Ann was surprised to hear that.

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—*Why is Earl Downing...?*

Without any particularly strong feeling, Alban urged him on, "And?"

"They sent a demand for surrender. And for taking you into custody."

"I figured they'd come eventually, but they were later than I expected."

"What would you like to do?"

"Have them wait. I want to watch this," said Alban while directing his gaze at the fairy sculpture in making. He observed it intently, as though someone was inside its still vague outline.

"Understood." Replying as though bracing himself, Dale took his leave.

"Why has Earl Downing come to take you into custody?" Ann asked unintentionally, unable to resist her curiosity.

Alban smiled as if there was something funny.

"For a year and a half, I haven't gone to Lewiston. Failing to show allegiance is the perfect pretext for attacking me, isn't it?"

"You haven't gone to Lewiston? Why? Even though by doing so, you're placing yourself in danger..."

Alban frowned in annoyance, and sitting in the chair, he threateningly pointed the tip of his sword at Ann.

"Silence, craftsman. Just make that."

"But, why—"

"I said silence!!"

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Ann cowered at that angry roar.

"You wouldn't understand! Something like the feelings of someone who's had all their dignity stripped from them and is forced to behave like a servant... The one who could understand is...!!" Alban, who'd been shouting in rage, suddenly shut his mouth, as if noticing that he let his feelings get the better of him.

Ann gingerly bowed her head, then looked at Alban. Facing down, he let the sword to the floor and heaved a deep sigh. It looked as though even he was tired of his own fixation.

The room was neatly arranged, but possessed only modest stone walls, a woolen carpet, and the melancholic sound of the ocean outside the window. One wouldn't believe that this was the castle of a descendant of Grand King Cedric. The Silver Westhall castle Hugh lived in was much more extravagant.

An oppressed, proud household. Still, in order to protect the order of the kingdom, they had most likely been desperately enduring. Perhaps it had been only that fairy who could sooth those raging feelings.

But that fairy had disappeared.

For a year and a half later, Alban still had not gone to Lewiston. It was not possible that he had not understood the meaning and outcome of that action. Yet he did not go.

He had chosen slow self-destruction instead.

That was how much Alban despaired after losing Christina. He had become unable to endure his suppression after losing her.

Ann too, knew the pain of losing a loved one. When her mother passed, she felt

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it deeply in her heart, and believing that she was all alone, she couldn't take a single step.

—This man believes he's all alone, as well.

The peace he had finally obtained for the raging feelings he couldn't bear—after that disappeared, his loneliness gave birth to obsession. But that obsession he had created himself was gnawing at him.

If the sole desire of such a man was a sugar sculpture, she would make it.

Reproducing that man's feelings as they were.

Ann once again set down to work. With no time to rest, she mixed the colored powder and kneaded.

Only the sound of the wind and the firewood popping in the hearth was heard.

Inside, the room was kept at a moderate temperature. But Ann, who earnestly continued sculpting, was dripping with sweat. She wiped the sweat on her forehead with the back of her hand. Kneeling on the floor over the stone slate, she redid the gloss of the fairy's wing; it needed to be more and more lustrous, and thinly stretched like silk.

A gust of cold air suddenly brushed against her flushed cheeks.

There was no knock, but she could tell someone had entered the room. Thinking that it must have been Dale, she didn't raise her head. Alban seemed to have thought the same, as he continued gazing at Ann's hands.

Suddenly, a voice sounded over her head.

"I'm going to have you return her."

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At the familiar voice, Ann looked up in shock. "...Shall?"

She couldn't believe it. Having been so preoccupied with the sculpture, her mind was slightly dazed. She felt like she was seeing an illusion or something of the sort. Shall Fen Shall was standing right beside her with his sword in hand, pointing its tip at Alban. The blade shone with the flames of the fireplace.

Alban raised his head as well, frowning. "You're... the fairy that came with this craftsmen, aren't you. Though I've also heard you're Mercury's warrior fairy. What have you come for?"

"I've come to have you return this girl."

"I won't return this craftsman. I'll be keeping her here until she makes what I want."

"Then I'll kill you here and now. I bet Earl Downing would rejoice if I deliver your head to him."

Still flabbergasted, Ann whispered, "Shall... For real?"

Shall glanced at Ann, then spoke bluntly, "I'm amazed at your idiocy."

That foul mouth certainly seemed like the real thing. But hearing that unreserved comment turned the inner corners of her eyes hot.

"Shall? Why... Did you come here? Shall..." she whispered with both hands over her mouth. Her tears were about to escape.

"I heard about Jonas from Mythrill Reed Pod."

"Mythrill. He really told you... Shall, I'm sorry. That time, I—" Regret and joy swelled up inside her chest.

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"Apologies aren't necessary. Stand. It's dangerous here. Once they get themselves in gear, Earl Downing's soldiers are going to break through the gate and storm in. We need to leave the castle before that."

"Eh... But, I... The sugar sculpture—"

Instantly, she felt that she couldn't leave.

Alban slowly stood up, holding the drawn sword in his hand. "I won't allow that craftsman to leave. Keep working."

"I'm taking her with me. If you want to fight, come."

Shall held up his sword as well. The sharpness of a polished obsidian set into his eyes.

"Wait!"

Ann jumped at Shall's back.

"Wait, Shall! Your Grace, too, please wait. I will continue working, so please withdraw your swords!"

This time, Shall turned to Ann in shock. "Are you mad?"

"I'm serious."

She looked up at Shall to appeal. "I... Want to give shape to this work. I want to make this fairy's sugar sculpture."

"What are you—"

"I undertook it. I started it saying that I could make it! I want to make it. I feel like I can do it. So let me. Please."

At those words, even Alban looked surprised.

She wanted to continue working. She even felt that she could complete it soon. She couldn't possibly leave it that way and run away. That was her job.

"Please, let me continue working!"

"This castle is surrounded by soldiers. When they break through, it'll become a battleground."

"I know."

"It's dangerous."

"I know that, too. But I can't abandon this job midway. Please. It's the only thing I can do, and it's my pride."

"...Unbelievable..."

Suddenly, the killing intent faded from Shall's body, and he withdrew from his stance. The sword in his hand turned into light, dispersing.

He heaved a deep sigh. "Make it. But I'm staying here too."

Ann timidly asked Alban, "Might it be alright if he stayed here as well? If you could allow that, he will also be pleased, and I'll be able to continue working."

"...Very well."

Having granted his permission, Alban once again sat down in a chair with his sword in hand.

Shall moved to stand against the wall, watching Ann's work attentively.

Even while progressing with her work, Ann couldn't believe Shall was there.

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—He came back. The misunderstanding was resolved. He came back for me. He forgave me.

Joy overflowed inside her chest.

At pivotal points, Ann confirmed aspects of Christina with Alban.

Her hand gestures and the fineness of her fingers, the way she smiled, the way she tilted her head—she paid attention to everything, especially to the coloration. In order to faithfully replicate her light blue color, she subtly adjusted the colored powder over and over.

As the fairy's shape became clearer, Alban's expression changed. In his previously apathetic green eyes appeared the passion of a seeker.

"It's very similar," said Alban as he noticed the facial features. "It's similar. But... the eyes are wrong. They didn't have such a cloudy white color."

"What color did they have?"

"Silver. It was a translucent silver, like it repelled light."

"Silver, is it?" Ann pondered sullenly.

—A silver color can't be made by normal means. Moreover, it needs to be translucent. What should I do?

Shall coldly watched Alban's eager state.

"With those eyes... It's Christina."

At that murmur, Shall let out a chuckle. Sneering.

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Catching the sound of that sneer, Alban glared at him. "What's so funny?"

"That's a sugar sculpture."

"It's Christina."

"It's a sugar sculpture, made by this girl's hands. What's going to come out of having something like this made?"

Alban then showed a somehow self-deprecating smile. "Fairies are born from the condensation of an object's energy through the gaze of a living creature."

"So?"

"So I wanted this shape."

"...Eh?"

At those surprising words, Ann inclined her head. "Whatever do you mean?"

"It's Christina's 'shape.' Moreover, it's a sculpture made of silver sugar that can prolong a fairy's life. Fairies are born from objects, so if I gaze at this, might something be born from it? Don't you think there's a possibility, craftsman?"

—He's asking if something will be born from the shape of Lady Christina made of silver sugar?

She tilted her head, unable to grasp Alban's intention. But then immediately, she realized. "You can't possibly mean... That Christina will be born again from this!?"

It was impossible.

Christina was born from wave energy. Even if something were to be born from

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the sugar sculpture, the probability of it actually being her was infinitely low.

Low to none.

"Have you ever witnessed the moment a fairy disappears? They become particles of light, and disperse into midair. The matter that made up her shape disappeared, so I need to once again give shape to that dissolved matter. A fairy's lifespan is prolonged by a sugar sculpture of beautiful 'shape.' That shape has some sort of energy. A fairy's life is connected to that. It's the 'shape.' The 'shape' is what's necessary."

What Alban spoke of was unfounded hope that revealed his obsession.

However, Ann couldn't deny it. Though it was unfounded, thrusting reality at a person who clung to it was too cruel.

But Shall was different.

"Impossible," he said mercilessly, spurning that hope. "What's been lost can't be revived. No matter how much you cry and seek it, it won't come back. Even if you stared at something like that, it'll result in an unknown distorted fairy being born."

"I won't allow you to say another word!"

The enraged Alban stood up, holding his sword. Shall remained against the wall without moving, and scornfully said to Alban straight out, "Whether I say it or not, it's fact."

"Stop, Shall!" Ann pulled at Shall's arm. "Don't say that!"

She couldn't watch quietly as Shall cornered Alban with the cruel truth.

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It was at that moment that the castle trembled.

The three gasped in shock, and at the same time, Dale came jumping in through the door.

"They set explosives at the gate. The gate's been breached. The soldiers are coming."

"...So I didn't make it," Alban murmured. "I thought it didn't matter when, but... I can't believe that, when just a little longer and what I'd given up on would be complete..."

—I want to give this man the fairy he longs for.

For the first time, she heard Alban's humanlike weak voice. With that, her desire to make it welled in her even more strongly. It was only a little longer until what he desired was complete.

In that instant, something occurred to her.

"Ah..."

Ann rapidly let go of Shall's arm and held up a stone bowl she'd poured silver sugar into. What she thought of on the spur of the moment was a method for creating a silver color.

"Duke! The eyes, right? If I can do the eyes, it'll be complete, right? I can do it, so, please watch," she affirmed while searching for a nearby pot.

Shall grabbed her arm in a fluster. "You're still going to make it at a time like this!?"

"It's almost complete though, I can't stop. Until the soldiers come into this room,

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I'll keep making it."

"You don't need to go along with this man's delusion!"

"I'm not going along with it! This is my job! I undertook it, so I want to do it to the end. I'm not pretty, or smart, or rich. But I want to believe that, only in this, I won't lose to anyone. Because it's my job. So I can't stop midway."

At those words, Shall gazed at Ann in surprise. After a momentary silence, he asked, "That's what you want?"

"Yes."

"You're an idiot."

"I believe so. But, I want to see this through."

"If that's what you want... Then, as you wish."

Shall gently touched his hand to Ann's cheek. "I'll hold off the soldiers as much as I can. Make it until you're satisfied."

Leaving only those words behind, Shall turned on his heel and left the room.

Translator Notes:

General note: When speaking to Alban and Earl Downing, Ann and Hugh use Keigo (Japanese honorific speech, and specifically in this case, Sonkeigo) to show respect. I did my best to give it some distinction, but it's very difficult to translate.

¹Ann drops the Keigo from here.



AQUA Scans & Icarus Bride present:

Sugar Apple Fairy Tale vol. 2

“The Silver Sugar Master and the Blue Duke”

Story by Mikawa Miri

Illustrations by Aki

Scans: Public

Translation: Raincraft

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Chapter 7. If I continue gazing at you

As the old castle was built with battle in mind, defending the Castle-Lord's chamber was simple. In the event of an enemy invasion, the Castle-Lord's chamber would be defended for a fixed amount of time, during which they may escape, or alternatively, commit suicide.

Other than the staircase centered in the castle tower, there were no other means of reaching Alban's room. The staircase was barely wide enough for two adult men to walk side by side; moreover, its winding made running up difficult. Defending the stairwell entrance would prevent anyone from coming near the room Ann and Alban were in.

Shall stood at the stairwell entrance with his sword in hand. Slowly, he closed his eyes; he felt uneasy.

Ann was in the room he was defending behind him—that was fine. The problem was Alban; that obsession-possessed man might harm her on an impulse.

In truth, he didn't want to do something like leaving the two of them alone, but Ann strongly wished for the sugar sculpture's completion. It was in no way solely for the sake of the one thousand Cress reward, nor was it obstinacy; it was her own pride, and her tenacity as a craftsman.

"That *idiot*."

But—Ann being Ann—it couldn't be helped. If that was her wish, he intended to grant it.

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Outside the castle tower, voices of jostling soldiers and sounds of conflict were heard. They'd be coming soon.

"Over there! It's that staircase!" voiced one of the soldiers.

Upon opening his eyes, he saw five soldiers rushing over, the sound of chainmail resounding. Holding up his sword, he commanded, "Stop."

Noticing Shall's figure, the soldiers came to a halt.

"Duke Philax's warrior-fairy?"

Looking puzzled, they exchanged glances, then said, "Fairy, step aside. Even if you protect your owner at this point, it's futile. We will be placing him under constraint; your owner will inevitably be replaced."

"Unfortunately, I have no owner."

At that answer, the soldiers' expressions grew increasingly puzzled.

"Though by no one's orders, I won't let you pass."

Apparently sensing Shall's strong will, the five soldiers readied their swords. Shall, too, still alertly poising his, surveyed the five.

Just then, a voice sounded behind the soldiers. "Heeey, hold it, hold it."

Beyond the dark hall, Hugh came walking over with a lamp in hand. Behind him followed Salim with a blood-stained sword.

The soldiers' eyes widened upon seeing Hugh come in sight.

"Silver-Sugar Viscount? Why are you here? Weren't you to remain in waiting

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along with Earl Downing...?"

"I was going to, but when I told Earl Downing that I'd like to go personally if an old friend of mine is to be captured, he allowed it. I cut through the fighting on Salim's horse, and came here. By the way, you should give up on taking that on as an opponent. All five of you will be cut down."

While speaking, Hugh came in front of the five soldiers. "So I heard from Salim that you left on your own to save Ann, but why is it that you're protecting Alban, Shall?"

"I'm not protecting him. I just need time. I can't let you pass for a while."

"Now that it's come to this, Alban has no way to escape. I want to see him quickly and take him away unharmed. That's all. Let me pass, Shall. The more they think he's resisting, the more he'll be at a disadvantage."

"Sorry, but I can't let you pass."

"Why?"

"Time is necessary. That's what she wishes for."

"She? You mean Ann? I don't know what she's up to but, at any rate, let me pass."

"I refuse."

Hugh clicked his tongue in frustration. "You haven't forgotten, have you? I have your wing here." He directed a sharp gaze at Shall while softly searching through his inner chest pocket.

Shall felt a shiver down his spine before the prospect of having his wing hurt.

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Biting it down with his back teeth, he smiled thinly. "If you want to do it, go ahead."

"I'm your owner."

"I have no owner," said Shall once more.

Their powerful gazes clashed.

*

"Silver-colored eyes, with a transparent feeling, right?"

Ann poured a handful of silver-sugar into a small pot. She ran it over to the fireplace, and held its bottom over the flames.

"What do you intend to do?" murmured Alban, overwhelmed by Ann's spirit.

He couldn't hide his surprise and confusion at how, even after the soldiers stormed in, she declared she would continue making the sugar sculpture.

"I shall create silver-colored eyes."

Inside the warmed pot, the silver-sugar began to melt, turning into a thick, clear liquid. Small, knobby bubbles boiled up from within the pot.

"Alright."

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Ann removed the pot from the fire, and like so, headed towards the workstand's stone slate. She emptied the molten silver-sugar over the slate at once, and after chilling her fingers in cold water, she touched them to the thickly spreading, clear silver-sugar liquid.

"Hot—!"

She instantly drew her hand back from the heat. But, after chilling her fingers in cold water once more, she split the already hardening silver-sugar liquid into two—each roughly the size of a thumbnail.

The liquid's viscosity grew quickly, and the silver-sugar became soft and jelly-like. She then rounded those up over the stone slate.

Once silver-sugar was melted via heat, its properties changed. When chilled, it became stiffly solid, and transparent like glass.

Over the stone slate, the molten silver-sugar that had been rolled in the palm of her hand became splendid spheres. The small spheres looked like little crystal balls.

Grabbing the two in her fingertips, she held them up against the lamp's light. The orange-colored light refracted and transmitted gleamingly. Gazing at it, she nodded.

"Yes. All right."

Then, she drew her hand to the area of the sugar-sculpture's face. Making dents in the position of the eyes, she created the eye sockets. At their bottom, the eye sockets were filled with the gray hue the silver-sugar applied. Inside them, she embedded the spheres she had just made.

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She added eyelids, and made lashes. The lashes, she finely crafted one by one, making sure to hold her breath while intertwining them with her fingertips. She applied countless of them. Then, taking a needle in hand, she cleaved their tips, making them even finer.

—*Come forth.*

Unconsciously, she prayed in heart.

—*Here... in this sugar sculpture... appear.*

She begged of her own fingertips—that the 'form' Alban desired may appear.

"...This is..." whispered Alban, standing up involuntarily.

While shaping the lashes, the sweat streaming from her head blurred her eyes, but even the time to wipe it was too precious, and she continued working as is.

Alban slowly came near the sugar-sculpture.

Suddenly, Ann stopped the needle's movement. Something instinctively told her it was complete.

—*This... is probably enough.*

Lowering her arms, she looked over the entire sugar-sculpture. Silver eyes were looking down at her.

"Christina..." Alban whispered.

Relieved, Ann smiled.

"Was I able to make a sugar-sculpture that meets Your Grace's expectations?"

Looking down at the life-sized fairy sugar-sculpture, Alban muttered, "It's her."

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It was oddly big for a sugar-sculpture, but in comparison to the figure of the fairy, calmly standing as though having adapted to the atmosphere, the size didn't catch the eye.

The faint blue coloring looked fleeting, as though about to disappear at any moment. Still, gazing at it, one could tell the silky, water flow-like hair; the gently smiling lips; and those silver-colored eyes, were startlingly pure.

Most likely, she had always humbly remained by Alban's side, smiling gently. That was probably the kind of woman she was. Ann could somewhat understand that.

"I was able to make it. Thank god." Relieved, a smile escaped her lips.

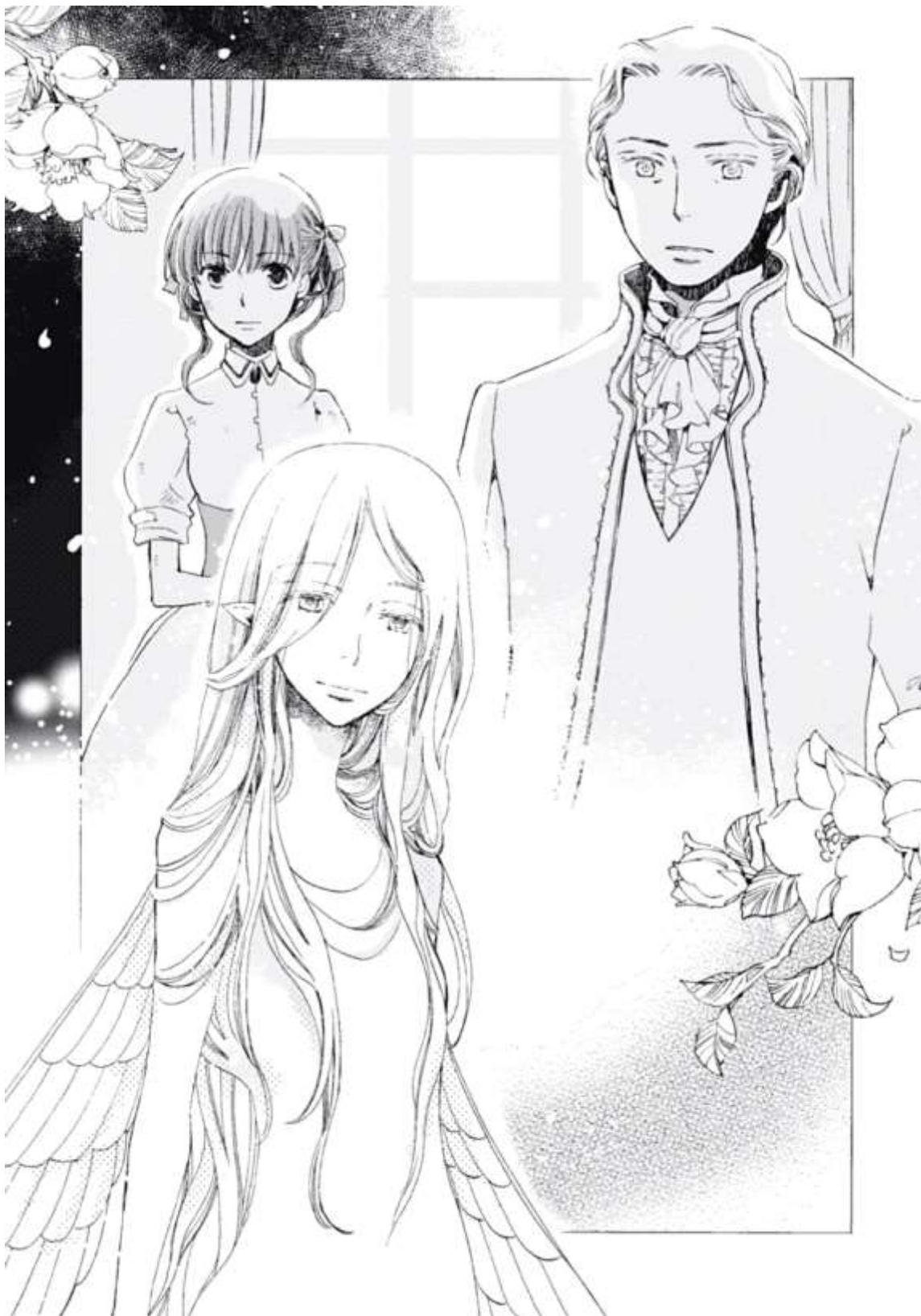
Alban looked at Ann, and for a while, remained silent.

"Craftsman... I didn't catch your name."

"Halford. My name is Ann Halford."

"Halford, is it?" he repeated for confirmation, then once again turned his face to the fairy sugar-sculpture. "This... is what I wanted, Halford."

"Yes."



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"It's ironic. Seeing this in front of me, the more I understand. As that fairy said, from this mere 'form,' that love-filled life can't be born... But... I wanted it. From the moment I thought *perhaps*, I wanted it so badly I couldn't bear it... I wanted to see her."

The obsession that had engulfed him up to that point disappeared from Alban, who spoke indifferently. Albeit intellectual, calm, and of a noble status—there stood a young man in an unfortunate position. Surely, even as he obsessively sought the sugar-sculpture, deep in his heart, a part of him must have possessed this reasoning. Torn between reason and obsession, he suffered.

—Although, rather, if His Grace could have become a man of nothing but obsession, he'd be immersed in delight right now.

He should have obtained what he so maddeningly wanted, yet, seeing Alban's sad expression, Ann's chest hurt. The blue color of madness she felt engulfing Alban's entirety up to that point, she realized, was actually the color of sorrow and despair.

"However foolish a thought it might have been, I wanted it. I just wanted it."

"It's not like it's been proven," said Ann, involuntarily.

Alban slowly turned his face towards her.

"Fairies are born from an object's energy and the gaze of a living being. If that 'form' was Lady Christina herself, perhaps if Your Grace thought of Lady Christina and continued to gaze at it, eventually, something might happen. No one's proven that nothing would happen."

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At those words, Alban suddenly smiled.

"Even as a consolation, that's a pleasant thought. Indeed, this sugar-sculpture is Christina herself. So much so, that it makes me feel it wouldn't be strange if something did happen... Halford."

"Yes."

"There's a leather bag on that table over there. There are ten one-hundred Cress gold coins inside. You may take it."

Indeed, there was a bag placed over the work-desk.

"Are you certain?"

"That was the agreement, no need to hold back. You may take it and return to where your fairy is. Go."

Ann took the leather bag in hand as told. It was quite heavy. The sound of the coins rubbing against each other inside the bag, without a doubt, belonged to gold.

"Then, I'll be receiving this."

She quickly bowed her head, and was about to leave through the door.

"Halford."

She was hailed just before she could walk out. When she turned around, Alban was smiling. Though it was a gentle smile, he looked as though he was about to cry at any moment.

"You... are the greatest sugar-craftsman."

Ann returned the smile, all the while wishing that from now on, the young man before her might receive even the slightest salvation.

"Thank you very much."

*

Hugh and Shall were glaring at each other.

Hugh placed a little strength into the hand inserted into his coat. Feeling a sense of discomfort in his entire body, Shall frowned.

—*Gonna do it?*

Then, suddenly, the discomfort disappeared. Hugh was looking up at the stairs over Shall's shoulder.

"Ann?"

At Hugh's murmur, Shall turned around.

Ann was coming down the dimly lit stairs, tightly clutching a leather bag before her chest with both hands. Perhaps due to fatigue, her gait was unreliable and unsteady.

Apparently recognizing Shall's figure standing there, she smiled gently.

"Shall. . . . Eh? Hugh?"

As soon as she called out, her leg slipped, and with a short shriek, her body was thrown in the air.

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"Ann!"

Faster than Hugh had raised his voice, Shall dissolved the sword in his hand and caught Ann's body as she came falling down, strongly enduring the sudden impact to his arm.

Once he was convinced he'd caught her, he took a breath, and looked down at her. It seemed Ann had yet to recover from the shock of falling, and simply looked up at Shall with perfectly round eyes.

"Shall. Th... thank you."

Normally, that was where he'd want to say a few things about her carelessness, but in his relief at her safe return, no words came out. He silently let her down to the floor, and like so, tightly embraced her to his chest.

"Shall?" Ann called his name in confusion.

Hugh came near the two.

"Are you hurt, Ann?"

"It's really Hugh, right? What are you doing here?" questioned Ann from within Shall's chest.

"Due to various circumstances, I came to take Duke Philax into custody. Is he upstairs?"

"Yeah, he's there. Together with the sugar-sculpture," she retorted, looking somewhat satisfied.

"Sugar-sculpture? That you made?"

"That's right. A sugar-sculpture of Lady Christina."

"I see." For just a moment, Hugh showed a pained expression.

"It seems His Grace has prepared himself. Please don't be rough, Hugh."

Hugh shrugged. "I'm the Silver-Sugar Viscount, so I won't do anything rough. Rest assured."

He then faced Salim and the five soldiers behind him, and jerked his chin.

"You heard it, no rough stuff. Hey, one of you go outside and inform Earl Downing that Duke Philax has been detained. And also to stop the battle. Salim, lead the remaining four and go to the room upstairs. You should know the place. I'll go later."

One of the soldiers ran off towards the outside of the castle tower. Accompanied by the other four, Salim went climbing up the stairs.

After seeing them off, Hugh pulled out a small leather bag from his inner chest pocket.

"I'm returning this."

It was the leather bag containing Shall's wing.

Ann tilted her head.

"That's... Shall's. Why do you...?"

"I took it up from Shall but, even with this, this guy absolutely won't listen to what I say, so I don't need it. Here."

He casually tossed it at Shall, who caught it in one hand.

"I'll make you pay for that."

At Shall's words, Hugh exclaimed "Ehh—!" in an exaggerated expression of surprise.

"How come? I gave your wing back. I did the same thing as Ann, so how come Ann gets off with that, and I have to pay? That's discrimination," said Hugh while climbing up the stairs, grinning.

It had finally gone quiet, and Ann seemed to realize that she'd been tightly held into Shall's chest the entire time.

"Ah—! Why, I—!"

Startled, she stirred herself in attempt to escape from him. However, Shall wouldn't allow that. Placing even more strength into his arms, he hugged her. Apparently sensing that, Ann's movements stopped.

"Shall?"

Her face turned red in a flash, but he didn't care, and continued to hug her.

"What's wrong? Hey. Umm, oh. That's right. I got the one-thousand Cress. I have it here."

He felt a slight movement from the leather bag she was holding before her chest.

"Hey, Shall."

"Stay still for a while."

"Eh... But..."

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Despite hearing her flustered voice, he embraced her further.

Ann cast her eyes down.

"...A-alright." Replying obediently, she stopped moving.

"You idiot. Don't make me worry."

"I'm sorry. But, I—Because I'm a sugar-craftsman... But, I'm sorry..."

"Ann," he murmured her name to ascertain her safety.

Then, Ann said softly, "The second time . . ."

He heard that.

"What is?"

"Not referring to me as 'scarecrow' or 'you idiot' or 'stupid,' but as Ann, by name. Just now makes it twice."

At those words, Shall's eyes widened. "You keep count of something like that? Why?"

"Because. It's because being called by name makes me happy."

—*Really!?*

It was a slight shock. If such trivial matters could make her happy or sad, it was no wonder he couldn't comprehend her strange behavior. Seriously, he didn't understand humans. Especially—even more so than Liz—he didn't understand Ann.

At the very least, he was able to predict Liz's actions, but he couldn't predict Ann's. He didn't think that, knowing the castle was surrounded by soldiers, she

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would continue making the sugar-sculpture in the presence of that Alban. Yet she declared it her wish with eyes that harbored a strong will. He didn't know any other girl that would give such a strong look.

She was full of surprises and puzzles. But for some reason, it wasn't unpleasant. It even seemed to be amusing. It was strange.

For the time being, he decided in his heart to call her by name as much as possible from then on.

"Shall," Ann whispered doubtfully. "I want to stay together. From now on, alright?"

In place of an answer, Shall held her even tighter.

He still didn't understand why, but he felt relieved by having retrieved this girl in his arms. The body he was embracing was warm. That warmth was like embracing something soft and tender.*

*

Alban, Duke of Philax, was apprehended by the Silver-Sugar Viscount, Hugh Mercury, and was sent to Lewiston under the watch of Earl Downing. One month later, King Edmond II's cousin, John Black, was newly conferred the peerage of Duke Philax.

Alban, of course, was presumed to face execution. However, the restrained Alban remained as intellectual and calm a young man as ever. Even regarding

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his being taken into custody, he himself declared it a matter of course, as he had neglected his obligation.

At his commendable behavior, even Earl Downing—who was the forefront in orchestrating the downfall of the Alban House—seemed moved. The King, who had been sympathetic towards Alban from the start, of course, didn't wish for a harsh punishment.

In the end, Alban was stripped of his status, and under Earl Downing's surveillance, was sentenced to house arrest in a small castle at the outskirts of Westhall.

He was forbidden from making contact with the outside, and wasn't allowed to get married. His personal needs were to be tended to by fairies, due to the concern that, should a human woman care for his personal needs, a turn for the worse might cause his lineage to linger. With William's generation, the Alban House was to end. He became a prisoner for life.

But Alban seemed to spend his days peacefully, living without having to pander to the King. By becoming a prisoner, he was able to protect his pride.

The fairy sugar-sculpture he had specially made was placed in his room. He was said to be spending his time tirelessly gazing at it every day.

While even having troops dispatched, it was a generous treatment, said to be extremely exceptional. Because of that, people started talking. They were saying, "Duke Philax obtained a wondrous sugar-sculpture, and thanks to that, he received good fortune beyond one's imagination."

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And, naturally, the name of the craftsman who made that sugar sculpture was talked about as well.

*

"Hello, auntie!"

Upon opening the door to the Weather Vane, located on the outskirts west of Lewiston, the eyes of the Landlady, who was serving food to the guests, suddenly sparkled.

"Little Miss, is it?! You sure did it!"

The Landlady placed a plate of food on a guest's table with a toss, and came running over. She hugged Ann tightly to her chest.

"Auntie? What is it? What do you mean by 'did it'?"

"There are rumors going around. That a sugar-sculpture to Duke Philax's liking was made, and thanks to that, he received magnificent good fortune. And that the name of the craftsman that made that sugar-sculpture is Ann Halford!"

"Really?"

Ann was surprised. It seemed the rumors reached Lewiston faster than she did.

Upon leaving the castle, she had spent three days in the city of Philax, and after ridding herself of her fatigue, she once again returned to Lewiston.

She intended to reserve an inn for lodging during winter, where she would spend

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an enjoyable end of the year. The funds for that were the one-thousand Cress she received from Alban.

She had more than enough money, but due to her natural poor man's mentality, she wanted to choose a cheap and safe place that suited her standing.

That was when she came to the Weather Vane.

The Landlady released Ann, and smiled at Shall and Mythrill who were behind her as well.

"Glad to see the two of you, too."

At the Landlady's words, the guests who were having lunch seemed to have taken an interest in Ann's direction.

A man that looked like a peddler called out from a nearby table, "So you're that rumored sugar-craftsman. You sure are young. How much do you charge?"

"Well, the largest, most elaborate pieces are two Cress."

"Huh, that's relatively moderate. I'm going to have a child soon. Maybe I should order a celebratory sugar-sculpture from you."

"Eh, by all means!"

At that moment, an unamused voice sounded at the corner of the room.

"You should probably give up on having a sugar-sculpture made by her."

Looking over, it was those youths from the Radcliffe Guild. Jonas included.

As soon as Jonas's gaze met with Ann's, he quickly looked away.

"That girl seduced the Silver-Sugar Viscount. You can guess how she even got

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Duke Philax to like her. Right, Jonas?"

Implored by his companion for assent, with an unfixed gaze, Jonas retorted in a small voice, "Ah, yeah . . . Well. But, that's . . ."

"What's with that? You're being unclear. Though, as for Jonas here, we all saw Duke Philax acknowledge him, so we can guarantee it."

"But, even if you got Duke Philax's liking that way and made a sugar-sculpture, if the sugar-sculpture was badly made, it wouldn't bring good fortune, right?" said a woman sitting at the counter, who seemed to be a merchant house's Landlady.

"That's right. The sugar-sculpture this child made for Duke Philax granted him an unbelievably generous treatment. That's an immensely good fortune. That's the sugar-sculpture's power, isn't it?" concurred the Landlady.

"Even you fellows acknowledge that this child made that sugar-sculpture, right?"

Being thus told, the youths were at a loss for words. Jonas was uncomfortably fidgeting more and more.

A young man who was sitting near the youths abruptly opened his mouth. "All of you, enough of this unsightly behavior. You'll damage the name of the Radcliffe Guild."

Displeased, they glared at him. But once the young man stood up and looked in their direction, they raised their voices in surprise.

"Keith... You. Why, in such a place..." murmured Jonas.

The one they called Keith slowly surveyed Jonas and them.

"I sometimes come here for lunch, you didn't know? All of you, leave this place immediately. I don't want you to cause any more embarrassment."

"But, Keith! This girl really—" One of the youths raised his voice to complain, at which the other jokingly placed an index finger to his lips and sounded a "shh".

However, those eyes were not laughing.

"Be quiet before you make me upset."

The youths fell silent at the quiet intimidation. After exchanging glances, they got off their seats.

"Alright. If Keith says so, we'll leave."

"Glad to hear."

The youths came walking in Ann's direction, and while making sure not to look at her, they took their leave. Only Jonas glanced her way as he passed her, but that time as well, as soon as their eyes met, he quickly looked away and left. Kathy, who followed after him, glared at Ann like at an enemy as usual before leaving.

After they left, the one called Keith placed a generous sum over the table, then called out to the Landlady, "Sorry for making a fuss. I'll be fleeing as well."

He slowly came towards the entrance, and momentarily paused before Ann.

He had bright brown hair, and purplish dark-blue eyes; prudent-looking, composed features; draped in a fine knee-length coat.

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"My colleagues said something rude. Forgive them."

"Eh, no, it didn't bother me."

With just a little smile at the edges of his mouth, the young man took his leave.

Ann tilted her head while seeing off his back.

—A member of Radcliffe?

Full of smiles, the Landlady placed a hand on Ann's shoulder while Ann was staring at the entrance.

"Now, once again, welcome. Here for lodging? Or perhaps food?"

Turning around, Ann pulled herself together and smiled.

"Both. Lodging and food."

"Yay! Warm food! Ann, Shall Fen Shall, let's sit here. It's close to the stove; it's the best seat."

Mythrill headed towards a table at the back of the room while bouncing up and down. Despite being unable to feel the cold himself, his concern in picking a table near the stove for Ann's sake made her happy.

Speaking of, the Weather Vane Landlady's concern towards the fairies made her happy as well. She had expressly called out to Shall and Mythrill by saying, "Glad to see you." As the owner, she welcomed the fairies. Meaning, in this place, the owner acknowledged that fairies were allowed to dine together with everyone. By doing so, she made that known to the other guests, and if one had a problem with that, they had no choice but to leave.

"I wonder what I should have. But first I want to drink some warm wine with lots of sugar and a lemon squeeze. It's a staple of winter, so I absolutely gotta have it."

Mythrill rushed to take a seat and excitedly looked up at the blackboard on the wall. The blackboard had "Today's featured menu" written on it in chalk.

"Let's go, too, Shall. I'm also hungry. For now, I want the Weather Vane's specialty bean soup and walnut bread. Then for the main dish maybe some chicken grilled with salt herbs. And maybe some dessert, too."

As she headed towards the table while rubbing her stomach, Shall muttered in amazement, "You plan on eating that much?"

"Well, it's because I'm hungry. Is that wrong? Ah, that's right. What if I get fat?"

"No matter how much a scarecrow eats, it probably won't get much bigger. Hurry up and take a seat, Ann."

"Again with the scarecrow... Ah... But..."

Feeling slightly uncomfortable, Ann took a seat, then tilted her head to look at Shall. During the past few days, she'd been meaning to ask about something she thought was strange.

Noticing her gaze, Shall, who'd taken a seat, furrowed his eyebrows.

"What is it? You're making a weird face."

"Hey, Shall. Though it was the same just now, too, only these past three days, you'd sometimes call me by name. Why?"

Being called by name made her very happy, but she felt a sense of discomfort.

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Why Shall suddenly felt like calling her by name was so strange she couldn't bear it.

"You said it makes you happy, didn't you? So I intend to make an effort."

"Eh, then, you calling me things like 'scarecrow' or 'you idiot' till now wasn't out of spite to purposely bully me!? Though you casually called me scarecrow just now, too, that was unconsciously!?" she asked back in surprise, at which Shall showed a complex expression.

"... You think that I'm that spiteful?"

"So it wasn't spite..."

Then that meant Shall's abusive language was by nature. She was shocked.

Flowing from the kitchen were the aromas of bean soup, warmed wine, and thoroughly smoked meat. The smell of the food, along with the heat of the stove, made one feel relieved. Mythrill ecstatically sniffed at the smell of the cooking.

Shall seemed to find being thought of as spiteful to the core funny. He lowered his gaze, and let out a chuckle.

Gazing at his long, laid down lashes as he smiled, Ann felt incredibly happy. She was happy he was there before her eyes, happy he was smiling.

Her light feelings towards him continued to reside in her heart, but she no longer felt any strange nervousness. Shall was there—that was enough. Mythrill was with her, too. With just that, she felt relieved and contented. She, too, smiled naturally.

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"Now, what'll it be!?" The Landlady called out from beyond the counter in an energetic voice.

For the time being, the three of them were happy.

Afterword

Hello, everyone. I'm Mikawa Miri.

Thankfully, I was able to write Sugar Apple Fairy Tale's sequel.

At the end of the previous work "The Silver-Sugar Master and the Black Fairy", I personally thought, "Ann became happy! That's all that matters!"

But, in writing the sequel, I suddenly recovered myself.

Ann missed her chance to become a Silver-Sugar Master. And she barely has any possessions. Yet she has to support two fairies. How harsh for a 15 year old—.

Awawawawa. This is bad!

I submitted a plot that starts a year later where I'm not sure how but she somehow survived to that point. But cheating like that shouldn't be allowed. I resolved myself that I can't rush off here.

That said, this story takes place almost two months after the end of the previous work.

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Sugar Apple Fairy Tale Vol. 2 - Ginzatoushi to Ao no Koushaku.

Also, I wrote a short Sugar Apple story for "The Beans VOL.15" a little before this book should be released. It takes place three days after the end of the previous work. In this book, the Silver-Sugar Master Onii-San that gave Ann the cape she's wearing makes an appearance. A small Mythrill-sized fairy also appears. And, what. It includes a four panel Manga drawn by Aki-Sama and a color pin up of Shall. It's extravagant. It's miraculous. So please buy it.

This time, too, I really caused Manager-Sama a lot of trouble. Still, I'm forever grateful for their always bright and comfortable contact. Please continue to take care of me.

And Aki-Sama. The Ann Aki-Sama draws makes my chest tighten and Shall makes me dizzy. Mythrill makes me want to keep him in my pocket. Thank you very much. I feel incredibly fortunate to have your art.

I also received lots of letters. The encouraging words and impressions all made me really happy. So, I wish from the bottom of my heart that you could enjoy reading this book.

It's because of the readers that I could write a sequel. I'm very deeply grateful to everyone.

Well then, I'll be happy to see you again.

—Mikawa Miri

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Translation Notes:

**The original text here really sounds like he's describing a bunny or something...*

