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THE HEAVILY ARMoured NOBLE GIRL MONETTE

– How To Break a Curse You Don't Remember Casting –

- VOLUME 1 -

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[Kimamani Translate | Experimental Translations]

- STORY -

“As if I’d marry an ugly woman like you!”

Monette, a noble daughter of the House of Idira, was hurt deeply by what her fiancé, Prince Alexis, had said.

To rub salt on the wound, her younger sister was then made Alexis’ fiancée instead of her. Unsure just what part of her was ugly, Monette develops a complex... and begins to cover her whole body with iron armour.

And so, Monette researches magic alone in the old castle... until one day, two men come to visit her...

“Monette, break my curse!”

This is a story of Monette, who wears armour from the top of her head to the tip of her toes, Prince Alexis, who suffers under a curse of bad luck that forces him to stick his foot in a bottomless swamp at least once a week, and Percival, a worrywart knight who spoils people when he’s tired. It is a story of their journey as all three of them think respectively:

I’ve got the most common sense here.

Chapter 1

Armoured Girl

“As if I’d marry an ugly woman like you!”

Those were the first words he uttered the first time Monette Idira met him face-to-face.

Those were also the last words she heard from him.

What ugly words. To make things worse, those words were uttered by her fiancé, Alexis Radoll. Monette, still young, was very hurt by his words – and before the wound could heal, the very next day, she despaired when she learned that her younger sister had become his fiancée instead. She began to fear the gaze of others since she didn’t know what part of her was ugly. And fearing their mockery of her ugliness, she stopped appearing in front of others...

And eventually, she decided to wear iron armour from the top of her head to the tip of her toes.

Monette looks up at the sound of the birds chirping. A blue sky peeks out from behind tree leaves criss-crossing above her. Every so often sunlight brightly shines through the canopy, but Monette just keeps looking upwards without closing or squinting her eyes.

It’s bright enough that it would normally hurt people’s eyes... normally.

“I planned to get back before the sun rose...”

After muttering that she stayed too long, Monette starts walking again.

Enough food supplies to last her a week are in the paper bag she holds with both hands. She bought food that would last for a while, but it’s probably still not sanitary to walk for many hours in sunlight holding the bag. Most importantly, if sunlight hit it

for too long, it would begin to hold in heat... and by 'it', she meant the armour.

Wanting to get back quickly, Monette speeds up a little. In this quiet forest where the chirping of birds echoes, her iron armour clatters loudly...

She's covered from head to toe – so naturally, her fingertips are too. She covers her entire body with armour. A long while back she started to be known as the 'Heavily Armoured Noble Girl', or just the 'Armoured Girl' for short. What an ironic name. But it's true that given how she hid not only her face, but every inch of her skin, there was no way to describe her but 'heavily armoured'. It's also true that she was a noble girl. Though naturally, given that Monette was living alone deep in the forest in the old castle, she didn't really benefit from her nobility. It's been a long time since she was a noble's daughter.

And so that nickname of hers was terribly ironic, but Monette had no interest in correcting the name or in tracking down the person who thought it up and berating them. Her reasoning is probably something like this: They can say what they want, I only talk with people once a week to buy food anyways.

"I've got bread, jam, and meat jerky. Maybe next week I'll bring them some wine to make some more money."

Reaching the old castle in the forest, Monette spreads out her purchases on a table. As she confirms that she hasn't forgotten to buy anything, she takes off her helmet. She lets out a rather deep sigh of relief as her navy blue hair is freed.

It's incredibly tiring for Monette to go shopping in the nearest city district once a week. It takes several hours to reach the district from the old castle – it's a long journey as it is, but given that she wears a full set of armour, it's naturally impossible for her not to get tired. To make things worse, once she reaches the district obviously there are people around, and she always breaks out in a cold sweat at the idea that they look down at her even though she's covered in iron.

She thinks that she hears a young boy saying 'How ugly,' but even when she accepts that those words are just an auditory hallucination, she hears people actually saying 'Armoured Girl' behind her back. She's too afraid to verify whether those mocking voices she hears is real or not.

The only thing Monette can do is to take shallow breaths in her helmet and quickly finish up her shopping. Then she runs away to the forest, clanking all the way.

In direct contrast to the city, the only person in this old castle is Monette. Naturally, no one sees her and no one speaks. She even has animal repellent set up.

How relaxing – even if she takes off her helmet and the rest of her armour, no one sees her. It would be so nice if she could live in this old castle for the rest of her life. But in order to live, she needs food. She could make do if all she needed was vegetables, but she can't make goods like bread and other processed food by herself. In order to buy food like that she needs to go to the city...

“Should I pay them to deliver it here...? But I don't want people to come here too... Hm?”

Monette goes quiet at the sudden sound of other people's voices. She sneaks up to the old castle's entranceway. People are talking on the other side of the door. From their voices, it's two men... as she was listening closely to verify that, they knock on the door. In a panic, she first puts on the helmet before putting on the rest of the armour that had been left outside. She twirls around in front of a mirror to make sure that no skin is visible.

Either they had followed her in some kind of fascination with the Armoured Girl, or they got lost in the forest and want help.

They're probably not salespeople – she doubts that anyone would come this far just for that. Maybe she forgot her change when she bought her bread, and a nice clerk came to return – nah, no way. If something like that happened, they'd probably want a tip that was greater than the change she forgot.

As she muses, she cautiously reaches a hand out to the doorknob before slowly unlocking the door...

Her eyes widen at the person standing on the other side.

A young man with dark brown eyes and hair and sharp features. He's wearing a ratty robe and is putting up his hood in an attempt to hide, but he can't hide the elegance that seeps through what little that can be seen. The moment Monette sees the young man, a young boy's words echo clearly in her mind, the memories returning.

As if I'd marry an ugly woman like you!

...and so, she slams the door back closed.

She slams it so hard that the door might've warped. So hard that it may have hit the noses of him and his companion...

...she hears a strangled cry, so it's possible that she actually hit one of them.

Humans are pretty good at bouncing back from things, so Monette returns to normal soon after slamming the door shut. She's mastered repressing her unconscious mind. But the two on the other side of the door don't seem to want to go home just because of what she did. They begin to bang on the door, louder than before.

"Monette, it's you right!? Please open up!"

"I think I'll have some bread."

"Lady Monette, please, just lend us a small amount of your time!"

"Perhaps I'll brew some tea. Oh, I had some new tea leaves – I should try them out."

"I know that you resent me, but Monette – wolves! Oh no, Percival, wolves!"

"Maybe I should have some pastries first... wolves?"

"Lady Monette! Forget about talking, please just give us shelter!"

They begin screaming in between calling out her name as they bang on the door.

"I suppose my animal repellent wore off," says Monette, tilting her head to the side.

...Though, since she's wearing an iron helmet, all that can be observed from the outside is a grinding noise and a slight tremble.

Even as she tilts her head, she reluctantly puts her hand on the doorknob. She really doesn't want to let them in, but at the same time, she doesn't want them to be killed and eaten right on her doorstep. She wouldn't be able to sleep if they were eaten as they screamed and panicked.

And so, with no other choice, she opens the door. The two men run inside in a panic. She slams the door closed so the wolves can't get in.

It looks like they were really panicked – though, that's a pretty normal reaction to wolves closing in – so the two of them were breathing shallowly and making sure that they were both alright. They then look up.

That elegant and intelligent face reminds Monette of his young self... though she barely remembers him from back then anymore. Monette lowers her head. Though she's covered head to toe in armour and living in a forest, she has to lower her head to him.

"It's been a while, Prince Alexis," says Monette.

Her iron armour makes a grim grinding sound as her head lowers.

Chapter 2

The Unlucky Prince

Alexis Radoll is the First Prince of this country who lived a blessed, easy life anyone would envy up until one year ago. With his dark brown eyes, tall height, and limber hands and legs, he was handsome enough that any woman would let out a soft breath in desire at the sight of him. He was also talented as royalty – he aggressively threw himself into his studies of subjects he needed to know in order to ascend the throne.

He was earnest, hardworking, and easy to get along with. He would treat people equally in good faith while remaining as dignified as you would expect royalty to be. He was an ideal prince – loved by the people, held dear by his retainers. Everyone dreamed of him ascending the throne and talked about how the future of the kingdom was secure.

...Up until one year ago.

Now, for some reason or another, his stable life had made a 180 and was filled with bad luck. No, “filled with bad luck” is putting it too lightly. “Rife with bad luck” would be more like it. After all, it’s just that horrible.

Running a mysterious fever or getting mysterious injuries became an everyday occurrence. When he tries to sleep, something or someone always gets in the way and he ends up unable to rest. It’s taking Alexis everything he has just to get through each day – no matter how talented he is, it’s natural that his concentration would waver and he would start making mistakes.

To make things worse, terrible rumours began to spread – about how he’s using the country’s funds for his personal use, how he’s taking bribes to unfairly promote his subordinates, and so on. The people and his retainers began to flip their view of him. Even though they’re ridiculous rumours with no shred of truth to them, everyone unanimously believes them for some reason.

Eventually, people started saying that he got some random woman pregnant and so he has a bastard child – and even that he was keeping his fiancée’s mouth shut about this through violence.

Why, the rumours grew so out of proportion it's as if they managed to escape the atmosphere and call over their friends from Planet Bad Luck.

If it had just been one or two things, Monette would've probably just said "Serves you right." But hearing this much made even Monette do nothing but knit her brows in her helmet.

"You have no leads on where these rumours may be coming from?"

"Yes, not one."

"That story about a bastard child – could it be because you frequented the red-light district or had some kind of thoughtless love affair in the past?"

"I've never done anything like that, absolutely not even once. If you were talking about how I can make women fall for me just by making eye contact it would be a different story, but I have no experience with everything you mentioned."

"I see, you're pure then," shoots Monette, sugar-coating the fact that he's a virgin, "Do you have any other ideas then?"

"So then..." someone cuts in.

Monette turns her attention towards the new voice. It's the man who came in with Alexis. He's taller than Alexis and is sturdily built. He's blond-haired and has a severe expression. His sharp green eyes give him an intimidating air. From his casual-looking clothing and sword at his hip, he's probably Alexis' bodyguard.

"Who are you?" Monette asks him bluntly after staring at him for a bit.

It can't be helped if she's a teensy tiny bit rude. They're the ones that forced themselves in her home – she has no responsibility to be nice to them. Really, they're all being rather ill-mannered with each other.

"Percival. Percival Galette. I work as the prince's bodyguard."

"Mr. Percival. I see. Very well, continue."

"The way you talk really gets on my nerves."

“Oh, I’m so very sorry. I’m just a little irritated because I’m being forced to welcome some ill-mannered visitors without any advance notice.”

“Says the lump of iron.”

Percival glares intently at Monette. Monette glares right back.

Of course, Monette’s face is hidden by her helmet, and her helmet is made so even if she can see others, they can’t see her eyes. Glaring is quite literally useless. She’s a lump of iron, just like he says.

After the sturdy man and the lump of iron glare at each other for a while, Alexis, reaching the end of his patience, sighs and tries to stop them.

“Haven’t you had enough...?”

Then his chair collapses.

It collapsed rather dramatically, making a very loud noise as it crashed down.

“Prince Alexis?!”

“Milord, are you alright?!”

Panicked, the two of them run up to Alexis, who’s sitting on the ground on top of the collapsed chair. He waves them away, saying that he’s okay... the very next moment, tea spills over his head. His teacup had been knocked over when the table had tilted thanks to the shock of his chair falling to pieces.

What a beautiful sequence of events.

“Ooh, combo attack,” murmurs Monette in spite of herself.

“Well, one problem’s been dealt with.”

“More importantly, could you fix the bathroom? Hot water stopped coming out of the taps after Prince Alexis used it.”

“Don’t worry, it’ll fix itself once we leave.”

“Get out, you pair of pests!”

Ignoring Monette’s angry yells, Percival and Alexis start talking to each other. At their reaction, Monette doesn’t really feel like yelling at them anymore.

“Maybe you’re cursed?” Monette says half-ironically, unable to resist taking one last jab.

She then decides to get the conversation back on topic... but instead, her eyes widen in her helmet. Alexis and Percival are staring at her. Though she’s wearing iron armour, it doesn’t feel good to be the centre of attention. Sweat beads on her forehead. Dark brown eyes and green eyes. Her heart constricts in pain at their direct gaze – it’s like they’re seeing right through the armour.

“W – What is it?” Monette asks, voice trembling. But since her voice echoes in the armour and can’t be heard well, they probably won’t notice.

“Lady Monette, you just said that Prince Alexis was cursed, did you not?”

“Y – yes, I did. What of it?”

“Who do you think cursed him?”

“Well, I hadn’t thought that far,” says Monette.

Alexis rises forcefully with a clatter, and with that force, takes her hand – to be precise, her armoured gauntlet – in his. Monette’s next words – “I don’t know,” – are swallowed down at Alexis’ actions.

He’s strong... maybe. She unfortunately can’t really tell through the armour. But his serious expression has strength in it.

“Monette, so you really did hold a grudge!”

“Prince Alexis?”

“I’m so sorry about what I did back then. I’ll do anything to make it up to you. So please...”

“So please?”

“Please break this curse!” pleads Alexis, his voice almost a scream.

Monette tilts her head to the side, her armour making a grinding noise.

This is what Alexis Radoll has to say.

I hurt Monette in the past. I hear that she's cooped up in the old castle, researching the House of Idira's ancient magic. I'm sure that she still holds a grudge against me and cast this curse on me when she saw her chance! That's what put me in this sorry state!

This is what Percival Galette has to say.

Unfortunately I didn't witness their first meeting myself, but I can't deny that milord's words were cruel. That's why I'm sure that Lady Monette cast a curse on Prince Alexis because she held a grudge against him. I'm the only retainer milord has left after his reputation fell to tatters. We need to stop Monette before things get any worse!

This is what Monette Idira has to say.

You're completely off the mark so please hurry up and go home.

Naturally they wouldn't be able to carry on a decent conversation in a situation like this. “You cursed me!” - “No I didn't.” - “Please forgive me.” - “Please don't break the chair,”...the conversation continued in this fashion, and before anyone knew it, the sun had set.

Monette let out a heavy sigh when she was forced to split half of her weekly food supplies with the two of them for their dinner.

Chapter 3

The Armoured Girl and Her Friends from the Ceiling

The old castle Monette lives in may seem like it's deteriorating given that no one's cared for it in a while, but it's still a well-constructed building.

It's pretty convenient to use since there's lots of space, and as it is an old castle, it has a unique atmosphere thanks to its olden feel. At night, you can see a night sky full of stars from the balcony, and in the morning, a refreshing breeze carries along the scent of the forest. If the path to the castle was properly maintained and the inside was cleaned up, it would no doubt become a fancy inn.

Monette was having dinner with Alexis and Percival in one such room of this castle, a large hall.

Naturally, her armour is still on. Obviously, her face is covered by her helmet as well. Her mouth is all properly covered up by iron, but she's still eating in a dispassionate manner.

"...Lady Monette, how do you work?" says Percival, looking at her suspiciously.

"What do you mean by that?"

"How does your body work?"

"I will not answer any questions pertaining to sex."

"What are you talking about?"

At Monette's response, Percival's brow furrows. It's obviously an expression of confusion, but Monette just cocks her head to the side with a grind. She doesn't know what he's asking.

Regardless, Monette manipulates a fork with a silver gauntlet-clad hand and brings a mouthful-sized piece of meat to her mouth after dipping it in sauce. After she fills her mouth with the food, Percival and Alexis seem to be staring at her.

She doesn't understand them at all. It doesn't feel good to be stared at. Her hand naturally begins to tremble – the trembles reverberate through the gauntlet to the fork, which begins to slightly tap against the plate, making a tapping sound.

“It is rude to stare at someone while they're eating.”

“Oh, I'm so very sorry. It's just that the only thing I saw was a bizarre spectacle - a lump of iron absorbing food,” says Percival flatly.

Alexis, who eats next to him, lets out a sigh at his words. He internally laments that his underling and the noble girl who resents him don't get along well.

“Monette, I want to ask you about how you're eating,” he says, as if he's acting as a mediator.

“How I'm eating?”

“Yes. We cannot see your mouth at all – and yet you're eating normally.”

At Alexis' explanation of what they found strange, Monette nods in understanding. So that was what they meant, she thinks.

It's true that it can't be helped if they think it's strange that her food is disappearing even though they can't see her mouth at all. As Monette barely ever eats in front of others – in fact, she hasn't for years – she forgot about how bizarre she looks when she eats.

“My armour was made in a special way. And I've also cast magic so others can't see.”

“You're very thorough,” notes Alexis. His voice is somewhat subdued, almost like he feels bad.

He probably thinks himself responsible for making Monette go this far. So in front of her thoroughly hidden appearance, he probably feels guilty.

Monette feels no need to make him feel better. She returns to her meal. She has no desire to tell him not to worry about it and saying that it isn't his fault would be a lie.

So as Monette continues eating, ignoring Alexis' dispirited state. Perhaps worrying about Alexis' mood, Percival speaks up and changes the subject.

“Are there no maids in this castle?”

“Yes, there are no maids or even gardeners. Naturally, no guards too.”

“There really is no one but you, Lady Monette.”

“That’s right. I’m all alone. Occasionally people who are lost in the forest stay the night, but that only maybe happens once a month at most.”

“I see.”

“Oh, but my friends often come over to hang out,” says Monette, glancing up as if she had just suddenly remembered this fact.

“Friends?” Percival and Alexis say in unison at the unexpected statement.

Apparently it comes as a shock to them that an armoured girl cooped away in the old castle has friends. Their reaction does make her fairly angry, but she tells herself that she won’t complain, calming herself down... then at the soft scuttling noise she hears from the ceiling, she looks up.

Speaking of the devil, it looks like one of her friends has arrived.

“Since you’re here already, I’ll introduce you,” says Monette, extending a hand upwards with an open palm. It’s almost as if she’s introducing someone on the ceiling.

But obviously, no one is there. Percival and Alexis look confused.

At that moment, a single spider smoothly descends down from the ceiling.

“This is my friend Robertson.”

The instant she introduces him, a shrill scream echoes through the hall. Alexis stands up, looking pale, and Percival draws the sword at his hip.

The two had become defensive in a moment. Monette glances between them and Robertson, making a clanking noise as she does. The way her iron helmet turns from left to right at an even tempo makes for a rather surreal sight, but sadly no one sees it.

“What is it? You don’t like spiders?”

“It’s a s – spider... A poisonous spider!”

“How rude. Robertson is not poisonous. Right?” says Monette, addressing Robertson. At her words, he slightly sways at his stationary position at a reasonable height.

A plump body and eight legs – he’s most definitely a spider. It’s true that his appearance may be frightening, but he’s not poisonous.

When Monette makes to tell the two of them that he poses no danger because of that, a second spider smoothly descends down from the ceiling.

“A friend of yours, Robertson? Pink and yellow stripes – what a fashionable friend you have.”

“It’s obviously a colour pattern that means that it’s poisonous!”

“How rude, Prince Alexis. No matter how fashionable its colours may be, that doesn’t mean it’s poisonous... wait, it is? It is? Apparently it is poisonous.”

“Lady Monette, please go take that spider somewhere else! The prince will be bitten!”

“Percival, you’re being rude as well. No matter how fashionable its colours may be and no matter that it’s poisonous, that doesn’t mean it’s going to bite... oh, it is. It *is* going to bite. Oh I see,” Monette says, now talking with Robertson and his fashionable friend.

Hearing that, Alexis lets out a scream and Percival readies his sword with an even grimmer expression than before. The atmosphere from back when they were having dinner has disappeared.

“It’s alright. It looks like it doesn’t really feel like biting right now,” says Monette, trying to calm them down.

But Alexis, who has evacuated to the table, just shakes his head vigorously, still looking pale.

“Listen to me carefully Monette, my bad luck is out of this world...”

“Is that so.”

“In this past year, I’ve been bitten by non-lethal poisonous creatures once every three

days!”

“It’s impressive that you’re still alive.”

He’s pretty tough despite his bad luck.

Even as Monette admires his toughness, she glances at Robertson and his fashionable friend. They had descended down from the ceiling with their silk and were still stationary midair.

At this rate, dinner would be put permanently on hold.

“I’m sorry Robertson, but could you and your friend go to the basement today?” asks Monette apologetically, lowering her head.

Understanding her words, Robertson and his fashionable friend smoothly return to the ceiling, climbing up their threads. Then they scuttle over the ceiling and the wall to leave the hall. They’ve probably headed to the basement. Monette mentally apologizes to them for having to go to the basement even though they came all the way to the castle. She hears Alexis and Percival’s relieved voices as they think that the danger has passed.

“If only Prince Alexis and Percival went to the basement instead,” she mutters without thinking in her helmet.

“I can hear you, you iron lump,” a resentful voice shoots back.

Chapter 4

A Charm, Water, and a Cute Kitty

They ate not only her dinner, but dessert as well. Monette was sick of them already. What an unruly, noisy meal. In the middle of the meal, Robertson and his fashionable friend who wanted to bite someone came to visit, and when Alexis screamed and jumped up, his chair broke... calling it 'lively' would be a severe understatement. What a terrible experience.

...On a side note, Monette had tried her best to urge Robertson's fashionable friend to bite them.

"Just bite them, Robertson's fashionable friend! Right there! Go!" she had said.

But sadly Robertson's fashionable friend had been satisfied with just capturing some bugs flying around. What a gentle spider. It's enough to make her want to literally shove the fashionable friend in Percival's face to show him just how much better it is compared to him... especially if some of its poison rubbed off on him while the friend was brushing against his face. After all, Percival had glared at it very viciously...

After that dinner is finished and Monette is able to take a breather, she places a single cup on the table. It is a completely ordinary cup, half-filled with clear water.

"Lady Monette, what is this?"

"I thought that I might investigate whether you're truly cursed or simply a scummy bastard who's really unlucky."

"Monette, I apologize for destroying the chair, but could you phrase things a bit nicer?"

Ignoring Alexis' pained plea, Monette takes out a piece of paper and a pen.

It's a piece of parchment cut down to the size of a palm. The pen appears to be specially made as well. Small letters are carved onto its fat body and its tip is pitch black, made from special ingredients. It's clear just from its appearance that it is not a normal pen. Alexis and Percival stare in its strangeness.

Percival in particular looks rather cautious. After passing his eyes over the parchment and the pen, he turns his gaze back towards Monette. His teal eyes seem to ask Monette what she plans to do with these items.

“I will create a charm.”

“A charm?”

“This pen’s ink has been mixed with my blood. I will draw a spell on this paper with it.”

Monette puts her pen on the paper. The blood-mixed ink sinks into the parchment. While it is black, it can seem red depending on the lighting. It’s a colour that may seem sinister to some.

As Monette slides the pen across the parchment as she draws, Percival tilts his head to the side distrustfully.

“All I see is a drawing of some ugly creature, but is it some kind of special writing?”

“Amateurs will not comprehend the appeal of this adorable kitty.”

“...Lady Monette, have you perhaps been afflicted with a curse that left you unable to draw?”

“...But Percival, it seems that *you* have been afflicted with a curse that stole your manners away.”

“Both of you, I’m begging you, don’t fight.”

Alexis stops the two of them right before they begin to fight. In her helmet, Monette clicks her tongue and glares at Percival. Naturally, since she’s glaring in her helmet her gaze doesn’t reach him, but coincidentally he happens to be glaring at her too, his teal eyes looking sharp.

What an infuriating man. If only both of them were cursed... but even as she muses about that, she continues to slide her pen across the parchment.

And so, her drawing of an adorable kitty is completed. If there were a third party here, they would surely praise her for how adorable and lovely it was, for how it looked like

it were actually living. Either that, or they would recommend her a good psychiatric hospital.

Anyways, she places this charm on top of the cup and takes a deep breath in her helmet.

The House of Idira has long since lost their right to call themselves witches. Currently, she has no living relatives that can use magic.

Thus, Monette learned magic by fumbling her way through the documents that had survived the years. She didn't know whether she had any talent, but luckily she had plenty of time.

Recalling the days she spent learning magic, she slowly lets out the air in her lungs... then murmurs:

“Search.”

This simple word is naturally a spell that activates magic.

At that moment, the parchment on top of the cup makes a popping noise and burns up, as if it were given an order.

It twisted around as it dissipated, disappearing in an instant. All that was left was the cup, filled with clear water, just like before. The cup held no traces of ash nor smoke – the water wasn't even rippling.

“Wh – what was that!?”

“That was magic. Very well then Prince Alexis, please drink this.”

“...I'm sorry Monette, I may be a little scared after all.”

“Milord, if you drink water that has a drawing of that cursed creature in it, you'll lose the ability to draw.”

“It was an adorable kitty! Fine, then I'll drink it first. Just watch.”

Monette takes the cup in her hand and drinks it with no hesitation. Naturally, it has no taste or smell. It's just water. She doesn't feel strange after swallowing it either. After

all, Monette had gone herself to draw it from a well just beforehand.

She drinks a mouthful to prove that, then returns the cup to the table.

“See,” she says, shrugging.

...Though her armour did nothing but move with a grinding sound so she’s not sure whether they could tell that she was shrugging.

“It’s not harmful, it’s 100% authentic water.”

“...Very well then, I’ll drink it first.”

Is he the Prince’s food taster or something? Percival reaches out to the cup.

“Go on, feel free,” she urges, even as she thinks that they’re being terribly suspicious.

Percival holds the water in his mouth with a terribly serious expression, as if he’s testing whether there’s any strange tastes. Finally, he swallows the water with a gulp.

“...It’s true, it’s just water.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying. Go on, here you go, it’s your turn, Prince Alexis.”

“Y – yeah...”

Alexis takes the cup in his hand. Perhaps seeing Monette and Alexis drinking from it alleviated his worries.

He then takes a sip from the water just like the other two did... then moans and begins violently coughing.

“Urgh, ugh, what is this!?”

“Milord, what’s the matter!?”

“It’s so bitter, I’m impressed you two could drink this...”

Alexis looks rather pained as he drinks tea and talks. He can probably still taste it on his tongue.

His pain and disgust is clear to see on his face. He takes a sip of his tea after saying a word, then takes another sip after saying a word, and so on... it seems like it was incredibly bitter.

Percival, who had just drunk the same water and deemed it 'just water', finds this strange.

"Bitter? But when I drank it, it was just water."

"Water? That?... Ergh, no good, I can still taste it. Monette, do you have anything with a strong taste? Like wine or cheese – preferably high-quality aged wine and cheese on a cracker," requests Alexis even at a time like this.

"What do you think you're doing, kicking back and relaxing!?" Monette retorts bluntly.

She picks up a box she had prepared beforehand.

It's a cute jewelry case adorned with beautiful stones. In it lies carefully wrapped chocolate.

Seeing its contents, Alexis gives his thanks and takes one, throwing it in his mouth. At the taste, he finally lets out a sigh of relief. It must've been pretty bad.

Percival is gazing at the cup quizzically as he gingerly drinks the water. He cocks his head to the side in confusion.

Monette shrugs her shoulders, making a grinding sound.

Sure enough or maybe not, as expected, Alexis is cursed.

Chapter 5

Who Cursed The Prince?

“What does this mean, Lady Monette? Why is Prince Alexis the only one to say that the water tastes bad?”

“That’s because he’s cursed, of course,” replies Monette, throwing a piece of chocolate in her mouth as well.

Alexis and Percival exchange glances.

They don’t ask out loud what she means, but their expressions are clearly questioning. Seeing their expressions, Monette chugs down the remaining water and begins to talk. Naturally, it’s water. It’s neither bitter nor sweet.

“The water from earlier that had the charm dissolved in it reacts to curses. It’s just water for people who aren’t afflicted with a curse, but those who are taste it as terribly bitter.”

“That drawing of that ugly creature has a power like that...?”

“It was a cute kitty-cat! Anyways, the point is that since Prince Alexis tasted the water as bad, someone must have cast a curse on him.”

“...I see, so as expected, I’m cursed.”

Alexis lets out a small breath of air, then slowly lowers his gaze. His exhaustion and grief is clear as day from his expression – anyone who was unaware of his words on *that* day or his current reputation would no doubt feel for him. Perhaps it’s due to his normal grace, but it’s painful just watching him.

But anyone would feel downhearted on learning that they were cursed, that someone wanted them to suffer.

Alexis’ gaze remains lowered for a while, his emotions probably battling it out on the inside. Finally, he weakly raises his head. His face looks exhausted and his deep brown

eyes look pained. He stares at Monette with those deep brown eyes of his.

At his stare, Monette swallows inside her helmet.

She wears the helmet so others can't see her. So, their eyes can't meet – but still, she stands defensively at his straight gaze. His eyes are spiritless and haggard, and yet she breaks out into a cold sweat at the idea that she's being stared at.

“Monette...”

“Y – yes. What is it...?”

“I understand that you hold a grudge against me. Little wonder, after what I said to you. I will do anything it takes to make it up to you, so please, break this cu–”

“– Like I said before, it wasn't me!” Monette says, raising her voice on sensing the start of another endless back-and-forth.

“Monette! Who could it be other than you!?”

“I don't know! Maybe you angered some random witch somewhere!”

“After realizing how terribly I treated you, I worked as hard as I could to be a good prince. I should've had good interpersonal relationships!” Alexis insists before lowering his gaze again.

Despite his insistences, he *was* currently cursed.

“They should've been good...” he murmurs finally, trailing off into a sigh.

The fringe of his hair sways. His hair is slightly damaged – Monette can tell how tough this past year must've been for him.

At Alexis' state, Monette shrugs with a grinding noise. As she shrugs, she thinks that she agrees with his statement that his interpersonal relationships should've been good...

She knows that he was a good prince.

Although she's cooped up in the old castle, she still goes to town once a week to shop.

When she's in town, she does often hear stories of Alexis, even if they're nothing more than gossip.

He interacts with people kindly (never abusing his position), he's gentle, and most importantly he thinks about what would be best for his citizens. If he ascended the throne, the country would no doubt take a turn for the better... everyone talked about this as they laughed in a friendly manner. Not wanting to ruin everyone's fun, Monette always just obediently listened to their stories and occasionally made noises of agreement.

Now that she thinks back, people stopped talking about him at some point.

In exchange, they started talking a lot more about his little brother, the second prince, but perhaps that was the beginning of the curse.

She had zero interest in the second prince so she had ignored all the stories about him, but now that she thinks back, she feels like the stories had some insults towards Alexis mixed in.

"It's been about one year since people starting saying this and that about you, correct?"

"This and that, huh... Monette, what did they say about me?"

"Do you want to hear?" says Monette before continuing concernedly, "Won't it hurt?"

Alexis nods his head with a pitiful expression. He probably wants to face the reality that baseless rumours are spreading, lowering his reputation.

That's why Monette decides to tell him everything. She thinks back to her memories of going to town. If she recalls correctly...

"They said that you played around with women, that you were showing your true self, that you were foolish compared to your brother, Prince Rodell."

"I - I see..."

"They even said that you should renounce your right to the throne. That they were tricked, that the only thing good about you was your face..."

“Prince Alexis, are you alright? Lady Monette, leave it at there.”

“Oh, and that you were an unlucky bastard who broke chairs.”

“That’s got to be something you said.”

Monette had intended to casually slip in the insult, but Percival caught it and berated her. In her mind, she clicks her tongue.

As she’s feeling refreshed after informing Alexis of some of the abuse hurled at him, Alexis lets out a deep sigh.

“Thank you for telling me,” he thanks her – but she doesn’t think that he’s actually that grateful. He looks like he’s about to cry – or even collapse.

At the sight of him, Monette murmurs, “It’s a curse.”

Monette didn’t think that he would do anything to make others resent him either. This was due to his reputation before it did a one-eighty, and most importantly the gifts of apology sent to her on a regular basis.

The gifts came with letters, none of which she had read. They probably were filled with apologies. As she continued to not reply to his letters, he eventually stopped sending them, probably not wanting to burden her. Instead, he began to send just the gifts of apology. She didn’t even want to see them so she sold them as soon as they arrived, but he probably understood that she was doing that – everything he sent sold for a high price.

A good prince loved by everyone. He even sincerely apologizes for things he did in the past.

That’s why Alexis thinks that Monette was the one to curse him.

...No, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he *wants* Monette to be the one who cursed him. After that thought crosses her mind, Monette scratches her head, thinking that it can’t be helped. On scratching her helmet with a gauntlet-covered finger, the loud sound of iron scraping against itself echoes out.

“I understand. It can’t be helped – I will help you break your curse.”

“...Monette?”

“I don’t like being treated as the culprit, after all. There’s only so much I can do with my charms, but I am a witch. I believe I will be able to help you a bit.”

At Monette’s words, Alexis’ expression brightens in an instant.

There’s nothing that the two of them can do to break a curse when they can’t use magic. No doubt Monette’s words were like a ray of sunshine in a sea of despair for them.

In fact, at this very moment Alexis is expressing his sincere gratitude from the bottom of his heart. He even stands up to try to shake her hand, thinking that words aren’t enough... that’s when...

Crash!

He crashes through the floor and falls down into the basement. Dust and wood shavings poof upwards.

“Your Highness!” cries Percival, peering down into the hole in a panic.

“I – I’m fine, Percival. I just fell a little... wait a second, Robertson! Your friend too! Ah – AH-H-H-H!”

Alexis’ indescribable scream rings out.

Monette hears the sound of several bottles of wine breaking.

She wonders which will be first – this old castle collapsing, breaking Alexis’ curse, or perhaps even Alexis succumbing to the curse and dying – and sighs.

Chapter 6

The Bodyguard Knight's Strange Midnight Activities

“Would you prefer to sleep on the floor in the great hall or in the wine cellar in the basement? You may also stay in a shed outside,” asks Monette.

Percival glares at Monette, his eyes so very sharp. In response, Monette sticks out her tongue in her helmet. Naturally, no one can see it as she's encased in iron, but Percival furrows his eyebrows, sensing something. He has sharp instincts.

“This castle is big enough that it must have guest rooms.”

“Oh, were you not aware, Percival? Guest rooms are meant for guests.”

After Monette explains bluntly that they were not guests, Percival understands what she means. His eyebrows furrow further. But he probably realizes that they did barge in on her. All he does is glance at her with a dissatisfied expression. At his frustrated look, Monette does a little victory dance in her heart –

“Prince Alexis is tired. Please hurry up and take us to a guest room... a quiet room, where the floor won't cave in, the bed won't break, a bird won't crash through the window, the night section of a tap-dancing club won't hold their tap dancing competition on the floor above, and a surprise clown won't accidentally enter the room because of the late night party held in the room next to us.”

“Have you ever stayed in a room where the bed broke, a bird crashed through the window, the night section of a tap-dancing club held their tap dancing competition on the floor above, and a surprise clown accidentally entered your room because of the late night party held in the room next to you?”

“...Don't ask me that, it brings back bad memories.”

Apparently the examples he gave were just a small fraction of what they've gone through. Percival murmurs that they haven't been able to sleep soundly for the past year.

The only thing Monette can sense from his voice is exhaustion. She does another little victory dance in her heart. Her imaginary self finishes up her dance by tracing with her feet the words '*Serves you right!*' with a flourish.

Monette can't help but cheer up at their sorry state. Feeling generous, she lets them stay in a quiet guest room where the floor is not caved in. It's the room she lends to the very few people who stop by the old castle.

Naturally, the bed won't break and the night section of a tap-dancing club won't hold their tap dancing competition upstairs. A surprise clown won't accidentally enter their room instead of the room next door where a party is being held. But well, as they are inside a forest, it's possible that a bird may crash through the window.

"Prince Alexis, please use this room. Percival, you may use the room next door."

"No, I'm fine in this room as well."

"...Ah."

"What's the matter?"

"No, I mean, I understand. D – do not worry about it. I am fine with it so long as you wash the sheets yourselves afterwards."

"Don't show us consideration we don't want. I'm a bodyguard, just a bodyguard."

Monette is berated for messing around and so she sticks her tongue out in her helmet again. Alexis, looking tired at their back-and-forth, approaches the bed and verifies its make and softness.

"The bed legs seem sturdy – the bottom shouldn't fall out."

"Milord, what about the mattress and pillow?"

"Mm, looks like there's no ticks."

"How rude."

"Milord, I'll verify under the bed."

“No, it’s fine. There isn’t a man with a scythe or a woman with bloodshot eyes hiding under the bed this time around.”

“I’m telling you that you don’t need to– this time around!? People like that have hidden under your bed before!?” cries Monette, “What in the world!? That’s scary!”

Apparently they ran about quite a bit before coming to Monette’s old castle. At a certain inn they stayed at during their journey, a man whose wife was having an affair determined where the man she was having an affair with stayed. Aiming to kill this man, he snuck into their room by mistake. Another time, a woman stalking a man who had disappeared snuck into their room, again by mistake. From this trauma, they began to always check under their beds.

At their story, Monette is dumbfounded. This is enough to make even Monette feel sorry for them rather than think that they deserve it.

And so, she takes out a piece of parchment and a pen from the pouch on her waist and smoothly draws a cute kitty-cat with an experienced hand. She places the charm on the bed’s headboard.

“What a *dreadful* creature you’ve drawn... oh I see, you’re telling us to dream of being chased by this creature...”

“It’s a cute kitty-cat!”

“Look, Prince Alexis, half of this creature’s face has caved in. No doubt she’s telling us to go get our faces burned off in our dreams.”

“It’s a cute winking kitty-cat! It’s a curse ward!”

“A curse ward?” Percival and Alexis parrot in unison.

Monette lets out a humph and looks away from them. Though well, the sound of her humph is absorbed by her thick helmet – all they see is her suddenly looking the other way with a grinding noise.

On a side note, this cute winking kitty-cat charm is most definitely a curse ward.

Though well, despite being called a curse ward it doesn’t work indefinitely – it works for at most a half-day. And if Monette sleeps or goes away, the effect lessens.

Even with magic, there's nothing that works universally no matter where you may be in the world. This goes double-fold for those of the House of Idira, who had nothing to do with magic for so long.

As she doesn't know anything about who cast the curse or how it works, the only thing she can do is ward off the disasters as they come.

"Still, it should protect you enough to let you sleep soundly tonight."

At Monette's explanation, Percival lets out a small sigh of admiration and some slight relief, while Alexis' expression softens... and he falls onto the bed like he fell unconscious.

Immediately after, his breathing slows, seemingly sleeping. He must have been very tired – in both mind and body.

"As that's the way it is, I would suggest that you sleep in the room next door, Percival."

"No, I'll stay here," Percival declines firmly.

Monette shrugs, thinking him obstinate, then leaves the room.

Two hours later, after finishing some research she had been doing in her room, she puts on her armour on top of her dressing gown and heads to Alexis and Percival's room again.

On knocking on the guest room's door, after a while, the door slowly opens. Percival peeks his head out.

"My apologies for interrupting your fun."

"...Hm? What's the matter?"

"Er, that is... I found a stronger curse ward than the one I used originally, so I thought I would swap it out for the new one."

"...I see. Alright, then I'm counting on you," Percival responds slowly, opening the door.

Monette had thought that he would glare at her and hurl an insult or two – what a disappointment.

“This is kind of disconcerting,” murmurs Monette.

But she still enters the room. She hears Alexis’ steady breathing as he sleeps. It seems like he’s sleeping really deeply – he’ll definitely sleep soundly until morning. At this rate, Monette just hopes that he wakes up *in* the morning rather than after it.

“With this charm, Prince Alexis should be fine even if he sleeps until the afternoon... Percival? Are you listening?” Monette asks.

After a ten second interval, Percival, resting on the sofa, responds.

“Yeah, I’m listening.”

From his slow response and the tone of his voice, Monette realizes he hadn’t been listening in the slightest. She glares at him. What a rude person.

But the next moment, Monette’s eyes widen. Percival is gesturing for her to come over.

Gesturing her over after ignoring her – how terribly rude. But Monette still approaches him... only to have her arm – or to be more precise, her gauntlet – gripped tightly to pull her forcibly into a hug.

Monette’s body... or rather armour is pressed against his chest. His sturdy arms envelop her.

“Percival!?”

“Lady Monette...”

“W- What are you doing!?”

“Lady Monette, you’re such a good girl.”

“...Excuse me?”

“You even researched for us – Lady Monette, you’re really a kind and good girl.”

“U- um, Percival?”

He pats her helmet with his large hands. Monette is bewildered – she has no idea what’s going on.

His current behaviour is completely different from how he acted during the day. Not only is he saying positive things like “You’re kind,” and “Thank you,” he’s also embracing her and patting her helmet.

There’s no way she wouldn’t be shocked by this.

On a side note, although she’s being embraced, the iron armour doesn’t let any body heat through, so her heartbeat doesn’t increase in the slightest. Rather, the more Percival praises her, the colder Monette feels. From the slightly cold air, naturally.

“Lady Monette, thank you. You’re really a kind person.”

“Percival, please return to your senses!”

“You redid the charm for us too, huh? It really is a cute kitty-cat, you’re good at drawing.”

“What happened to you, Percival, are you going to die!? If you’re going to die, die somewhere else!” Monette screams.

But Percival continues to happily shower her compliments, ignoring her scream. He embraces her tightly and continues patting her on the helmet.

–

Fifteen minutes later.

“...It happens sometimes,” explains Percival. He’s sitting on the sofa, looking downwards, face covered with by hands. The air was thick around him.

“Sometimes?” asks Monette, standing right in front of him.

“...Like when I’m tired.”

“Please sleep.”

“No, but the prince-“

“Sleep. Right. Now.”

Percival murmurs “A bodyguard...”, but after glancing at Monette he obediently heads to the room next door.

No doubt after coming to his senses and calmly looking back at his actions – a brief moment of clarity for him - along with realizing his wrongdoings at the sight of Monette, he decided to obediently go to sleep.

...After seeing Monette covered in fingerprints from all his patting.

Chapter 7

Witches are Fickle

“Well then, about Prince Alexis’ curse of bad luck and Percival’s curse of behaving eccentrically when he’s tired...”

“Shall we talk about your cursed drawing ability and the monsters you create as well, Lady Monette?”

“Cute kitty-cats!” Monette cries, “How rude!”

Percival snorts in a combative way. Alexis sighs in exasperation at the two of them... then from that slight movement, his chair breaks into pieces and he collapses to the floor.

It’s shortly past noon.

After sleeping soundly, Alexis and Percival helped themselves to her food for lunch. It’s shortly after Monette started gazing at her remaining food supplies in dissatisfaction.

Apparently statistically, the curse doesn’t seem to kick in as much in the afternoon, so she thought to talk about it now when they had a chance... and then this happens.

Monette can’t help but say, “Please sit on the floor.”

She holds out a cushion to Alexis.

“Lady Monette, there’s a limit to how rude you can be. Asking the prince to sit on the floor...”

“It’s fine, Percival. If I sit on a chair, it breaks, so I might as well just sit on the floor –” Alexis’ voice cuts off as he makes to sit on the floor.

Needless to say, on trying to sit down, he fell into the basement for a second time, making a big racket. A loud, echoing crashing sound. Wood flakes fly up.

“Y-your Highness! Are you alright!?”

“Yeah, I’m fi- good morning, Robertson and your friend! I’m begging you, please don’t come this wa-!”

Alexis screams. At the sound, Percival hurriedly heads down to the basement.

Monette follows after Percival, all while urging the spiders, “Bite him, Robertson, Robertson’s fashionable friend!”

They go for a fresh start after the day’s first incident.

Monette can’t stand having any more holes in the floor, so she sets up a basic table in the wine cellar in the basement. For now, she’ll ignore Percival staring at the wine in interest, murmuring “This is...” and “Even wine from that period...”

“I shall give you a bottle for every chair you repair,” she says half-jokingly, but Percival just nods in response, looking rather serious.

Putting aside the wine, it’s time to talk about the curse again.

On placing an open book on the table, Alexis and Percival peer down at it, wondering what it contains. But they both just look confused immediately after glancing down.

After all, the book laid out on the table is not written in an alphabet they can read. No, they may not even be able to recognize the writing as letters. Even Alexis, who has learned several countries’ languages as a prince, is at a loss at the uneven lines of writing that look as though a worm might have wriggled them out.

“Monette, what country is this writing from?”

“This is witches’ script. Only witches can understand it and use it. It’s a special form of writing that only those from a witch’s bloodline can use.”

“You can read it?”

“It would be more accurate to say that I became able to read it,” Monette explains as she flips through the spellbook.

Witches' script, only known in witches' households. Normally, it would've been passed down from parent to child, but unfortunately, the House of Idira threw away their knowledge of the script long ago. If Monette showed the writing to any of her living relatives, they'd probably just end up saying, "What are these dirty lines?"

That's the kind of spellbook it is. It had been stored away in the attic of their mansion.

When she moved to this old castle, she brought all the books like that she could find. Holing herself away in this empty castle, she learned how to read it one letter at a time, thus becoming able to use spells.

"Does this book have anything on curses?"

"There's a few that might be relevant... nope, stop right there. You look like you're thinking that it's me after all. Prince Alexis too, please don't lower your head," Monette scolds, "Don't treat me like the culprit."

It would be an understatement to say that it makes Monette feel bad to be treated as the culprit after cooperating so much as well as providing meals and a place to sleep. After pointing this out to the two of them, their expressions change in an instant. They even bring the conversation back to the spellbook.

From the abrupt change in topic, Monette can't help but say, "Don't make me a participant in your farce," and glare at them from in her helmet.

"If a witch's spellbook has curses, then I was cursed by a witch after all. Just who did it...?"

"I'm not able to determine which witch exactly. While the House of Idira discarded their heritage as witches, there's still many witch households remaining in the world. Either you did something to make one of those witches resent you, or someone requested one of them to curse you..." Monette goes silent.

Alexis is softly laughing as he listens to her talk. But his brow is furrowed, and his narrowed deep brown eyes are pained. Still, he's forcing a smile onto his face.

"That's true," he responds, so thinly it almost sounds like a sigh. His voice is slightly hoarse – he looks indescribably pained.

Unable to bear it, Monette scratches her head. Her iron-covered finger makes a

grinding noise against her helmet.

It looks like Percival's expression is pained as well. He looks towards Alexis and almost says something... but shuts his mouth, looking irritated. He probably can't think of anything to comfort Alexis.

Percival twists his expression, looking pained again at his cowardice. Monette lets out a small sigh in the midst of the heavy atmosphere.

Though, her sigh is absorbed by her thick helmet and isn't heard by the other two.

But the fact of the matter is Alexis is cursed, and they do not know who the culprit is.

There's a number of modern witch households in the world, and it's almost impossible for a self-taught novice witch like Monette to investigate the spells they have.

Above all, the way Alexis' bad luck shows itself bothers her.

He gets ill and becomes injured, but never dies or deals with lasting injuries or sicknesses. He gets into dangerous situations like being chased by wolves, but every time, he's saved in the nick of time. He often breaks chairs or tables and such, but he only ever gets minor injuries.

It's much too weak for a witch's curse.

"Curses are the same as charms, they weaken if the one who cast it is far away or is sleeping. A talented witch may be cursing you from afar, or a weak witch may be cursing you close by, or perhaps a witch is suppressing the power of the curse to avoid suspicion, or it's simply a toned-back curse..."

"You can't investigate the curse with that cup last night like how you verified the curse was real?" asks Percival.

Monette shakes her head, indicating that it's impossible. It must make a surreal sight to see a helmet turn from left to right with a grind, but Alexis and Percival don't have the time to spare to notice that.

The two of them listen to Monette with strange expressions on their face, looking straight at her. Deep brown eyes and emerald eyes. Though they aren't glaring at her, their gazes are piercing. Monette finds it hard to breathe – she flips through the

spellbook to avert her gaze and additionally direct their gazes towards the table.

Her iron helmet hides her expression and her sighs... but she can't wipe the bead of sweat that drips down her cheek. When she automatically lifts a hand to do so, a clank sounds out when the iron gauntlet and helmet meet.

How terribly inconvenient.

"While I cannot investigate the curse, I believe a witch in a neighboring country may be able to. Unlike myself in the House of Idira, she was born into a long, continuous lineage of witches. I shouldn't be able to even hold a candle to her skill in magic and curses."

Monette spreads out a map next to the spellbook, then taps an iron-covered finger at the approximate location of the witch.

It's right on the border between the countries. It would probably take about half a month to get there and back with a carriage. You would have to leave the forest bordering the countries, then continue on into the valley... it would be tough at times, but it's not impossible to traverse.

Learning that there was a lead unexpectedly close by, Alexis and Percival's expressions very slightly soften.

"However," Monette says in warning as she reads the spellbook, "Witches are fickle. No matter who you may be, no matter what you may want, if it doesn't suit them, they will not cooperate with you. They may not even reveal themselves in front of you."

"Is that the way it is? Even if it's a royal command?"

"Though human, witches have apparently always lived on a different plane of existence than others. And so, even if you're royalty, everything depends on their mood. Depending on how you treat them, they may even go hostile. Supposedly no matter the country, people have struggled with dealing with these moody witches."

"I see. So even if we go to meet her, we won't know if she'll even meet us, let alone cooperate with us..."

For some reason, Alexis and Percival exchange glances.

Ignoring them, Monette flips through the spellbook.

“Though that doesn’t appear to be the case between witches,” she murmurs.

...The words slip out accidentally.

Chapter 8

Witches are Capricious and Selfish

“...What about witches?”

“Yeah. It seems that whether the person asking is a normal person or royalty, a witch won’t listen to their request unless it benefits them in some way. At the same time, witches are said to be whimsical, and for some reason they always take great care in the connections between one another.”

It is surprising, Monette explains without noticing the meaning of her remarks. On the contrary, with a magic book in hand, “When a fellow witch visits, it is considered very rude to not greet them with the utmost hospitality,” she teaches them about the manners among witches.

They are tremendously careless remarks. So careless that just calling them careless doesn’t quite fit. Robertson and his fashionable friend who were stretching along the ceiling came sliding down their silk..... However Monette is reading from her magic book without noticing their warnings.

“...Miss Monette. Are you a witch as well?”

“Well, the Idira family threw away their witch heritage long ago, but I am able to read the script and spells. If I were to visit a witch, they would surely welcome..... um.....”

Feeling an unpleasant premonition from her remarks—Finally—the end of Monette’s sentence gradually disappeared. At the same time, the words, “I am an idiot...” occupy Monette’s brain, and she curses herself. Alexis and Percival are staring at her.

The color of their eyes are different, but what they are trying to say is the same. That is why the pressure is so astounding. So much pressure is being applied.

Monette’s helmet makes a grinding noise as she turns her face away from the men and pushes the map forward with her gauntlet.

Then,

“.....please be careful. Be sure to send me some souvenirs.”

The words echo in her helmet creating white noise.

“Monette, I beg you! Please come with us!”

“I don’t want to; it sounds bothersome! I already told you where to go, isn’t that enough!?”

“Monette, isn’t there a possibility that the witch won’t meet with us even if we go alone!? And the Prince’s curse could worsen in the meantime!”

“Then I guess you should give up and die! I’ll tell you, I didn’t curse you, but that doesn’t mean I forgive you!”

Monette shouted out her refusal and turned away.

I don’t like to shout because it gets noisy when my voice echoes inside my helmet, but I don’t care about that right now.

I don’t want to listen to anymore of their stories. You two spewing out words, threatening me and accusing me of casting the curse, did you think I would hear you out?

I don’t want to go outside. It’s not a joke to leave the country. Alexis is the main reason why I ended up in this old castle, of course, so there is no reason to do so much for him.

Rather, there was no thanks when I saved him from being killed by wolves nor when I gave him a place to sleep. In such a case, I should have abandoned him and not opened my door in the first place.

So thinking, Monette tried to once again reject their pleas..... and caught her breath in her helmet.

Alexis had deeply lowered his head.

Deep enough that his face could not be seen. His hair was hanging straight down, in a

posture that would be painful to hold, he was bent down as if he had become stuck in that position.

Royalty. The first prince. To the daughter who has all but been disinherited from her family tree and left with nothing the moment her engagement had ended.

Deeply, deep enough to make you think he was a miserable existence, he lowered his head.

The neighboring Percival narrowed his eyes at such a spectacle..... And then he also lowered his head.

“Monette, I’m asking..... I can only rely on you. I swear to listen to whatever you say, and I won’t force you to do anything. You don’t have to unravel the curse, I don’t even care if the curse is solved.

“Alexis.....”

“I want to know who placed this curse on me; I want to know what I’ve done. I want to apologize if I can apologize, and I want to provide compensation if I can make up for it. I know that this is just for my self-satisfaction, and I know it’s horrible for me to inconvenience Monette like this. Nevertheless...”

I want to know.

Monette stared at him for awhile as Alexis’s words seeped into her. His dark brown hair shook, and the words the boy once said crossed her mind.

As before, Monette had the resentment towards Alexis swirling in her. While she could say that, it is also true that those emotions were diminishing. She would not forgive him, but she didn’t hate him from the bottom of her heart.

Even if all the problems Monette faced were because of his words, he was as young as he was. Even if he had the influence of the royal family behind him, she did not want to impose the responsibility of her life afterwards on the words of such a small child. Moreover, he was aware of his mistake, and he continued to show his sincerity and tried to apologize.

It was rather a series of things that continued on after his words that had so deeply injured Monette’s heart. It had become an obstacle, and she had several opportunities

to overcome that obstacle..... she could not stop using her helmet as a shield.

But it is a fact that his words were the origin. They were the reason why Monette is staying in this old castle.

It is such an exquisite place. Maybe it would be easier to just hate him.

Thinking about such things, Monette let out a large sigh.

“Please make sure that it is only the finest room in the finest inn.

“.....Monette?”

“With the highest grade room service. I will return home as soon as the mood gets worse, and depending on the reason for the curse, you may be at fault and just anger the other party.”

So saying, Monette added, “If that is still good...”

I was interested in other witches. It is a witch from a family line whose practices were passed down through the generations. If it is possible to talk, it must be fun, and I could learn a lot.

Besides, I can be selfish this way. Special room service in the best room. Of course I will eat expensive high-class dishes and anything I want.

If I am going to be dragged out of this castle, I have a right to luxury. Do you know your wallet’s circumstances?

This witch is capricious, selfish, and will play on your fears. Sometimes I will laugh at your bad luck, and sometimes I will threaten you to make your curse worse. I will enjoy your reactions, and I will enjoy the scenery as I travel. Surely it will feel great.

So she told herself. And finally,

“If it is still fine, you may come with me as I go visit a witch in a neighboring country.”

As I said so, Alexis and Percival’s eyes rounded..... and I floated a smile while crying in relief.

Chapter 9

Armor Girl's Packing

Before the sun sets, travel through the forest and pick up the carriage after gathering supplies in the city. If we spend the night sleeping in the carriage, we will be able to make accommodations in the next town over..... , Percival points out their planned course on a spread out map.

On the other hand, Monette objected. Looking at the map, the distance between the two cities that Percival pointed to did not seem to be that far apart. Let alone riding a carriage, you should be able to walk between the city and town without night falling. Then they could stay overnight in a nice inn in an urban area and be refreshed and ready to leave for the town by morning.

Although she appealed so, Percival let out a large sigh and cast his eyes down onto the map.

“Monette, you better not believe that this will be just an ordinary trip.”

“.....Ha.”

“In the past year, when Prince Alexis gets on a carriage, the wheels will fall off, the doors will be blown away, and the horses will go on a rampage.”

Monette narrowed her eyes to Percival's words.

When she looked over at Alexis, his face looked worn down and his body was weighted with fatigue. Apparently even carriages couldn't escape the prince's curse of bad luck.

That's why he wants to depart before day's end. Besides, Alexis's body was small and, “An inn inside the city is.....” When he mutters that with such a serious voice, Monette could only shrug her shoulders inside her armor and give in.

And so I started my first time packing.

I have been living alone in this castle for a long time. I don't have much in my room. There are some rough characteristics that were here before I lived here, and a few things are scattered here and there.

A change of clothes, magic books, pen and parchment..... and while walking around, I judged whether something was necessary or not and packed it away in my trunk. If I bring a bunch of unnecessary things with me, I will have a hard time in the future having to repack everything..... Although I've never had to repack something before.

Even though packing isn't all that interesting, Percival was here for some reason watching the whole time.

Sometimes he would ask, "What's that?", and sometimes he would help me lift something heavy. Most of the time he would just silently gaze at me while thinking. And his eyes would follow me wherever I went in my room.

What do you want to do? Every time I look up to catch him, he turns away to look at a magic book with a strange expression and with wrinkles between his eyebrows. — — By the way, Alexis was fixing a chair. Well, it was uncertain if the man who was currently moaning after hitting his finger with a hammer could fix it in the first place — —

"Percival fix the chair, or please grab some bottles from the wine cellar that look like they could be expensive."

"Are you going to sell them?"

"They are funds for me so that I can have some wild merrymaking on this journey."

"I know. I won't rely on your money."

I decided to not reply to Percival's dismissive tone and instead moved my focus back onto the trunk.

I then restarted my packing because talking to Percival is boring, and I didn't really feel like chatting anyway. It will be fine if I just pick out a couple bottles from the wine cellar that look good. It's easier than bothering to ask for any help from him. If there is something that would be bothersome to drive away, it's better to just ignore it instead.

In other words, “If you have something to say, say it. I’m not gonna ask.” Currently, my interest was focused solely on the trunk.

While she was packing, Monette let out a small voice of surprise when she found a small drawing sticking out of the pages from a book.

The drawing was done completely in crayon. Two girls were drawn lined up together and holding hands. The lines were distorted, and the colors were unflattering. It was exactly the type of picture a child would draw.

As Monette looked at it, she narrowed her eyes inside her helmet... How nostalgic.

“Miss Monette, what is that?”

“It is a picture my sister and I drew when we were young.”

“Sister...”

Percival lightly tossed out the word, but he then tightly shut his lips as if that would prevent it from being heard. To that concern Monette could only close her eyes inside her helmet.

At the same time the figure of a young girl floated on the back of her eyelids. Her cute little sister, when she was young, her body was weak, and we spent a lot of time together in our summer resort. In that villa where there was nothing, both of us drew pictures all the time and talked about our dreams.

Eating sweets, drawing with crayons on paper, and playing with toy jewelry. It was just us sisters, putting on beautiful dresses while having ourselves a tea party.

“I want to be a glittering princess.”

The day when I had said those words went across my mind.

...and then I folded up the construction paper as if to scrape away that mental image. Of course I can’t put this in the trunk.

“Percival, if you are just going to stand there and watch, how about helping me instead?”

“Miss Monette.....”

“I want to leave early, so you could also get some sleep so that you don’t impede on my innocence.”

Monette interrupts Percival’s words, and his breath gets caught a little as he understands Monette’s meaning.

Since he noticed the complaint, “Do not touch me anymore,” that was included underneath her words, Monette let out a sigh of relief in her helmet..... And,

“Don’t be weird.”

I continued to move my tongue as if I hadn’t noticed the blaming glare Percival had started giving me.

“What’s wrong with saying something is weird when it is weird?”

“I just got a little sleepy.”

“Miss Monette, thank you. You really are such a kind girl. And what a cute kitty-cat. You really are good at drawing.”

“Stop it! Don’t repeat my words!”

If you recreate his weird behavior from last night, Percival will panic and stop.

Apparently his weirdness is embarrassing for him, and he cannot help but to boil up like a red tomato. Monette laughed in her helmet.

Then, once the sun had risen a little, I resumed packing, and I spread out the clothes I had on hand.

While it is a little simple, I look at a lovely white dress with a ribbon on the chest. I like the rough comfort of it, so I decided to take it. I folded it up and packed it into a corner of the trunk.

“What is that now?” were the words spoken at that moment. Looking at Percival, he had an expression that showed he was truly surprised by something.

“What is what?”

“Is that a one-piece dress?”

“I wear it in my room. Now go away. I don’t want you to watch me pack my clothes.”

Monette is glaring at the man who has no delicacy.

On the other hand, Percival was still stunned and muttered to himself, “Miss Monette?” His despicable face says that he honestly can’t believe it, and it frustrates Monette.

Why are you surprised so much just from me packing and filling my trunk with cute clothes?

“How rude. I’m sure even you put on clothes you enjoy when you’re in your own room.”

“No, well..... will they fit?”

“What are you asking? Are you trying to say that I’m fat?”

“That’s not it, you won’t be able to fit in your arms, shoulders, or even your head.....”

I see the color of puzzlement in Percival’s face and hear it in his voice as he continues to inquire, “Doesn’t it rip?” and “How do you wear it?” He is not being disdainful or combative; he was purely curious from the bottom of his heart.

Monette could not understand what Percival was trying to say in such a state, and she tilted her head with her helmet making a loud noise.

No matter what, you should understand without me explaining how someone puts on a simple one-piece.

His head is clearly overheating, and he threw his hands out to me for an explanation. Of course by taking of this full-body armor I am wearing.

.....Take off this armor.

“.....Because I will take it off when I am alone?”

“Take it off?”

“Because there is a person inside? The armor isn’t the main body.”

As I explained to him that if armor can be put on, it can be taken off, Percival just stares blankly at me for awhile.....

“Yosh, I will go pick out some wine.”

And he turned away and left. Did he just wave a white flag?

Monette’s eyes coldly stared daggers into his back as he left, but since it was through her helmet, it probably didn’t hit Percival..... No, maybe he could feel something on his back because it started to exude an uncomfortable and miserable feeling.

“...After all, why was that guy’s gaze following me?”

I tilted my head in wonder, but I decided to just go back to packing.

Chapter 10

Hopeless Departure

“I will leave the house for awhile Robertson, so please take care of everything while I am away.”

I inform Robertson of my departure while he is dancing along the ceiling within sight. It is as if he was saying, “Leave it to me!” is it not? Sigh, such friendship will only increase the sorrow of parting, but relief also springs in my heart once I think about how he will protect my castle. Above all, it is encouraging to have a spider who will wait for my return.

“I think that someone who will get lost in the forest will most likely wander in, but I wrote a note that says, ‘Do not kill the spider.’ Just in case, do not appear too much in front of other people.”

I promise you, Robertson.

He may be a spider, but Monette still cherishes his friendship. Eight long legs, short hair that covers his whole body and a richly growing plump stomach. He makes quite the impact. Most people scream and feel a sense of crisis without him even doing anything.

Especially Robertson’s fashionable friend who is apparently poisonous, so there are a lot of people who would try and exterminate him before he could bite them. It is fine if you just try to scare him away, but trying to kill him is just taking things too far.

I wrote a note, but I’m still anxious. That’s probably why, to appeal to me, Robertson who was drooping down the ceiling, quickly rose to the top.

It is the meaning of acknowledgment. He will be careful, and he wishes for me to do the same. This intention to return really makes me feel the sense of friendship, but the parting still saddens me.

But I must go.

Determined, Monette grabbed hold of the doorknob. She pushed open the door, took one final look behind her and said,

“Well then Robertson, be careful not to mate with a female spider...”

She called out, to finish her journey and return to find Robertson eaten..... to avoid tragedy.

The world of spiders is truly a terrible thing.

“What if Robertson’s friend is female?”

To Alexis’s question, Monette shook her head as if there was absolutely no possibility.

Inside the quiet woods, every step Monette takes in her armor creates a kashan kashan sound, and when Monette shakes her head, the sound of the armor scraping against itself overlaps.

“Robertson promised he wouldn’t bring in any spiders of the opposite sex.”

“Is that healthy?”

“It is too much if him being predated occurs right in front of me.”

“.....Ah, it’s a spider.”

To Alexis who nods to her point, Monette nods back.

Robertson is a friend. It could be said that he is my only friend.

However, it is a possibility that if he mates with a female, that female will become a predator. I know that it is a rule in a spider’s ecology, but if that sight is shown right in front of me, it will become a lifelong trauma. When I am already so weighed down by complexes that I have become an armor girl, what will I become after adding on such a trauma?

He should not be deceived by a bad female spider, but as I look back at the castle, I can’t help but feel anxious. Alexis, who is the cause of this journey, has begun to speak

apologetic words and tries to comfort me. Percival has not said a word since we departed while carrying with him some wine and the trunk.

Those who get dragged by the collar more than once, will most likely become divisive, thinking such a thing, I took out a piece of parchment from my pouch and wrote on it with my pen.

Of course it is to repel any beasts. I try to make this little kitty-cat's face look wild. Un. With this, other wild animals will stay away.

“Beasts should avoid us until we leave the woods.”

The parchment is gone, so I took a small peep into my pouch.

I brought along all the parchment I could find from the castle, but there is still a limit. The magic that I can cast isn't permanent in the first place. If the effect of the spell fades out, I would just draw another cute kitty-cat and reapply the spell.

For me, who was living in an old castle and usually never left, there was no need for something like a permanent spell of beast removal. I would be safe inside my stone walls. Even if the beast removal effect on that castle did wear off, it could be easily reapplied, and speaking of strong sustainable magic, my armor is lighter.

Even so it occasionally expires, and there is a case that someone might fall from the sudden heaviness of the armor in an old castle. – – In such a case, that person would just have to lie down in the armor, call for help, and Robertson would come rushing over with the reincantation. Ah, what a wonderful friendship –

Anyway, there is a limit in the number and the power of my spells.

Hearing that, Alexis nodded back with a serious look.

“If you have been suffering from this curse from a long time, then you should be able to survive somewhat even without the help of my spells, so please forget a little bad luck and do not ask for my help. For example, Alexis, isn't there a serpent currently biting your arm?”

“...I understand. It hurts, but I will endure it.”

“Prince, please shake it off like normal.”

“It’s okay Percival because this snake is not poisonous. It just hurts when it bites.”

“This isn’t a matter of whether it is poisonous or not.”

Sweeping away the snake from the Prince’s arm, Percival sighs.

Watching Alexis get bitten by another serpent while he rubs the area where the previous snake had bitten him, Monette suddenly remembered something.

“Beast removal only works on beasts, so please be careful as it doesn’t affect poisonous insects.”

“Do poisonous insects come out around here?”

“A traveler who stayed with me once before told me that there were poisonous moths, but well, I think we will be okay as this isn’t the right season for them.”

“...I see. Monette, are those moths large and pink?”

“Well, yes that’s right.”

“Thick, tactile yellow wings...”

“Why yes, Percival. Have you seen them before?”

“Right now actually. There are some on the Prince’s shoulders...”

While Percival can only mutter this out, fatigued as he is, I thoughtfully looked at Alexis.

Before I knew it, there were some puffy moths floating on Alexis’s shoulders.

In spite of this situation.....

“What fashionable shoulder pads!”

I shouted.

Needless to say that Alexis collapsed at that very moment, and the serpent who was biting his arm let go and ran away.

“Alexis has brown hair, so the colorful pink shines well.”

“What are you saying!?! Prince, are you alright?”

Percival rushed to Alexis’s side. Apparently Alexis has gone numb. He answers Percival with an, “It’s all right,” but his voice is trembling quite a bit, so I don’t think he’s all right at all. In reality, even though he could return words, he couldn’t move at all, even a twitch.

While watching the two play around and demonstrate what they meant when they said this journey would have, “many hurdles,” I sighed and chased away a new serpent which was about to come up and chew on Alexis’s hand.

It was not to help Alexis, of course.

“You will destroy your stomach if you chew on such a thing.”

It is a kindness to the serpent.

“Because insect poison lasts awhile, I hate it. On that point, it hurts when they bite, but reptiles are still better. The most annoying ones are fish. I cannot say anything positive about being poisoned from the inside.

“Sommelier?”

We are talking about poison while walking in the woods. Although Alexis is still numb from the poisonous moth and cannot walk, he is being carried by Percival.

“Sorry Percival. I must be heavy.”

“No, I do not mind. Even though the numbness remains, it seems that you are still fine. Nothing is more important.”

“It isn’t important. Mr. Snake, how about taking one more bite to see how it is.”

Here! As if it had heard and responded to Monette’s call, a serpent snapped up with a *pyon* and bit into Alexis’s arm.

A miserable scream escaped Alexis's lips, and Percival quickly swings Alexis away to try and get him away from the snake. Alexis screams even louder as this only worsens the numbness..... And Monette laughs inside her helmet at the unimaginable sight that is playing out before her eyes.

Chapter 11

Bread and Wine and Sister

Although Alexis was chewed on by three snakes and swarmed by more poisonous moths after the first two had flown away, the group still managed to reach the city somehow. Although it was exceedingly past the scheduled time, Monette was amazed to hear Alexis and Percival say things like, “We arrived earlier than I expected” and “I’m glad I arrived here alive.”

This urban area near the royal palace is crowded with people every day, and even when the sun has almost set, there are people constantly coming and going. Even though that should be the case, even though a few seconds ago you could clearly see people everywhere, chatting and laughing and running about, in an instant everything became silent. It was because the unfaithful prince had appeared.

The gazing eyes are severely cold, and even though all those frosty looks weren’t being directed at myself, I couldn’t help but grimace inside my helmet. All around people were whispering, and I could hear contempt towards the abusive Lord Alexis.

“It looks like Prince Alexis is quite hated. Serves you right.”

“Monette, could you perhaps choose your words a little more carefully?”

“It looks like everyone is absolutely disgusted by your very being, Prince. Serves you right.”¹

“Not the direction I meant.”

While Monette was laughing because of the easy-to-say verbal abuse, Alexis sighed pitifully, and Percival glared at the crowd. It could be said that Percival’s eyesight was much colder and sharper than the crowd could every hope to pull off. Are you wary of becoming too frustrated with your lord’s situation or...

However, after taking a deep breath and spitting out all the resentment inside of himself, he changed the topic. “I will arrange a horse-drawn carriage.”

“Let’s also buy some meals to take onto the carriage. Prince Alexis, as it could be dangerous, stay close to me.”

“Is this city dangerous...? What about Monette?”

“I will exchange this wine for money. The cold look I am getting from standing near you two is starting to affect me.”

With plenty of disgust, Monette decided on a meeting place for the horse-drawn carriage, and she started walking with a happy feeling and the loud rattle of her armor in her wake.

Then, proceeding about halfway down the road, she took a look back behind her. She watched Alexis and Percival turn to walk away, and she saw the people’s cold and somber gazes move to follow them accordingly. The sight of the city visible through her helm looking strangely more frigid even though it was the same scenery as before.

(Percival’s POV)

“Escorting Prince Alexis must be hard work.”

Percival narrowed his eyes slightly to the words that the shopkeeper said. He was glad that he had the Prince wait outside... While I agree, I think this shopkeep would have said this even if Prince Alexis was in the room.

To make matters worse, what does he mean when he says Prince like that? He wrinkled his eyebrows and clearly spoke the word with disdain. It was by my will that I decided to protect him, and I will proudly declare so. Right now, it’s about the only thing I can declare though.

“Other people are waiting, please wrap it up soon.”

I hesitate to use a hurrying voice, there would be no meaning in a store like this where they tend to gather wild horses.² I have learned many times over this past year that no matter how well you make your arguments or how desperately you make your pleas, people will not think twice about tearing out your heart.

“Do not make the story worse, even if you will be leaving the city soon,” I tell myself. I

received a paper bag with some bread in it, but i end up reacting to the words, “that poor girl.”

“That girl you were with, was that Miss Monette?”

“That’s right. Hiding their figure like that, it cannot be said that she’s not miserable. Because of her terrible appearance, so even the daughter of a distinguished family can become a pitiful person.”

“Terrible appearance...”

“Both the mother and sister are such beauties. God sure is cruel?”

To have such a difference in beauty between sisters, to the shopkeeper who was lamenting that with a color of sympathy in his voice, Percival stuck to him over the counter.

“Have you seen Miss Monette’s face!?”

“Eh, huh, face? Oh no. The other party is the daughter of the Idira family, you know? A bakery like this wouldn’t have seen her when she was young.”

The shopkeeper dumbly shook his head, overwhelmed by Percival’s momentum.

It is said that the second daughter of the Idira family has been weak since birth, and the sisters stayed in their summer resort for medical treatment. Once it was decided that the sister’s physical condition had improved enough, the older returned to the capital city. On the day that she returned though, she met her fiancée Prince Alexis for the first time who called her ugly, and the engagement was broken off.

Immediately thereafter, Monette started to conceal her face, and she withdrew to the old castle.

In other words, the only people who have seen her face are a very tight social circle. There are few people who saw Monette’s face, and those who did would only have a few vague memories. Besides, her sister is a beauty that you could not miss, so the surroundings would only remember her beauty while those vague memories would be immediately blown away.

“You’ve never seen Monette, but you say she is ugly?”

“Well that’s because she is always hiding her face so much, and those were the words from Prince Alexis. And the Idira family immediately changed the fiancée to the sister, so isn’t that proof enough?”

“I haven’t seen it.”

“Well, even if she is ugly, she is a gentle child.”

The shopkeeper placed out some fish as he was talking about it.

Percival gave a small sigh as he received it.....”I will take this too.” He then picked up the small bag off the counter.

(Monette POV)

Not knowing that such an interaction was taking place at the bakery, Monette had traded in her wine at the usual store.

When I whispered to them to not expect any more wine from the old castle for awhile, they asked me where I would be going. I told both clerk’s that I would be visiting another country, and the clerk’s expression became cloudy. It is easy to understand.

It was an expression somewhere between labor and worry. It was the exact opposite type of bright expression from when I talked to the prince a few years ago. I was proud of how tenderly I approached our first meeting too.

Too much..... I received the gold while remembering something that made me tremble. There was no sarcasm in their voices as they told me to “Be careful.” It makes me feel like they may actually think about me even if our relationship is only about the connection between wine and money.

“Armor girl.” Although it is a nickname that carries with it only irony and sarcasm, but these people do not hate the girl Monette specifically.

These people act as if they are talking to a full body of armor, and they buy wine from it. The conversations have an incongruity to them, but they are not like those who persecute me for my appearance. At least, they don’t hit me with a blatant cold glare when I walk in the door.

That is why I cannot understand Alexis's sudden change of character.

As Monette was deep in thought while walking down the street, she heard some lively footsteps coming close from behind her. Then,

“Sister Monette!”

Hearing a voice, she span around.

There was a beautiful girl with dark blue hair. She was wearing a beautiful dress that was shinier than anything else in town. Covered in glitter, a twinkling sound echoed in her mind.

Seeing the figure of such a girl, Monette stood alone, “Emilia...” and said her sister's name.

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1. The second time Monette says “Serves you right” she uses a more polite, womanly form of the verb, but it means the same thing.
 2. An idiom. He is essentially calling them all asses.

Chapter 12

Older and Younger Sister

Emilia Idira is the second daughter of the Idira family and the sister of Monette. She is also the fiancée of Alexis. Currently, with Alexis's evaluation falling, the voices are rising to have the second prince succeed, so it may be more apt to say that she is Alexis's fiancée for now.

She is an adorable girl who gives off a feeling of childishness and innocence with her jade color eyes and navy blue hair. Innocent and naive, yet she was so weak and fragile when we were young. No matter how hard you look, you would never find anyone with a grudge against Emilia.

Alexis who would be the perfect king and the innocent Emilia at his side..... Two years ago everyone was praising how well they suited each other and dreamed of the happy times in the kingdom's future.

“Emilia, why are you here?”

“When I heard that my sister was here, I ran as fast as I could. You normally visit the city in the early morning, and I can't see you.....”

Emilia shyly tells how she has trouble getting up in the morning. Before such an adorable appearance, Monette narrowed her eyes in her helmet.

Emilia is a kind child. Even when Monette concealed her face and cared for the fact, even when she wrapped her entire body with armor and retreated to the old castle, Emilia still persistently appealed. She always did everything she could to try and heal the wounds of Monette's heart.

However, Monette could not respond to this kindness from such a sister. Emilia, who realized that she was only putting more of a burden on her sister, forced herself to take a distance.

“Emilia, have you not fixed your habit of staying up late at night?”

“Oh yeah. I do a fortune every night, count sheep, and pray, and..... then it’s morning and I’m sleepy.”

Monette smiled at the embarrassed Emilia. If you were to tell Monette that people don’t change, then she would definitely believe it right now while hearing Emilia’s nostalgic words and seeing her smile.

Emilia was an adorable girl with a smile that just shined. Fine jewel hair ornaments shined along with her smile, and a fine dress with lots of gorgeous lace shook with her every time she moved. It was said that the second prince and his majesty tailored them specially after hearing the rumors about how Alexis treated her.

A breathtaking cloth dress special ordered from a foreign country and hair ornaments decorated with beautifully cut fine jewels. They were both set aside for only special parties, but when she heard that Monette was in the city, she immediately put them on.

When Monette heard that, she told Emilia that she was stretching a bit wearing such clothing to a downtown area, but Emilia returned that there was no more special event than her being able to see her sister.

That story, those clothes, Emilia was a picturesque sparkling princess. How vivid and adorable. Before such a dazzling light, Monette had to narrow her eyes inside her helmet, and she softly placed her hand on Emilia’s shoulder. The iron fingers hang on the expensive lace.

“Emilia, thank you for coming to see me, but I have to leave now. I will be gone for awhile, so you shouldn’t send me any letters.”

“But Oneesan.....”¹

Emilia’s voice was sorrowful, and I know in my heart what she is worried about. A pure girl, even when her older sister had become a lump of iron, she still always sent letters while not receiving any replies. She would always use pretty pink paper for her letters along with pressed flowers. From about a year ago, she sent one written on gold leaf paper, so beautiful it looked like a piece of artwork.

She had written how she would avoid the family because of the nostalgia it would bring about for the sister who had decided to live alone in an old castle. Emilia knew that if she was hurting from something like this, then all the letters she was sending

to her sister were probably doing the same. That's why, in order to not be a burden, she sent that one last letter to have a positive farewell.

The letter, once I read it, I could tell just how much you thought and agonized over it..... That's why I only read it once.

"Onesasan, please at least take this with you just in case..."

Emilia reached up to her neck, and she gently removed a necklace with a red stone she was wearing. The stone shined in the bright light, and the color tone changed depending on the angle. At times, it was dark enough to draw you in, and it was light enough to reflect your image off of it at others. You could see that the necklace was expensive just at a glance.

In the first place, Emilia was the royal fiancée and a daughter to the Idira family. It makes sense that her belongings would have a difference of three to four zeroes compared to that of the common citizen. At the very least, it certainly wasn't the toy accessories we played with when we were kids.

Surely a normal family could live a lifetime of luxury off of this one necklace. I thought about such a thing as I gazed at it. Perhaps it was because I have spent too much time in that old castle, but I immediately started wondering how many bottles of wine I'd have to sell to match the price of the necklace.

"I cannot accept such a thing."

"Please keep it as an amulet. I will always pray for Onesasan's safety."

"Emilia....."

Monette could only shrug her shoulders with a bitter smile. Good luck charms and prayers, Emilia had believed in such things since long ago. And embracing your dreams. She was born weak, and she tended to incline herself into the hope of chasing one's dreams.

And surely such prayers and good luck charms suit a sparkling princess. Even if I know I am from a witch's line, "I do not want to be a witch. I want to be a magical princess," I appealed such to myself, and it was enough to satisfy my childish prayers and dreams.

Nothing has changed from that time. No, it is not that I miss my favorite childish prayers, it is that my prayers have grown into a wish for a safe and stable life.

Thinking so with a small smile, Monette graciously took the necklace and put it in her pouch.

“Thank you, Emilia. I will treasure it.”

“I am not giving it to you. I am lending it out, so please return it properly...”

I just might end up being dazzled to death before my journey even starts, but I nodded my affirmation to Emilia because I don't think she'd ever let me go if I didn't.

Originally, I would immediately return to the old castle once this trip was over. There are no other places as cozy, I still have some magic books left there, and most importantly, Robertson is there. Of course, I will return this necklace neatly.

.....However, although it is not certain whether I really will return, I cannot tell a lie, so I just nod.

“Well then, I will go.”

“Sister Monette, please take care. If it seems possible, I don't mind even a single word, so please send a letter.”

I vaguely replied to Emilia who seemed to be unhappy and quickly walked away.

Emilia's gaze is focused squarely on my back... I can feel it through the armor, so i will not turn around. My pouch feels heavy. It seems I am dazzled by my own ineptitude.

As I headed to the meeting place, I noticed that Alexis and Percival were already there.

It was a good horse-drawn carriage. I wonder if it will be possible to leave immediately if this is the case, but as soon as I approach the carriage, the horse suddenly starts acting up. It starts whinnying with a loud voice and stamping the ground with its feet.

“...well, what is it?”

“Isn’t it because you look heavy, so it doesn’t want to take you?”

To the Percival who can carelessly talk about the weight of a lady, Monette gave a cold glare. Of course she knew he meant her armor when he said, “heavy.”

However, this armor is under the effect of lightening magic, and it actually weighs the same as a feather contrary to its appearance. The only weight there was to be had was the original weight of Monette. If it is a horse that is used to carrying packs on its back, should it not be able to carry a light girl such as Monette?

As she appealed so, Alexis and Percival actually looked impressed, and the rampaging horse calmed down with one last snort from its nostrils. Apparently it seemed convinced, but Monette went ahead to stroke its back to show there were no hard feelings.

“I am terribly sorry. I will make an inspection to ensure that nothing was broken during the horse’s rampage, and loading will be finished after I have confirmed that everything is in order.”

To the employee who apologized for the delayed departure, Percival and Alexis both lightly nodded while Monette said,

“I guess we will never be safe as long as we have a bad luck fellow.”

And shot a blow to Alexis. It is a stance where she will needle him as much as possible.

Alexis unexpectedly sighed to such a Monette, and Percival slowly pulled out a small bag from within his traveler’s bag.

It was shaken in front of me, and my armor rattles about as I tilt my head to the side. It was a cute pink bag tied off with a simple white ribbon. It was a bag that was usually used for small sugar confections, and it looked really out of place in the hand of Percival, who is apparently a knight.

“What is that?”

“It’s a sweet. I bought it for you.”

“Why?”

“.....that is.”

Percival doesn't say “to eat.”

His expression twists about instead. He would occasionally make that expression while I was packing in the old castle, and he would mumble some things to himself. If you ask for something to remove the numbness, you will notice that it is gone when there is nothing.²

I observed him and the sweets alternately before fixing my gaze on him through my helmet, and

“I do not need it.”

clearly telling him my refusal.

“I intend to make you both buy various things for me. That is my selfishness, my malice. Receiving a gift from you is nothing more than a bad joke.”

Spitting that out to them, Monette turned away and quickly got into the carriage.

The men could not find the motivation to say anything back. Not Alexis who stared after me with a gloomy expression, nor Percival who could only silently put the confection bag back into his traveler's bag. Gazing at each other, they both felt their moods get even worse, so they both sighed and stared off into the day after tomorrow.

The appearance of Emilia wearing that gorgeous dress crosses my mind. As you can see, the people watching us from the shadows are annoying.

My pouch is heavy.

Then the horse-drawn carriage started off, and they began making plans for the future.

While carrying a somewhat daunting air around it, the horse-drawn carriage swayed, the surroundings gradually darkened, and Monette decided to sleep as there was nothing to see in the world that spread out outside her window.

1. I'm avoiding using Oneesan just because it would look a little weird to suddenly put in some Japanese words when I don't use any other honorifics or words or lingo anywhere else, but since Oneesan is being used as a name, I ended up giving in. So sorry if any of this feels awkward.

2. First of all, this idiom took me way too long to translate. I just didn't get what she meant and assumed I was reading it wrong. But yeah, the idiom is pretty much saying that you can't fix a relationship when there is no relationship there.

Chapter 13

The Escort Knight's Madness in a Coach at Midnight

I dreamed about a long time ago.

Emilia and I were together, and I rest my head on my mother's knees and lay on my bed. My mother's thin and supple fingers would comb through my hair, and she would sometimes mischievously pinch my nose. Feeling comfortable and a little sleepy, I would talk to Emilia and her about my dream.

I would like to wear such beautiful dresses, I want to wear bright and colorful jewelry..... The dream of a young child is infinite, and talking to mother was never exhausting.

How nostalgic it is. It is such a long time ago.

I wonder why I'm remembering something like that right now?

Why..... ,

In this situation where an adult male's hard knee is being used as a pillow, and a brave hand is stroking a helmet, why have such soft and brilliant memories been interrupted?

".....Percival, if you are sleepy, please go to sleep first instead of saying, "We are both tired from earlier."

"Monette. Sorry, did I wake you up?"

"I was having a good dream and it's annoying..... Stop! Do not hit me with the *ponpon*! In this situation you can bare with being sleepy!"

Shaking off the hands of Percival who was taunting her as if she was a child, Monette got up in a panic. Even when I glare at him, he still softly laughs. On the contrary, he taps his knees as if to say, "come back over." It is very infuriating.

Not only that, but when I did not respond to his invitations, he spread his arms out and slowly approached. This is bad..... I can't retreat. There is nowhere for me to escape in this carriage. In other words, it was easy for him to embrace me.¹

Thanks to the armor, there is no tension unless it is painful, and naturally my heart isn't beating fast. It is just a bad touch.

"Oh, please return to sanity soon."

"Miss Monette, you are such a kind and nice child. Thank you for coming with us on this journey."

"Then do not disturb that good child's sleep."

"If you cannot sleep, I will sing you a lullaby."

To Percival's proposal, Monette stopped joking, and she seriously started to rampage in his arms. I will definitely be given a nightmare if I am forced to sleep on his knee while listening to him try and sing a lullaby. I don't even feel like sleeping in the first place.

However, in response to my blatant refusal, Percival did not show any comprehension, and he kept saying things like, "thank you," and "you are so kind and gentle." At the end, he started stroking my head saying, "you were so nice to stay." The expression and choice were quite gentle, but for me it only caused chills and discomfort.

How annoying.

If I were to lose my temper here and curse him, that may be a bit excessive of a punishment. It might be enough to just learn from this experience and insist that we change the guards a few more times during the night. Then again, it is bad to interrupt someone's sleep. As I thought, there is no other option.

Monette moved her arms about to grab a curse paper. Then while she was targeting her spell and about to activate it..... ,

"Miss Monette, sorry."

When he started whispering in a voice like that, I reflexively swallowed my words.

“I’m sorry, Monette... involving you in such a thing...”

“.....Percival.”

“There is no one else we can rely on other than you anymore... I cannot help it, I do not know the reason...”

Percival’s words only came out in fragments, and he was hugging me so tightly that I couldn’t see his face. Although it wasn’t painful, I could understand that the hold around my armor was still quite powerful. And the fact that his arms were trembling could also be faintly felt.

“Prince Alexis is an unfaithful scoundrel. Why everyone is saying that, why everyone believes it so easily.....”

“Why is that.....”

After all, Monette couldn’t answer him.

Alexis is cursed. In fact, I confirmed that he was cursed, and because of this curse, he has continued to suffer unhappily while the evaluation of him has plummeted.

Failure, rumors, and mistakes all piled together to make a bad reputation. The vassals abandoned him one after another, and the people’s hearts turned cold toward him. Now his reputation has plummeted to the ground, so if he were to venture out alone into the city he would be beaten behind closed doors while accompanying voices would jeer him.

That is why I wonder. Why did the surroundings change their minds as if this was all arranged? Because Alexis was once adored as a good prince, the people changing their attitudes so fast like this is just too unnatural.

Especially since his bad luck is so ridiculous. To the constant unhappy misfortunes that riddle Alexis, originally people should have tried to help him, make accommodations for him, or at least pity him. Even if the rumors were to run rampant, with no solid proof to any of them, it should have been split into those people who would believe them, but there should also be people who have suspicions and just write those rumors off.

Even so, the ministers and the public all changed their evaluations of him. They

jumped right to the side of despising him.

.....Until only Percival was left. Only he was left behind.

“Even His Majesty doubted Prince Alexis. I almost can’t believe what I’m saying. It’s almost funny. I feel like I’ve been thrown into another world. I do not know who to trust; anyone could be an enemy. Miss Monette, I am scared that I won’t be able to bear it.....”

“Percival.....”

“I pulled you out of the old castle and got you caught up in all this. You do not need to forgive, and you can even kill me with a curse at the end of everything. Just please, please, kill me in the precious original world.....”

That’s what I was told in a pained voice while being hugged, and all I can do is sigh while still trying to wiggle free.

I know what he is saying. The surrounding attitude towards Alexis seen in the city area is too direct, and it would normally be unthinkable to a member of the royalty. It seems as if all the people surrounding Alexis changed overnight. Even to me who had a grudge against him from the very beginning think it’s too strange.

Is this a curse? But then what does the curse actually do?

Who, why, when, and how was the curse done?

“Percival, I cannot investigate with my magic. Anyway, let’s go see the witch in the neighboring country. I also have something I want to confirm.”

“Miss Monette, sorry. Let me bear the hardships. I.....”

“Percival?”

“.....”

I suddenly felt something wrong with the stupidly persistent Percival, so I pushed him away to escape his arms and get a look at his face. He was speaking with a tone as if he was about to cry earlier, but now he was averting his eyes. Gradually releasing his arms from around me, he took a step away, and rested one of his arms overtop the

window while looking out. Then, in a calm voice,

“The moon is beautiful tonight.”

he muttered. Incidentally, dark clouds were covering the sky tonight. Since it was raining before, the wind was humid and sticky.

Monette sighed in relief as Percival had finally returned to normal. Wise man time start.

“The switch is sudden huh.”

“.....It’s a wave. It’ll normally pass after 15 minutes.”

“You won’t say you don’t remember saying, ‘You do not need to forgive, and you can even kill me with a curse at the end of everything,’ right?”

“Kuh, you’re remembering unnecessary words again.”

What a memorable iron mass! While Percival was clearly upset and glaring at me, I just stuck my tongue out to him underneath my helm. Of course he should not be able to see it because there is some iron in the way, but the second I stuck my tongue out, his brows clearly twitched. Good intuition as usual.

But in this situation you should know that you have dug your own grave. I have full ability to mock him here, and he cannot return any insults or complaints. While I remember his words, he makes an expression that clearly shows he knows his own position and is very uncomfortable.

This is a winning opportunity!

A bell to begin open warfare sounded off in Monette’s brain. Normally this guy is hateful and annoying, but when he is sleepy, he leaves himself open for a counterattack. Although I have a stance of torturing Alexis whenever I can, if the opportunity presents itself, I’m sure I can spare some time for Percival as well.

“Percival, I am going to go back to sleep again, so please sit down.”

“Hurry up and go to sleep.”

“Then please give me a lap pillow.”

“I will tell you that, your helm was really heavy. You should review that lightening magic of yours.”

“Where is my lullaby?”

“Who will sing!?! Just forget about all of it!”

Percival does a good job of yelling while whispering. Being careful to not wake Alexis, he has been whispering this whole time, but I don't really care and end up laughing inside my helmet.

I fully enjoyed his reaction. Is this just another good dream I am seeing? As I think so, in the end,

“Because I am a good and kind child, I will forget everything for a sweet cake.”

I told him a lie.

Percival's blue eyes became slightly rounded, and I suddenly feel a little guilty for not really meaning it.

He looked at me as if there was a celebration going on in his heart — — confetti is flying, a banner is shaking overhead with the words ‘One Point!’ — — I slowly closed my eyes. Thoughts can whirl around in various ways, so let's just sleep for now I tell myself.

.....Just before falling asleep, I say one last word at the end.

“Please let me sleep for thirty extra minutes since you disturbed my sleep.”

And then I went back to sleep.

Incidentally, Percival gave me an extra hour before the change of shifts.

1. I just want to point out one thing. Each character has their own little flaw. Alexis is unlucky and Monette doesn't want to show off. Funny and understandable. Meanwhile Percival's thing is that he is really creepy when he is tired. Like, pull out the taser and pepper spray creepy.

Chapter 14

Trilemma in a Carriage

Relying on the light from my hand, I draw up a spell, and when I am finished, I read a book.

I originally lived alone in the castle. Changing my environment to a carriage doesn't make my time move any differently nor does it leave any discomfort. Naturally, I do not feel lonely. I actually feel rather comfortable.

But it is troublesome to constantly drive away the poisonous moths that keep flying in on a regular basis.

"What a fashionable lizard in the window....."

"Good evening, I am poisonous!" or at least that is what the colorful lizard seemed to be saying as it stuck to the window. I breathed out a sigh before lightly tapping the window to let the lizard know to go home. I then sat back down to try and read some more of my book..... before I had to drive away a swarm of poisonous moths that had come to the window. How many is that now? Between the moths, the lizards, and the frogs and all the other various creature that were trying to get inside this carriage. Of course, every single one of them was quite fashionable.

And I have to drive them all away. It was easy work the first time, but it gets annoying having to do it repeatedly throughout the night. All this effort isn't to protect Alexis's sleep by the way. It is to protect Percival's. I would really like to be spared of having to deal with him when he is tired again.

"But as a result, I end up protecting Alexis. It's really really annoying."

While muttering so, I take out a sugar confection and throw it into my mouth.

A faint aroma and gentle sweetness spread as the confection melts in my mouth. It is delicious, but when I think about how I obtained this sweet by threatening and blackmailing Percival for his previous episode, it only gets even tastier.

Then while enjoying the sugary goodness of the confection, and periodically purging the poisonous moths and lizards, I killed time by reading my book. It was a history book describing the witch hunts. It is filled with a lot of bloody descriptive words, and it is a very frustrating thing to read when just killing time.

I am capable of reading these types of things by myself. Even if it is dark.

Do not tell me that there are some dangerous noises coming from the darkness; reading in this type of atmosphere can be fun and exciting. I also realize that darkness is producing what some would call scary noises.

“Is it possible to borrow books from witches?”

The thought suddenly struck me.

Books related to witches and their magic are only owned by the witch themselves, and they are passed down in their family generation after generation. They are not something you can pick up from a bookstore. The Idira family magic books that I own are ones that I picked up from the old castle, and I have spent a lot of time in the old castle reading them.

What I am trying to say is that I am getting sick of rereading them.

I know that it is necessary to read something three times to truly acquire the knowledge, but I still want to read some new magic books. Surely the witch from Phosphorous Country has a magic book that I have not seen. Or maybe they will have another book about the witch hunts.

Would they be willing to lend it to me, or is it something where I would have to trade with them? Unfortunately, I do not have any witches as friends who could answer these questions for me. Then again, I don't have any ordinary friends either. Robertson is a very good spider friend, but that isn't an achievement I can necessarily pin to my chest.

While I was thinking about such a thing, the horse-drawn carriage rocked and came to a stop with a *gattan*. The colorless water in the cup that I was holding swayed, and the necklace near it swung forward hitting the cup and producing a lighter sound. In order to find out exactly what was going on, I stuck my head through the window to talk to the driver.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry. The wheels have gotten stuck in some mud. We will be on our way again just as soon as I free it.”

“Can I help?”

“There’s no need.”

Telling me to wait, the driver took out some tools and boards, and he got to work on one of the wheels. His movements were deft and fast, so I withdrew my face as an amateur’s assistance were clearly unnecessary.

Opening the door and looking at the ground, I saw that the ground was indeed quite muddy, and there were puddles of water dotting the road here and there. According to the driver, it had apparently been raining for several days in this area previously. It’s only natural that a wheel would get stuck on a road like this. How unlucky.

While looking up at the cloudy night sky and sighing, a frog slipped in through a crack of the open door. As if it was pursuing it, a snake slithered in afterwards.

“If you do not leave the carriage before we depart, we will end up taking you far away from your homes.”

Chatting with the two, I shoo’ed them back out of the carriage away from Alexis..... and my eyes went round in my helmet. Whether it slipped in unintentionally without me noticing or there was a gap in the carriage’s roof and it fell down, there was a rather large slug resting on Alexis’s face. It was quite obese, and it was squirming over Alexis’s face. While I was looking at it, the snake came back in and gathered on him as well. There was a triangle relationship of predators right there, and the three did their best to eat each other.

Alexis awoke with a start when he felt them moving across his body, and his breathing was heavy and muddled. While listening to such groaning, I sat back and watched. It was about time for a shift change anyway.

“How..... why, why are these things on my face...?”

“Oh good, you’re up. It’s Alexis’s turn to watch. I’m going to bed, so don’t slack off.”

“Wait, don’t act like this is normal..... Oh god, I’m so slimy.....”

Looking completely creeped out, Alexis tried to sweep away the three animals while groaning..... and as a result of that movement, the three quit fighting each other and moved around to find cover from this new assault.

“Uwaaaa, stop..... quit sticking to me!”

“They’re just sticky overall, aren’t they? Yosh, there! Go!”

“Monette, don’t encourage them!”

Alexis struggled to get rid of the three animals while keeping his voice down. Like this, can it be said that this was anything besides comical and hilarious?

This was a good way to kill time while the carriage is stuck. But while I was watching this, Alexis eventually screamed out in frustration, and the sleeping Percival grunted in a small voice.

As soon as she heard it, Monette panicked and started calling off the three.

“Desist, desist! Because an annoying person seems to be getting up, desist!”

Waving her arms and head, Monette removed the battling three back into the mud.

It would be dangerous if Percival woke up now. The snake and the frog and the snail fighting, Percival struggling to drive them away, Monette is made to rest her head on Percival’s lap, and Percival’s lullaby echoing in the carriage..... it can only be called chaos. It would be hell.

Imagining such a scene, I wipe the cold sweat from my brow. Well, it can’t be done. My iron glove just scrapes across my helmet. Then I turned my gaze back to Alexis. He was wiping some of the slime off his face with a towel when he noticed my gaze and turned back to me.

“Monette, why is the carriage stopped.”

“The wheels have been caught in some mud, but they are likely to get it fixed soon.”

“Is that so? Were there any other problems?”

“If you mean were there any problems for us, then there was nothing. However, if you mean there were no problems among us, I will say that there was.”

“What do you mean?”

“Someone got sleepy.”

“Ah...”

That’s right. Alexis turned his eyes towards Percival.

Although he had stirred earlier, he seems to have settled back down, and he does not notice the gaze set upon him. Folding my arms and shrugging while leaning against the window, I do not bring up the words said before. He is an annoying person, I mutter in my heart, but I will not tell Alexis those words. Because Monette is a gentle and kind child who promised to forget the words said several hours ago.

“He is very annoying when he is sleepy. Has he always been like that?”

Clinging to people when you are sleepy, cuddling up to them and randomly stroking them, it could become a major problem. It would become an incident if the victim was a woman not wearing armor. – No, it is a problem even if she is wearing armor. –

Alexis shrugged his shoulders and answered Monette’s question.

So far, Percival has lived in a knight dormitory full of men, so the damage from his sleepy escapades has only affected his male colleagues. It seems that at those times, he was beaten or thrown into the bath. Talking about it, at the end Alexis mutters that, “it started about a year ago.” If it is like this, then it is around when Alexis’s bad luck began. It must be to eliminate the peace of mind that would be generated if they slept in the same room, or so Alexis says.

Listening to such a story, Monette sighed in her helmet and turned her eyes to Percival as well. In the time where it was impossible to rest or where it was so boring that you’d naturally get sleepy, why is this only happening now? The reason is simple, because I used a spell to limit the effects of the curse. I enjoy watching Alexis suffer when the curse is in play, but that means I have to deal with Percival when he is annoying and troublesome.

How unreasonable. I don’t want to think about it anymore, so I just say, “I will go to

bed,” and I lie down on my spot.

Then inside of the carriage quiets down.

Once the whole carriage shook with a start, the driver called in to announce its departure, and it took off once again. Fine vibrations and the sound of the wheels turning continue. Everything is rattling slightly, and the water in my cup is churning about. The necklace that was next to me is now in my hand... inside the gauntlet. If it was a flesh and blood hand, I'd probably think that the necklace was cold, but I could not tell through the iron. Grasping the necklace gently enough so as to not scratch it, I tried to close my eyes inside my helmet.

“It’s kind of hot and humid..... Monette, I am going to have a drink of your water.”

“Wait, Alexis, that’s...”

I got up from my rest and tried to stop him.

But I didn’t make it in time. When he took a drink, Alexis’s face scrunched up, and his face turned pale in the blink of an eye. In a panic, he threw open the window, stuck out his head, and spewed the water out in a coughing fit.

Chapter 15

Armored Girl and Cursed Prince

“Monette, did you assume I would drink this water after getting attacked by those three?”

“That is no longer in the realm of just being a witch if I did.”

Taken back by Monette’s answer, Alexis made a bitter smile and muttered, “I suppose so.” Of course now, Alexis was supposed to run with a joke beginning with, “That water is...” but like a first time daikon radish actor, he let it die. I made my complaints known through the glare I gave him.

Still, it was him who drank the water without permission, but I was the one who made the water unpleasant. Although it would not have tasted unpleasant if anyone other than him had drank it. I decided to take some pity on him and gave him a sugar confection to roll around and melt in his mouth. A sigh of relief passed through his lips.

“Sorry Monette, I have prevented you from resting.”

“It’s fine. I can just go to sleep now. I’ve also prepared a spell to repress the effects of your curse.”

“I rely on Monette for just about everything..... Sorry.”

To Alexis who started muttering some things on his own, Monette did not respond and lied back down.

It is a fact that he is inconveniencing me. He dragged me out of the old castle, and now he is taking me to a different country. Annoying would be the perfect word to use here. But Alexis’s mumbling is falling hard, and I can’t understand what he is saying. However, I don’t feel like saying something like good night or acting friendly, so I’ll just drift off in silence.

The sounds of the carriage’s rattling and creaking wheels along with Alexis’s

occasional mutterings of “Sorry,” did not make a good lullaby. The driver is just being a driver, but the Lord is bringing down the mood. Thinking so, Monette picked herself up a little bit to appease the Alexis drowning in guilt.

“Sorry Monette, I don’t remember what you look like.”

My voice caught in my throat, and my short breaths trembled a little in my helmet.

Alexis hid his face behind his hands. For someone who was taller than me, he sure did look small right now.

“...You don’t remember?”

“Aah, I can’t remember. I said such terrible things, and I can’t even remember the reason...”

“Well, it was the first time we ever met. The only time we ever met. Only that moment...”

“So it can’t be helped.” I try to say something like that, but the only thing that came out was my own gasping breath. My throat is trembling, my voice won’t come out, and I don’t know if I’m just having trouble breathing or about to vomit. What sounds I could make were bruised and inaudible, and a strange pressure was building up on my chest.

Alexis does not remember my face. He does not remember the intentions behind that word. Seriously, does he really not remember?

But if so... then, why did I become such a pathetic armor girl? I hid my face and my entire figure, I was afraid of anybody even learning what the tips of my nails looked like.

Thinking about such things, Monette’s heartbeat sped up rapidly and her breathing became shallow. A damp wind was blowing through the armor, and her muddled clothes stuck close to her body. The young voice of so long ago echoed in her head, and that scene began playing in front of her.

Unlike the Alexis whose voice was trembling when he admitted that he couldn’t remember, Monette recalled every detail of that moment. Of course, that included his appearance as those cruel words passed across his lips. Even now, she clearly remembered the sight of her kind parents giving away her sister Emilia as she wailed

in her bedroom.

Her breathing turned into gasping and a bad sweat was gluing her skin to the inside of her helmet.

“.....Monette..... Monette!”

When someone forcefully grabbed her shoulders, Monette returned to her senses.

Deep brown eyes were staring at her. Alexis has grown much since that time, but the color of his hair and eyes have not changed since then. Somehow a remnant remains. His lips slowly part the same way as that time.....”

“Monette, sorry.”

He apologized with a pained voice and slowly let go of Monette.

“I’m sorry to have reminded you of something unpleasant.”

“Alexis...”

“It was wrong, and I won’t do it anymore. Please rest up.”

Trying to be as soothing as he could, Alexis pushed on my shoulders. I guess he was urging me to lie down. Seeing as there was no reason to resist, I took a deep breathe in my helmet. The sound of the creaking wheel continued with a constant rhythm, but it helped my heart return to normal. Soon the dark and uncomfortable emotions inside me gave way to an uncomfortable drowsiness.

I probably won’t have any good dreams... as I thought that, I slowly closed my eyes, and Alexis’s appearance remained in my narrowing vision until the end.

A few hours later.

“Monette, you are a good child. Sleeping soundly is good.”

“Uwaa, she’s going to be angry...”

Such a 'conversation' was being exchanged inside the carriage.

As a matter of fact, Percival was sleepy. Poor Monette, woke up with her head in his lap and him petting her helmet again. This time, though, there was something intermixed in. Was this a lullaby? How annoying.

When Monette turned to Alexis, he was looking really apologetic..... although it was a different from the painful sorry from before, this one also made her extremely tired.

"From that heavy air, why is this situation... wasn't this guy sleeping the entire time?"

"Yeah, but he was leaning his head against a window when he fell asleep..."

"So?"

"The whole carriage shook a little while ago, and his head hit the window waking him up."

According to Alexis, the shake of the horse-drawn carriage's shaking made Percival 'Awesome!' when it slammed his head into the window. Then slowly looking around, his gaze fell on the sleeping Monette, and he gradually brought her helmet to his lap.

He began to stroke... and.

Listening to such a story, Monette took a heavy breath and shook off the hand that was still stroking her helmet. Still, Percival gently laughed, and he tried to catch the Monette who was trying to escape.

"I'm sorry I couldn't do anything to help you Monette, but Percival should be back to normal in about five minutes."

"Five minutes..... ah, doesn't that mean I've been like that for ten minutes already?"

It's hopeless..... and Monette began to mourn.

However, I cannot keep mocking myself here. Any moment now Percival will extend his arms to hug me. I must avoid it by slapping away his arms. I do not have time to mourn in between.

"Is there a way to knock him out of it?"

“If there is, I don’t know it.”

When Alexis responded with a bitter smile, Monette became slightly disappointed, dropped her guard, and was immediately captured by Percival’s arms. As expected of the Prince’s escort, the speed of his blows when shown a gap was truly instantaneous, and it was impossible for a girl to dodge, even if she is a witch.

I was careless. I was strongly hugged into his chest, and his big hand gently stroked my helmet.

At the end of such a battle, when the horse-drawn carriage calmed down after Percival returned to his senses, the sky outside the window had already started to brighten up. Alexis sits off on his own and admires the beauty of the rising sun. Then he gazed at Monette who had gone back to sleep, and he was relieved that she was no longer groaning or making any bitter sounds while she slept. There was a small voice that was leaked occasionally, and sleeping gradually continued.

She was peaceful, and that’s good for now.

Even if there was nothing good for himself.

Chapter 16

The Case of the Prince's Curse and the Inn 1

We took a few hours of rest to eat breakfast and lunch before the carriage began to shake again, and we managed to make it to the next town before the sun went down. Looking at the situation out through the window, you could see a dense crowd of people jumbled about.

On the way, there were many small incidents that we had to deal with such as more fashionable moths coming in, fashionable frogs crawling in, the horses falling in love at first sight and toppling the carriage over as they chased down their loves—nothing unexpected at least.

While thinking about such things, the carriage lurched forward before coming to a complete stop. The driver called into the carriage letting us know that we had arrived before opening the door for us.

Percival and Alexis grabbed some information about the city while paying for the fare while I stretched out my aching limbs. I'm not sure if that noise is the sound of my armor scratching against itself or the scream of my body having finally gotten off of the carriage after a long time.

Then, while continuing to give my body the movement it so desperately craved, I made sure to caress the nose of the horse that had brought us this far. I felt that the horse's eyes shined a little speaking to me about its new lot on life with love. It was a way of life unsuited to me.

"First we will find some accommodations, have dinner, and we will head back out tomorrow morning with a new carriage..."

With a map of the city in one hand, Percival started going over the plans for the day.

Listening to it, Monette felt her mood start to brighten up. The word "inn" that escaped her lips sound like a sweet melody to her as it echoed inside her helmet.¹

She had been looking forward to this all day. It will be the best inn in the city. Unlike

the narrow carriage, she could stretch out her limbs on top of the bed. There will be male and female bedrooms, so the deceitful Percival's annoying illness would not bother her. And most importantly, she could remove her armor. To this, especially, Monette felt a smile break out underneath her helmet.

"Then let's quickly go to the inn! I will be taking the best room!"

Practically pushing the two men forward, Alexis had no room to complain, and Percival only knitted his brows as he took a peek into his wallet.

How does it feel?

At the counter of the inn they chose, Percival seemed a little reluctant.

"Two rooms please. Make one of them your best room."

I beg you.

On the other hand, Monette felt better than ever, and her mood only got better when she interrupted Percival with the words, "On the top floor!"

This is a three story inn. Besides the counter and dining room, there is nothing on the first floor, so the top floor might not mean anything with this inn. But there is a principle here that she would not compromise on. And she would be lying if she said that watching the crease in Percival's eyebrows deepen didn't bring her some delight.

Monette then pulled out a menu for room service out off of the counter, and she began to flip through it. This was of course to show off. On the first day of their trip, she was made to sleep in a carriage, and she was forced to have Percival give her a lap pillow. It's about time these two learn what happens when they bring along a witch.

"...On the top floor?"

"Yes. The best room on the top floor. With room service as well."

"Alright. Just to let you know, the top floor of this building is slightly tilted, so be careful."

"As long as it's not on the roof."

To all the grief Percival had given her the past two days, she would return it all at once. She picked out some midnight snacks immediately and asked the lady at the counter to have them delivered to her later.

In this case, she noticed all the people near the reception counter staring at her. The sight of someone in full body armor ordering such things would be unusual. Plus, this town is only a day away from the capitol. Surely the story of, “a pathetic armor girl who was thrown away by the prince after being called ugly” had reached this place. She didn’t really mind them staring, but with their gazes fixed on her for too long, she starts to get a bad feeling and a cold sweat begins to break out.

Even though I am covered in iron, I still get the feeling that they’re looking at me and something ugly is being reflected in their sight. What is that something? I do not know. It’s because I don’t understand that I became like this.

“...Monette, is there something wrong? Are you alright?”

When Alexis called out to her, Monette came back to herself. His deep, teardrop-like eyes were staring into her... well, they were trying to, but because of the iron helm, they were slightly off. From here, she could see Alexis’s eyes, but he could not see hers. No matter how much he looked, iron and magic would block his view.

As she thought so, Monette felt a wave of relief wash over her, and she took a look around her at the surrounding people. She heard someone whisper, “armor girl,” but nobody could see her. Yes, she just kept telling herself that.

“Monette, if you don’t mind, could you prepare one of your curse avoidance spells?”

“Are you going to avoid your curse?”

“Yes, I will be staying in my room the whole time.”

I have also read more adult books. The Alexis is showing a strong front, but his eyes are clearly looking for an escape route. I do not even have to imagine why. Just as I am exposed to gazes and rumors as the so-called “Armored Girl,” he is exposed to disdain as the “Prince of Infidelity.” Him staying in his room the whole time would most certainly be the correct choice.

Thinking so, I took out a pen and a piece of parchment from my pouch and started to draw a cute kitty-cat.² This time I drew a cute hachiware kitty-cat that was sticking it’s

tongue out. How adorable.

“Please make do with this. It will only last you through the night, so do your best until the effect expires.”

“Thank you Monette, but did you have to go to all that bother to draw up some poor animal have its head split open?”

“It’s a cute kitty-cat!”

Impolite! I wanted to appeal, but Alexis was already being guided by the hotel staff and left with a bitter smile. You could tell just by looking at him that he was anxious, and when he looked back and said, “I will spend the whole time in my room, so please do some shopping for me,” he looked quite pitiful.

Surely, if I was accompanied by constant misfortune I would not like to go shopping either. To such a thought, all I can do is shrug my shoulders and wave to Percival as I made my way out of the inn to buy some more parchment and ink. I decided to ignore Percival muttering, “clione?” when he saw my spell this time.

Along with the parchment and ink, I take a look at the carriages lining the street. Although I don’t have the courage to browse through stores while wearing a full body suit of armor, I can still get an idea about what they sell by taking a look at the wagons they have. In the end, I bought myself some pink nail polish and returned to the inn when the sun had begun to set and the street lights were lit.

I took a meal in the dining room of the hotel.

Apparently there were some seasonal travelers going through town as the dining room was quite crowded. The quiet whispers of the local villagers could barely be heard amongst the backdrop of drunken laughter and merriment. It was my first time eating in a place like this..... I don’t usually eat with other people in the first place actually. I was pretty anxious at first, but I started to feel better after a little bit.

After finishing my meal, I thought about returning to my room early in preparation for tomorrow..... but I decided to go to Percival and Alexis’s room instead. Of course it was to see in what ways Alexis’s bad luck had tortured him.

“...You shouldn’t just visit a man’s room like this Miss Monette. Do you want to follow us there to laugh at the Prince’s bad luck?”

“That’s 90 percent of the reason, but I also want to adjust the spell I gave him.”

To enhance the curse avoidance effect—if I say something like that, then Alexis and Percival have no choice but to let me inside. They’ll listen to just about whatever I say if it means that they will get a good night’s sleep.

Understanding that whatever I want would be better than the curse, Alexis let out a small breath and nodded to let me come. He was clearly fatigued, and there was a small abrasion on his forehead. The curse avoidance that I gave him seems to have worn off faster than expected. I wonder if he fell off a chair or something.

“Well without Monette’s spell things would have been much worse. All right. Have your fun, Monette.”

“...Prince Alexis.”

“I am already accustomed to the bad luck of an inn.”

So laugh hard, is what he’s saying right? Alexis walked back towards his room. His back still looked anxious, and Percival was left staring after him. I think the saying goes you add and divide by two.³ If that were to happen, I am worried about what Percival would do with all his pent up energy.

“Because the Prince says it’s okay, you can come in, but if you are only here to enjoy his misfortune, return to your room. In addition...”

“I know, don’t poke the curse. I will make a spell that will block the curse throughout the night.”

“It’s a deal then..... If you make a mistake though,”

“If I make a mistake?”

“I might end up sleepy again.”

“What an unprecedented threat.”

I waved off Percival’s threats and his piercing gaze with a wave of my hand and walked with a *patapata* into the room..... although with my armor on it would have been more of a *gatchan gatchan*. But on the inside, I was not so dismissive. My only true

relief was that Percival couldn't see the scared look I had underneath my helmet.

Anything else besides the Other Percival. What will happen if I'm sleeping?..... Underneath that tilted roof, "Miss Monette's hands are beautiful," he'd do something like use my pink nail polish on my armor.

This must be what they call a monster..... Thinking so, I followed behind Alexis.

"I know what Monette is expecting, but something won't happen any time soon."

"Really?"

"Yes. When I go to bed, the floor will give out while I sleep, a cat burglar will break into my room, or some strange woman will come banging on my door. Right Percival?"

"That is so. There were a few times that I thought we were safe, and then several things happened at once."

Two people walked and talked, and I just nodded my head while walking behind them.

Although the curse itself is continuous, there seems to be an inconsistency in the events that happen. From minor things to bump and bruises to events like poisonous moths and lizards, the only rule is that Alexis doesn't die or even maimed. It is a relatively subtle and obscure curse from a witch.

Thinking that way, Monette's helmet creaked as she tilted her head to the side, but she quickly put her thoughts to the back of her mind because they had reached their destination.

Unlike her best room of the inn on the top floor, this one had a simple and uninteresting door. It also apparently only has two narrow beds inside as well.

"Since we will be leaving early tomorrow, please try to keep the bad luck moderate."

"I know. And I will be ready at an appropriate time."

As Monette purposely told them that room service would be coming for her, Alexis shrugged his shoulders as he unlocked the door with the room key and took hold of the door knob.

The door made a small creak as it slowly opened, and.....

“Surprise!”

.....several cream pies flew out into his face along with the sound of bellowing laughter.

1. It’s a little late to be pointing this out, but this story really does switch between 1st and 3rd person in some of the strangest places

2. Hachiware means there is a split in an animal’s coloration. It kind of looks like they’re wearing a mask.



Chapter 17

The Case of the Prince's Curse and the Inn 2

Alexis received that pie to his face in a spectacular fashion, but his body stiffened up afterwards.

I cannot say that the air in the corridor wasn't cold. Where there had been a cheerful and jubilant cheer of "Surprise!" earlier, there was now just a heavy silence. You could still hear the lively chatter of the dining room downstairs, but even that sounded as if it was coming from some distant place.

The situation is only further exacerbated by how perfectly the pie had attached itself to Alexis's face, creating an exquisite balance for itself.

When the silence was finally broken, it turned noisy pretty quick because the people who had thrown the pie had noticed their mistake. In an instant, those responsible's faces turned pale, and they quickly got to work removing the pie from Alexis's face. The cream was stuck on there quite admirably, so they took out towels and handkerchiefs and wiped it all off apologizing the whole time.

His face remained stoic despite the stubbornly attached cream, and if you look, there was quite a bit messing up his hair as well. Even in such a state, Alexis continued to try and calm the perpetrators down, telling them not to worry about it, and that it was just an accident..... isn't he a little too friendly?

"Alexis, is this alright?"

"Monette, they had no hidden motives."

"Prince Alexis, are you alright? Are you injured?"

"Do not worry. It does not hurt anywhere."

"Alexis, was it delicious?"

"I am glad you asked Monette. I would say that I would have preferred a more

moderate sweetness. Having just eaten a meal, it was a little more sweetness than I could bear.”

Alexis replied so while wiping the leftover cream off his face. Under these circumstances, he sure is showing a lot of restraint. If someone were to make a mistake and accidentally pummel my face with a pie while lying in wait in my room, I would like to yell and curse out those responsible.

Is this the size of his vessel, or is he more forgiving because this is a byproduct of his bad luck?¹ Is he just no longer bothered by harassment that is only at this level? I am stubborn..... but even I feel a little bit of pity for him as Alexis ushers me into their room.

The inside of the room is not that wide. It is like someone ordered a simple accommodation so the builders created something as simple as possible. There are two beds with a small table in-between them. There seemed to be a bathroom, but it looked like it was just tacked on as an afterthought.

Alexis immediately headed towards that bathroom in order to wash out the cream still stuck to his hair. I can see a little fatigue stuck on his expression. It’s right there next to the fresh cream stuck to his temple. You certainly would want to wash that away quickly. And while I was absentmindedly thinking about such things, Percival had gone ahead and started to inspect the beds.

He pushed down on it in order to see if the legs would break off or if the bottom would give out and turn into a futon. When he was getting ready to take a peek underneath to see if someone was under there as well, Monette couldn’t help but shrug her shoulders and say something from the chair she had taken a seat in.

“Aren’t you a little too worried? People don’t usually hide under random beds.”

“Just to be sure... Ah, were you also supposed to be part of the surprise? Unfortunately, the party is actually next door.”

“Someone’s there!?”

Hyaaa! Monette released a blood-curdling scream when a clown slowly crept out from underneath the bed. That is seriously scary. I don’t know what kind of surprise he was thinking of springing, but something like that would be seriously traumatic.

But that clown was completely apathetic to my complaints, and he left the room with a smile on his face. Then in a matter of seconds, cheers rose once again along with the call of “Surprise!” from the next room over. Apparently it was another failure this time. I’m glad they’re having fun..... even if I can’t fully believe this situation.

As Monette once again realized just how ridiculous Alexis’s bad luck manifested from this curse, the man in question returned after taking a quick bath with a towel wrapped around his shoulders. His hair was still damp and dripping water droplets. Even though he was wrapped up in the cheesy sleepwear that the inn prepares, those pajamas looked like first-class goods just from him having worn them.

While wiping his hair, Alexis tilted his head in curiosity.

“Have you found anything?”

“No, just a clown.”

“Oh, that’s good.”

Percival explained the “little clown” incident, but all Alexis did was shrug his shoulders and give a bitter smile. Apparently they got off pretty easily with just a “little clown”. I didn’t listen in to their talk in too much detail, but even then I could tell that they had gone through some issues in the past when it came to underneath the bed.

After watching the two and listening to them speak for a moment, Monette suddenly stood up. Alexis who had finished bathing did not look too terribly worse off, but he was a little pale and was slightly shivering. Upon inspection, despite how narrow it was it looked like just an ordinary bathroom, and only water came out from the from the spout... I thought that some bad luck had occurred in the bathroom, but maybe I was wrong.

Monette had headed to the bathroom to check it,

“Hm, it really is just water but...”

and came back after a few minutes.

It really was just water. The pipes looked old, but they were solidly built. I thought everything was fine until the freezing water struck me through the gaps in my armor making me feel like I had just stuck my hand in a bucket of ice water. However, when I

went to Alexis with this, he just continued to dry his hair and returned,

“Hm? But I only got water?”

He was looking at me like I was the crazy one.

“That... wasn’t the water really cold?”

“It certainly was. What about it?”

Alexis said it as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Apparently he had become completely used to such cold baths over the past year. Actually, it seems like he had gone even beyond that and thought that baths were supposed to be had with cold water. Monette did not know how to respond and could only stare blankly at him while thinking that he was truly strong.

I may need to change my way of thinking. Alexis is indeed badly hit by his curse, but in proportion to it, his adaptability is truly frightening. As a result of this trip, most of these events just happening due to Alexis’s own bad luck is just becoming more and more unlikely.

“So Monette, are you satisfied...”

Satisfied? Alexis’s words stopped around here as the moment that he sat down in a chair, the two back legs snapped with a loud *CRACK!* He looked quite pitiful, but he did not scream and dutifully fell on his back. Percival rushed over to help him.

I was about to say something, but before I could, loud cheers rose up again cutting off my thoughts. I glanced in the direction from where the voices were coming from—that being the wall separating us from the next room over. We were right next to a party venue.

It sounded quite exciting. Music followed by more cheering followed the sound of dancing, slap-sticks, boisterous laughing. How fun it seems and not in the least bit inconvenient.

“This will probably last the whole night.”

“I wonder if it will continue until dawn..... we might be lucky and get a full hour of

sleep.”

Alexis and Percival both wearily stared at the wall.

I could see the sorrow wafting from their shoulders. I could not help but to sigh and take out a piece of parchment from my pouch. *sara sara*² I will draw a cute kitty-cat for tonight—one that is dreaming about fish. That should be suitable for the night.

As soon as I showed the spell to repel the curse for them, the two looked at me like I was an angel. As soon as I activated my spell next to their bedside, the group in the neighboring room that had been cheering and yelling until now moved their party to the bar as they had run out of sake. The effect of the spell felt astounding as the loud rambunctious noise from before quickly quieted down.

“Monette...”

“A witch’s whim. I cannot promise that it will last all night, and room service will be coming by soon.”

“Thank you Monette. It’s a very cute..... sea slug?”

“A Cute Kitty-Cat!!!”

“Ah, in that case I understand. They’re three cats playing together.”

“There’s one cute kitty-cat!!!”

How rude! And Monette rose up in anger.

She stormed out of the room, but when she reached the doorway, she hesitated for a single second. She turned back around to the two and spat out, “Good night!” before closing the door a little harder than normal.

1. The size of his vessel is a Japanese idiom referring to the depths of one’s kindness. This author really enjoys their idioms.

2. The Japanese have a lot more SFX than we do. This one is the sound of her smoothing out the paper.

Chapter 18

The Witch is Tsun and Whimsical

On a large and fluffy bed, a simple but refined table had been set. The cheese that the room service had brought up was beautifully packed, and I was surprised to see that the colorful flower ornament that I thought was just added on for aesthetics was actually made of cheese as well. It was a luxury dish that appealed both the eyes and the stomach. It was incomparable to the violent assortment thrown together in the dining room.

It was all natural cheese, but unlike whatever it was they had down in the cafeteria, this cheese had a unique fragrance and taste that went great with crackers yet was light enough to be eaten on its own as well.

The taste was deep, fragrant, and rich in variety. In a word, “It truly fit its expensive price.”

“This would go well with some expensive wine,” I thought to myself as I drank some orange juice. I never thought I’d regret not having any of my cellar wine.

While enjoying such exquisite room service, I enjoyed a nice, long bath. After being tossed around in a horse-drawn carriage for so long, my body has become stiff, and I stink of sweat. Even if I stretch out my arms and legs a little, it cannot compare to the comfort of having all the fatigue melt away in the hot water.

This is the best room in the inn, so it naturally has a large bath that comes with hot water. No, it is natural that hot water would come out for an inn’s bathtub no matter what room you’re staying in, but Alexis’s face as he walked out of a cold bath has seared itself onto my brain. Rather, it might be better to say that I have started to count my blessings that I can turn the knob and have warm water come out of the spigot.

Then let’s finish bathing and start painting my nails with the nail polish I had bought in town. The clerk, although he had quite the dubious look to his face when I walked in, said pink was a good color that blended in well with the nails. After I finish my left hand, I get started on my right, and when I am all finished, I take a moment to admire how beautiful my nails have become. Then taking a small breath, I wait for them to dry.

Now that I have entered a time that I cannot do anything while my nails are still drying, I think about what to do next. I could go to bed since we will be leaving early tomorrow, or I could prepare some more ink for a spell.....

Then I waved my hands a bit with a *patapata*, and after confirming that my nails had dried and were no longer sticky, I pointlessly wasted my time lounging around in comfort. Then when I felt myself get a little thirsty, I reached out towards my pouch in the corner of the room.

Walking along with a *kashan kashan* down the hallway at night, I stop in front of the room that Alexis and Percival were staying in. I picked out and pasted a spell from my pouch onto their door when I heard the sound of footsteps, the door slowly opened in front of me.

“Miss Monette, what’s the matter?”

It was Percival who emerged from the darkness. His gold hair was wet, and what skin you could see peeping through his pajamas was still dripping, so he must have just gotten out of the bath. Monette took a step back when he first called her name, and upon seeing that, Percival quickly assured her that he was not sleepy.

Then he laughed and said, “I took a hot bath after a long time.” After spending a long time suffering misfortunes alongside Alexis, it seems that he was close to making the terrible mistake forgetting the fact that hot water is warm. If there was a third party listening in, they would most definitely be wondering what this man was saying, but Monette understood his pain.

“So, did you need something?”

“Why I, it’s different...”

There really wasn’t any reason, Monette turned her face away inside her helmet.

However that type of attitude just gives off the opposite impression and says that there most definitely was a reason why she came. Percival tilted his head in curiosity. Another water droplet dripped from his hair, but he was too preoccupied with Monette to think about drying his hair.

“.....I just ended up here while walking.”

I complained about his sharp ears in my heart. I didn't knock on the door, and I was just going to leave after I finished posting my spell. It's awkward getting caught like this.

But if I say that, then Percival will never let it drop, and he might even find it suspicious, so I have to come up with some kind of excuse. And while I was struggling over this, Percival sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

“I become extremely sensitive to footsteps.”

“Footsteps?”

“.....Ever since a year ago.”

Monette muttered “Oh,” in her helmet. Percival didn't say anything afterwards and didn't look like he wanted to either. He turned his head away a bit, and his blue eyes narrowed with another sigh. He has probably been wary about trivial footsteps for the past year. His expression seems to say so at least.

Alexis does not have extraordinary bad luck.

Someone is artificially sending it, and it is a power even I don't fully understand. In other words, there is someone with malicious intentions for Alexis. There is no guarantee that the person responsible might eventually decide to take more direct action. Alexis is constantly hit with bad luck, yet he never sustains great injury from the after effects. Still, it is possible that when he falls asleep..... there is always such a possibility. You also have to take in the people's possible actions when the unfaithful prince leaves the country.

Percival surely thought of such things and has been wary of every footstep in the night for the past year. He is the escort that protects the crown prince. But who is he supposed to protect him from? He doesn't know, so he has to worry about every possibility.

It could be the curse of a witch with a grudge or the machinations of an ordinary person.

Thinking about such things, Monette just shrugged her shoulders.

“Even though Alexis gathers poisonous moths and snakebites, he does not die, and even though he is constantly taking cold baths, he never even catches so much of a cold right? Ah, but if you hit him with a brick, that should kill him.”

“What a horrible thing to say.....”

Percival stared at me annoyed. His eyes changed from the previous fatigued look he had earlier to one that clearly wanted to chide me for my disagreeable words. I responded suitably—by sticking my tongue out underneath my helmet.

“Although, if it was Miss Monette, I don’t think you’d die even if you were to be hit in the head with a brick.”

“How rude. Witches are the same as human beings. They will surely die if beaten upside the head with a brick.”

“And people inside the country are likely to do so.”

“.....who is inside?”

“By the way, why did Miss Monette come here in the first place?”

Percival muttered something troubling under his breath, but when Monette asked more about it, he quickly changed the subject to something else and gazed at the door. Thinking that he saw something, Percival took a half-step out into the hallway, “What is this?”..... and noticed the spell hanging on the door.

The curse depicted a curled up kitty-cat sleeping peacefully. It was the type of figure that when you see it, you just want to crouch down and give it a good pet.

Percival narrowed his eyes and stared at it for awhile. He observed it closely, tilting his head a little to an angle before finally saying, “All right. I give up. What is this?”

“.....A cute kitty-cat.”

“I know that. No matter how hard I look, I can’t see any resemblance to a cat, but I understand you draw cats. So, what type of spell is this?”

“.....It is a cute kitty-cat sleeping spell.”

“Okay, so what does it do?”

Monette glanced between Percival and the spell hanging from the door wondering how he could not understand the effect from the picture.

Percival misunderstood her reaction as being, “I’m not telling.” A merciless voice reached Monette’s ears inside her helmet.

“Don’t tell me.....”

“It might be a spell with a good effect, or perhaps it is a curse that invalidates the curse-avoidance spell I placed earlier. Or perhaps it’s a spell with an even scarier effect.”

“What do you want to do?”

“I just tried wanted to write something since I bought some new ink. It might be a terrible curse, so if you don’t want to take the chance, go ahead and rip it off.”

Instead of explaining further or waiting for a reply, Monette turned on her heels and walked away from the door.

At that time, I heard Percival calling after me, but I pretended no to hear him and continued walking with my iron feet echoing *kashan kashan* in the hallway. I’m sure he will demand an explanation if I stop, so I should just hurry up and escape instead.

When I turned the corner at the end of the hallway, I had become completely invisible to Percival, and I ended up hesitating for a moment. Afterwards, I ended up taking a peek back round the corner.

The hallway was completely quiet and devoid of any figures. Of course that included Percival as well. I bet he returned to his room the instant I went away.

And at the door..... was my spell.

It seems that he decided to not tear it off. It made me feel a little itchy, and I ended up instinctively scratching my head. Unfortunately no matter how hard I tried to scratch my head, as an armor girl, I just end up making a loud *gori gori* sound as my iron fingers scrape against my helmet.

Unfortunately I can’t clear up this irritating itch out hear, so I continue walking down

the hallway to return to my room. While walking, I tried to take light steps to dampen the *kashan kashan* of my footsteps resonating in the hall.

“Witches are whimsical, and I just wanted to try out my new ink.....”

So I returned to my room while making excuses to nobody in particular.

At the back of my head, the itch is getting worse becoming a pain-like numbness that is more irritating than before. How restless, I am uncomfortable.

I wish I could have a good dream..... I wish I had never done something so stupid.

I told myself this before finally arriving at my room, peeling off all my armor, and entering my bed.

Chapter 19

Whimsical Witch and Witch Slayer 1

The next morning, when Monette had arrived at the dining room where they had agreed to meet up in advance, Alexis and Percival were already there. Already stuffing their faces with eggs and toast, when they noticed Monette walking in their direction, they waved and said, “Good morning Monette. We went ahead and got started ahead of you.”

Isn't there a problem here? Although I don't consider myself to be especially high class, but I am familiar that it is common manners to wait to order food until everyone has arrived if you are meeting up to eat together in a group. Of course, since I don't really think of these guys as fellow traveling companions, it doesn't really bother me.

That is why I did not say anything and accepted the breakfast that the clerk brought me. The main course was fried eggs with bacon. It had a salad with a cherry tomato as a side and some lightly cooked toast.

It was a nice breakfast, but since I had that room service cheese last night, it seemed a little rustic. Still, I had no complaints as I bit into my toast.

“I saw a good dream for the first time in awhile.”

While Alexis was eating, even though he did not know about the extra charm I placed on his door the night before, he was still giving his thanks for the curse avoidance spell I placed.

He couldn't remember the dream he had in detail, but he was apparently wrapped up in something warm and fluffy. Although the contents were gone, that lingering feeling was enough to completely blow away his lingering fatigue. To have such a sunny smile, it must have healed him both mentally and physically.

While Alexis was like that, Percival wasn't showing a much different expression. It was hard to say whether he had had a good or bad dream the night before, and his strangely still expression irritated my eyes a little.

Oya, I tilted my head to the side a little. Although since I am still wearing my helm, Alexis and Percival could not notice such a small change.

“Percival, did you have a good night’s sleep?”

“I had a dream where I ate a meal alongside that monster you drew last night.”

“A cute kitty-cat, isn’t that a great dream?”

“The way it looked, I thought I was going to watch something absolutely grotesque, but he really knew how to handle his knife and fork elegantly, and he showed his wit in the rich conversation we had.”

“He’s cute, elegant, and stylish is he not?”

When I asked him if it was a good dream, he answered that it was fun.

Although I was starting to get worried that my spell had had no effect, I can only say that having a cute and fun meal with an adorable companion would be a good dream. Actually, wouldn’t it be the best dream?

Of course I do not mind whether or not they give credit for their good dreams to my spell, so I just nod and say, “That’s good.”

After finishing breakfast, we prepare our luggage quickly, check-out of the inn and get on the carriage.

The quality of this carriage is much better than the one we picked up the other day. When I thought about spending another night inside a carriage, I got depressed, but something of this level should be fine. It has soft cushions for its seats, so you should be able to rest easy when you lie down inside the carriage.

“It cannot be helped. I should be able to endure with this carriage.”

“It’s the tallest carriage here... What are you going to do with this?”

“It’s absolutely necessary to reaching the witch that can cure Alexis’s curse.”

“...Is that so?”

While Monette answered him with a puffed out chest, Percival sighed deeply and got on the carriage. Because she is stating it like it is a fact, it becomes hard to argue. Monette could feel her inner noble girl rising in her heart.

When I got on board, I chose for myself the biggest and softest looking cushion. The fluffiness accepted body, and the fine quality cushion let off a good fragrance. The interior decoration of the horse-drawn carriage was also stylish, so it is almost certainly true that this was their finest quality carriage.

From here to the next destination, the border city, should take about a day to reach with a horse-drawn carriage. Even if they are a little late, it should take a day and a half at most, so we can take a break halfway there and make it by tomorrow afternoon.

While she was running the math in her head, she set aside the thought, "It would be nice if we made it in two days," to the corners of her mind. The trip would take a full day if it was a normal person. The full day to get there could be considered the usual, and the day and a half is taking into consideration any small accidents delaying the trip.

Of course something like this is the natural conclusion. It doesn't take into account the fact that the customer happened to have been cursed by a witch. The driver looked a little perplexed when Percival told him to, "Travel at a safe speed and on a problem-free route that would create no problems even if the cart were to break down."

After riding on the horse-drawn carriage for a few hours, we had successfully driven away all the poisonous moths who wanted to follow along. Silence had descended inside the carriage, and Monette was off raising daises inside her head until she was pulled back to reality by Alexis calling her name.

I pulled my face up that was buried inside the cushion.

"Oh, sorry, were you sleeping?"

"No, well... did you need something?"

"If you don't mind, could you tell me about witches?"

Because they didn't really know anything about them, it's natural they would want to know about what they'd be dealing with, and Monette didn't really mind.

Witches are usually whimsical and even if it is an order from the king, they will not nod their head if they don't feel like it. On the contrary, they are usually people who don't like standing up on a stage. Their interests usually include studying and conversing with their fellow witches.

As far as knowledge about witches, this could be thought of as being generally known and is the extent that is told about inside this country.

The Idira family was the only witch family inside this country, and we forsook the witch name long ago. The stories about witches that remain in this country are close to rumors at this point, and Alexis says that he was only vaguely told about them. It seems that the topic about witches was no longer examined in literature, and there were no documents left since I took them all with me to the old castle.

Besides, since he was currently known as the Prince of Infidelity, asking the Idira family, the family that his fiancée belongs to, about curses was...

So Alexis came to me.

Since he will be meeting with a witch soon, I agree that it would be better for him to have some knowledge beforehand. Also, if we don't talk, then we will end up bored and sleepy.

I almost had a heart attack when I saw Percival yawn earlier.

"I am not too familiar with the subject, but is that okay?"

"Yes. I don't want to do something rude when I meet with the witch, so I'd like to hear various things. Does everyone use spells like Monette?"

So Alexis began with his questions, and Monette shook her head.

There may be witches who use the same or similar method, but not all witches handle magic the same way. Perhaps you have to draw out your spell by mixing ink with your blood, but this method takes time and effort to master.

If you are a witch with talent or a witch that inherited your magic from generation to generation, you should be able to perform magic more easily. There was a possibility that Monette would be laughed at and ridiculed as a newbie witch with only self-education. Perhaps the witch from the neighboring country would dismiss her saying,

“It’s too much trouble.”

If it is an experienced witch, they could use magic just by saying a specific word or performing a specific action. As she told them this, Alexis and Percival both looked away.

“Okay, Monette uses spells but there are other ways.”

“Even the Idira family of old used to have a diverse number of techniques, but doesn’t this method suit me?”

“If you could use magic just by saying a word or a prayer, you could move a country.”

“I could, but I wouldn’t. The country is pleasant as it is, and that sounds like a real hassle.”

Monette cleared that up as soon as possible.

Even if you were to read the history books of the past, when witches could be found all throughout the nation, there were only a few cases—if even that—where a witch became involved with a country, and those cases were usually them deciding to help out during a war. Whether or not they became involved with royalty is uncertain, but there is at least no records about royalty making a move based on a witches words alone.

However, it is not that they don’t have the power to move a country. With the case of Alexis’s curse, if it is a powerful witch, she could kill him with just one incident of bad luck. As a matter of fact, it would be possible to kill the entire royal family and cause the country to collapse...

But I wouldn’t do that. I have no intentions of doing that.

However saying “I don’t feel like it,” is certainly different from, “I can’t do it.” There is always the possibility that a witch could have destroyed a country on a whim. There is a possibility that a person could have been killed by a witch hired by their spited lover, or that very spited lover could have been killed by the witch when they made their request.

Everything is done by the commandment of the witch, and that commandment is entirely based on the severely unstable thing called, “mood.”

They are a terrifying thing if you turn one into your enemy, and they are not a very useful thing even if you turn them into an ally. If you don't handle things correctly, they may just make you lick their boots, and if you handle things too seriously, you may just make them angry. They are more selfish than children yet more intelligent than a cat.

"So that's what a witch is like. When you say it like that, they sound really hard to handle."

"N, no, hard to handle is..."

With Alexis taking a look at Percival, the other had trouble responding to Alexis's statement, and he ended up just silently nodding. He seemed to be experiencing the old condition called, "Having awareness that something is going to be difficult to handle." The two of them were prepared for something bothersome, but it could be said that the pressure scaled up as soon as they realized the horror of a whimsical witch.

Did they become pale because dealing with the witch might be more troublesome than they had expected? Or have they realized that they are on their way to meet with such an opponent right now?

Monette who was still resting on top of the really fluffy cushion watched their reactions for a moment before continuing on.

"Witches are certainly difficult, and normal people probably couldn't even meet with them. Even if they did, and the witch glared at them, they wouldn't be able to use magic to resist..."

"But?"

Monette took out a book from her bag and handed it over to Alexis almost like she was trying to encourage him.

A technique that could be used to resist against a whimsical witch with great power. Its presence isn't well known, and its existence is only really passed down as a tradition.

The witch's magic does not work at all, and before it all witches become nothing but ordinary humans. That is...

“That is the Witch Slayer.”

As Monette said it aloud, the horse-drawn carriage shook once with a loud rattle.

Chapter 20

Whimsical Witch and Witch Slayer 2

“Witch slayer...”

Alexis whispered the words back to himself like he was trying to confirm what he had heard.

Monette flipped the book in her hands closed before turning to Percival.

“Percival, do you remember what we talked about last night? That if a witch is beaten upside the head with a brick, they will die?”

“Ah, I remember.”

“Wait, what were you guys doing last night?”

“I told Percival that you can kill a witch by beating their skull in with a brick. If a witch has their skull caved in by a person repeatedly hitting them with a brick, they would obviously die.”

“I see... So the witch slayer is a brick?”

“Wait. Don’t just advance the story on the premise that you would be able to just hit a witch with a brick.”

Monette waved off Alexis’s idea, but contrary to the overall joking atmosphere, Alexis was staring at her with a serious look. His eyes were boring holes into her armor, and the same could be said for Percival as well.

The gazes of the two were hard for Monette. She could feel their gazes bouncing off the armor wrapped around her causing a resonating *jii~*¹ to bounce around inside. Rather than hearing what the person inside had to say, were they trying to figure how to slay armor instead?

Cold sweat dripped down Monette’s back, and she sunk further into the cushion to put

a little distance between them. Her eyes were swimming inside her helmet. She could not escape from the gazes focused on her, but her eyes still kept darting around through the iron as if some way to escape would magically appear.

Noticing that Monette had sunk into the cushion and sensing her apparent discomfort, the two men took a breath, lowered their eyebrows, and diverted their gazes to another part of the carriage. Alexis tried to keep his voice calm as he brought the subject back on track.

“So Monette, do you have something like a curse that can take down witches?”

“...No. Witches are immune to another witch’s curse. Besides that one fact, witches are the same as other people and will die when hit upside the head with a brick.”

“I’m starting to think you have a weird thing with bricks, but if that is the truth, is there a way for an ordinary person to get so close to a witch?”

Monette silently nodded to Alexis’s mutterings. Although it is not a pleasant thing to talk about how to repel witches such as herself, Alexis’s remarks were correct.

A witch slayer is just an ordinary person, not even another witch. As soon as the person recognizes that magic does not work on them, they can be considered witch slayers. It is not impossible for a witch slayer to sneak up and take a witch off guard.

“It is always possible to attack a witch while she is sleeping. Nevertheless, before a certain incident, witches never really paid any attention to anything like a ‘witch slayer,’ and they always wrote that off as just a random incident. The country acted as an intermediary and recorded these extremely rare incidents.”

“...A certain incident?”

“Yes, actually, a single witch was assassinated in her sleep.”

It was a few hundred years ago. At that time, ‘witch slaying’ was not known by that name, and there was never any reason that would warrant giving out such a name.

At that time, a witch slayer, the first person to be known as a witch slayer, was hired when a woman’s husband fell in love with a witch...

At least he pretended to. In the end he was just using the witch to kill time. An

entanglement of indecency that he enjoyed in his own snobbish way.

The man tried to take advantage of the witch's magical skill for his own self-interest. He tried to toss her to the side when he was done with her, but he ended up being tortured and killed instead. For men, a witch that falls in love with you can give you anything given her mood, so it is synonymous to having a convenient woman with the best usability.

In the wife's grief, the woman hired a man immune to magic, and he easily killed the witch in her sleep.

After that, anyone who was immune to magic became known as a witch slayer, and a long fight began between them and the witches.

Even with absolute power, a witch cannot onesidedly kill regular humans on their end. Humans create, and witches rely on them for food, materials, and other daily necessities. No matter how good of friends a group of witches are, they would never sacrifice time that could be spent researching magic to procure these things for each other making it impossible for them to be self-sufficient.

That is why the witches had to locate the witch slayers specifically, leading many witches to have to hide what they were, which led to them being killed in their sleep. Even if you were to call it fighting, most of the deaths were the result of the two sides just cleverly assassinating each other.

“Such a fight... obviously ended with the witch's victory.”

Although witchcraft is ineffective against witch slayers, it was still effective against everyone else. If a witch has a country backing her, then a few ordinary men with a knife are no match for her. Sometimes they would curse a king, sometimes they'd threaten the people, and sometimes they'd deceive a village to lead a witch slayer to their inevitable death.

In the first place, the only reason why the dispute lasted as long as it did could be said to be the whim of the witches. The first witch slayer was hunted down for retribution, but everything after that was mostly for killing time and providing a fun show. Since they were written from the viewpoints of witches, the records that the Idira family left behind certainly held a surprising tone about the time period.

However, even though it ended nearly a few hundred years ago, the witch slayer's

eradication is still known and talked about.

Monette spoke about all of this quite lightly, and she gave off a smug smile when she saw the Alexis and Percival's faces pale. Have you finally realized the horror of a witch?

Of course, I am also a witch, so I showed my pride by rising gracefully from the cushion and showing off my majestic figure. Confusion arises in Alexis and Percival's eyes. It seems that they finally recognized the poor armored girl that had been carefreely accompanying them until now had become one of the magnificent and terrible witches that were in the story.

It felt good, so I smiled in my helmet and pulled out a sugar confection from my pouch. I picked out the most tasty looking one and threw it into my mouth..... but it was a little slippery.

“Ah”

I raised my voice without thinking.

However, it was already too late. The sugar confection would never take its rightful place in my mouth and instead rolled down the inside of my helmet, lodging itself with a loud *KONG!*

When I reflexively stood up from my seat, things only got worse as the confection fell further down my armor with a *Kon* *Kon* *KONG!*..... Everyone turned their heads to my iron covered foot. We could not see the skin through the iron, but everyone knew that the confection had fallen all the way down onto my foot.

.....

“Pfft...”

Percival was the first to break the silence.

Even though he covered his mouth with his hand and looked away, his shoulders were still trembling quite grandly.

“Kuu.....”

Alexis made a noise as he stared out the window.

His hand was grasped so firmly over his knee that I could see the whites of his knuckles.

It was quite obvious that they were enduring their laughter. They were quite close to their limits as far as I can see.

Towards such two people, Monette narrowed her eyes inside her helmet and pulled out a piece of parchment and an ink pen from her pouch. *Sari sari* She quickly drew up an angry kitty-cat with fumes being expunged from its nostrils. Its gleaming fangs and inflated tail appealed to the extent of its anger.

Monette finished the drawing in almost a second before shoving it in front of the two's faces.

“Go ahead and laugh, but whoever laughs first, I will beat this monster upside your head.”

“Mo- Monette..... no one' going to laugh..... Look, we'll turn around, so go ahead and take it off and take it out.”

“Yes, Monette. The curse is..... the sugar candy is going to disappear, so let's buy some more at the next town.”

So while two people continued to fruitlessly make their cases while trembling, Monette spoke the words of her magical invocation underneath her helmet.

1. This is probably the first Japanese sound effect I knew without having to look it up. It's a pretty common one in anime; it's meant to be the sound effect for intense staring.

Chapter 21

The Drawing Competition and the Three Kitty-Cats

“This is pretty much all I know.”

When Monette finished talking, she entrusted herself to the cushion with a *pashan.*

There were few books left in the Idira family library, and most of them were related to magic. What a witch is and how they interact with one another, very little was written about such things. The reading could be finished in a few days.

There was only one book on witch slayers, and it was more of a dramatic adaptation of a story than an actual account. It lacked authenticity a reliable source.

It had a way of writing that had an exaggerated sense of urgency, focusing on finding and killing the last witch slayer. When I finished reading it, I had felt a sense of accomplishment as if I was the protagonist and had just eradicated the last witch slayer rather than feeling like I actually learned something. Well, it was a really good read, so I guess it's alright.

“To be honest, I'm not too familiar with witch habits, as I've never met one besides me.”

Saying such, Monette rested her helmet back on the cushion.

“That reminds me, why are Monette's curse drawings..... cats?”

“If it isn't a..... cat, will the magic not activate? For example, what about other animals or a word?”

Apparently the interests of Alexis and Percival have shifted from witches to magic.

To that question, Monette looked at her pouch. Their words made her feel like there was something off when they said the word, 'cats', but she is a kind girl and will ignore that for now.....

She then took out a piece of parchment from her pouch and drew up a cute kitty-cat. There is neither a prop nor a gesture; it is just a simple kitty-cat. It might be a bit simple, but as long as the cat is adorable even without the decorations, it will not be a problem.

She showed it off to the two men, and Monette's chest swelled with pride. Although since she was wearing armor after all, it only looked like the armor had slightly shaken from the side.

"I can draw anything. It is a curse as long as I imagine the effect, and use my blood in the ink."

"So the main point is what the drawing represents to you?"

".....that is a foot, and that is a foot. Then what are these three things coming from behind the hind legs.....?"

Ignoring Percival's mutterings of monstrosities, Monette nodded her head in affirmation to Alexis's question.

The important thing is what Monette, who comes from a family line of witches, puts into the parchment. She combines her imagination with the magic incantation, and she gives it from through the blood-mixed ink. That is how Monette performs magic.

In other words, the parchment and pen are just tools, and if it becomes necessary, she can make do with just ordinary paper and her own raw blood.

While Monette is explaining all of this, Percival's brow creases as he intently examines the drawing still being held up.

"I understand the method and practice, but..... why a cat then?"

"Oh, well that's easy. It's because..."

Monette proudly examined the spell she had just crafted.

It was just a simple kitty-cat that was standing upright. It is so pretty, and the slightly trembling tail was a nice touch. She showed off how the tail was moving back and forth by drawing three of them with waves passing between them to show it off. It is a truly revolutionary technique she believed.

The reason for why she only draws kitty-cats should be obvious if you are looking at such a picture.

“It’s because I’m best at drawing cats!”

Monette declared so with pride and joy.

The air inside the carriage turned weird after that. The three were all silent, and only the rattling sound of the wheels running along the road ceased to quiet themselves.

Without noticing the precarious and awkward silence, Monette took a satisfied breath and affirmed her own comfort. She figured if she could lean back onto the cushion, perhaps the issue of her stiff shoulders could finally be solved.

Meanwhile Alexis and Percival didn’t quite know what to do with themselves.

“...Num, number one. The best...”

“It’s a little embarrassing. Besides these cute little kitty-cats, I can’t draw that well.”

“...that’s, I see.”

Haha..... Alexis nodded his head and gave a cramped smile.

That facial expression says that he wants to say something more, but for some reason he was holding himself back and just continued to stare at the spell she had drawn.

Does he like it that much? When Monette tilted her helmet in wonder, Percival, who had been frozen so completely that it would make you wonder if he was actually breathing, finally stirred. Noticing this movement, Alexis and Monette turned their attention on him who looked at them as if he had just had some sort of enlightenment.

“...I see. I finally understand.”

“Percival?”

“Miss Monette. You keep a creature that normal humans don’t know about called a kitty-cat locked away in the old castle’s basement don’t you!”

“There is no such thing!?”

“I see! So your drawings are some kind of monster that I’ve never seen before.....”

“I don’t keep anything and my drawings are really cute!”

“So it’s an unknown animal named Kitty-cat!?”

Percival continued question the origin of the picture while Alexis had become interested in those unknown creatures asking himself, “What would does something like that eat?”

It’s all a seriously rude affair. The only thing in the old castle’s basement is a wine cellar. There is no mysterious being called Kitty-cat living there. The only thing that does sleep there occasionally is Robertson.

In the first place, this is an iconic kitty-cat that everyone should be able to recognize. It is obviously a stray cat that are abundant in urban areas. When they are in a good mood, they will rub themselves up against your leg and allow you to pet them, otherwise they may be feeling fickle and faint and will end up hiding themselves away where people can not see nor hear them.

I tried pointing this out to Alexis and Percival, but they did not seem to be convinced.

“.....Fine then. You two must be pretty good at drawing if you can judge so much like this.”

With a hmph, Monette became sulky inside her helmet.

She then took out two pieces of parchment from her pouch and shoved them out in front of the two men.

“Monette?”

“Now, please draw a cute kitty-cat for me.”

Knowing that they couldn’t say no when they heard Monette’s lowered voice, Alexis and Percival both pulled out pens from their bags.

A drawing competition suddenly took place. Neither Alexis nor Percival could

disagree, and for the moment, the only sound that could be heard in the carriage were the rolling wheels and the scratches of pens on parchment. Monette was beside herself in the cushioned seat feeling dissatisfied as she observed the two.

They both ended up finishing at the same time and raised their faces while saying, "I'm done."

"I guess I'll go first?"

It was Alexis who stood up to the challenge first. He didn't really have any confidence in his abilities, and he handed over his piece of parchment while saying, "I haven't seen a cat in awhile," and scratching his head.

When the piece of parchment was flipped over, Monette took a hard look at it, and Percival let out of voice of admiration.

Everything looked great.

On the piece of parchment was sitting a clever looking cat. It was lovely with a slender yet supple body that looked extremely soft and fluffy. Its tail wrapped around its back foot, asserting itself in front of the cat's body giving it an aura of magnificence.

Alexis said that the proportions for the feet were off because he hadn't really seen a real cat's shape, but it was to the point that if he had not said anything, you would not have noticed.

"Prince Alexis is seriously amazing..... where did you learn to draw?"

"I learned at the palace, but I could not live up to their standards. I was never praised even once."

With that, Alexis quickly rolled up the parchment. He seems to have zero confidence, and with a bitter smile, he laughed and said, "I'm still only at this level even with all those lessons."

He lacked any level of humility in his expression, and I could understand the situation well enough. From his birth, the first prince was surrounded by fine arts, spoke with the finest artists, and he probably had the best artists as his teachers as well. Simply put, his standards were too high.

In response to Alexis's moping, I snatched the parchment from his hands, unfurled it, and observed the cat. Round eyes like marbles were staring back at me.

Is this cute kitty-cat about to cry?

"This is cute. As unwilling as I am and even though it physically repulses me, I guess I am forced to praise Alexis this one time during our journey."

"I'm glad that you like it."

Alexis gave a slightly bitter smile.

With that, I laid out two pieces of parchment. The first piece was the one drawn on by Alexis and the second one was the the drawing that I had done earlier. Comparing them both, I could easily understand the difference in skill, and I wonder if I should make a few repairs here and there..... I could steal a few notes from this. I should be able to make kitty-cats that are even more beautiful and lovely from now on.

I have to admit, if a third party were to look upon these two drawings, they might not recognize that this is the same cat at first glance.

After doing an in-depth comparison of the two, Alexis seems to have finally been persuaded that I was not just humoring him, and he seems to be happy since his drawing is being praised for the first time. Meanwhile Percival was silently looking at the parchment in his hand.

I turned my gaze onto Percival and had him hurry up. It was his turn to show off his cat after all.

"Percival, please show it quickly."

".....N, No. It's not that interesting."

"It doesn't matter if it's interesting or not. The only thing that matters is cuteness."

Pushed forward by Monette's urging, Percival slowly placed his drawing next to the other two already laid out ones.

".....this is."

“.....somehow.”

Monette and Alexis muttered to themselves.

What was drawn on Percival’s piece of parchment was certainly a cat.

Yes..... it’s a cat. That much is obvious.

But how to say it..... it’s just a cat. There’s no liveliness that a real cat would have in the drawing, but it is definitely a cat. I’m not saying it is not cute, but rather it is not so cute that you would really give it a second look.

If you think that a man who devoted his entire life to nothing else but the sword had drawn this, I suppose you could call it good, but it would be very easy to find someone else who could do a better job. With that being said, it is not so bad that you would laugh at it either.

In the end,

“It’s so plain and boring that it isn’t fun.”

It’s just that.

“See! I told you!”

“No, it’s not a bad job! It’s just..... so plain that no real words come to mind.”

“If you’re just going to trail off like that, then you don’t need to say anything!”

“Percival, do not mind this so much. See..... um..... it’s like.....”

While Alexis was fruitlessly trying to comfort Percival in his own, inefficient way, Monette started releasing verbal abuse from the side such as, “A man who draws for all ages.” It is a stance where she wishes to undermine all of Alexis’s efforts, but harassing Percival is also a nice benefit.

Then, while the three continued to observe the three pieces of parchment for a while and berate each other, the carriage began to sway and stop with a *gattan*.

Chapter 22

Beyond the Border

We had apparently arrived at the border. When I looked out the window, I saw the driver talking to someone who looked like a government official. He handed over some documents from his bag which were most likely transit documents.

However, rather than the tense, serious affair that I would normally imagine when a head of state enters a foreign country, their exchange looked like it lacked any tension at all. On the contrary, they were slapping each other's shoulders and laughing as if they were lifelong friends.

The official was not even looking at the transit documents in the first place. Their office looked like it was just a shack by the side of the road, and some carriages probably had more room than it. There were no signs of any caution to their surroundings at all, and it would be very easy to sneak across by keeping your head down in the fields or traveling through some nearby trees. Carelessness seems to be their company motto.

I would put up high walls, have it strictly guarded, and keep an eye out for everything—even a child..... well that would be an old story.

This is just the proof of peace I tell myself while relaxing back into the cushioned seats right before the carriage started to shake and rattle once again. As evidenced by the official-looking man from before calling out, "See you later!" while waving at our driver, we seem to have successfully passed the check. Of course, when the exam is 10 percent examination and 90 percent chat, I think we would have passed even if we got a zero on the actual examination.

I bemused myself with my own little joke while relaxing in the cushion—until a feeling of numbness ran through my body causing my body to jolt, my armor to rattle, and a loud shout to escape my lips.

"Hyaa!"

My body jumped out of my chair immediately.

Almost at the same time, I heard Alexis's voice as well. He had cried out in shock as well, and I soon realized that he had experienced a shock as well.

"Wh-what was that...?"

"Monette as well? My whole body felt like it had gone numb..."

Alexis's movements mirrored my own as his head tilted to the side along with my helmet as we tried to figure out what had happened.

Surely at the moment that we had crossed the border, a sense of numbness had swept through my body. Unfortunately, it was only for an instant, and it was hard to say which part of my body it had originated from. In addition, the feeling passed quickly, and there was no trace of it left. Even if I look at my body to confirm, I cannot see my skin because there is a bunch of iron armor in the way, so I can't check if anything is different.

"It's weird," I mumble inside my helmet.

Meanwhile, Alexis was checking himself over, and he was able to confirm that, "I don't think it is poison."

With him, his judgment seems to be skewed in a certain direction though, but I am not really in the mood to make fun of him as we are both in the same boat here.

That's why I tried to move on and forget about that feeling just like Alexis... until Percival unexpectedly butted in. With the helmet in the way, it undoubtedly looked weird, but his blue eyes were certainly staring right around where mine were.

'Perhaps he thinks I cast some spell...?'

Thinking so, right at the moment where I was about to claim that I had not done anything,

"Monette, are you truly alright?"

Percival spoke first.

He apparently did not experience that sense of numbness that Alexis and I had, so he does not know the degree of pain and is worried. His eyes looked a little worried, and

he asked once again, "Are you OK?"

It is honestly to be expected. We crossed the border easily, and right when everything was going well, Alexis and I screamed out. It would be weird if he wasn't worried.

"Everything's fine. It did not hurt, rather I was just so surprised by a sudden numbing feeling that I unintentionally shouted out."

"Are you sure? If you feel like something is wrong, we can hurry to a town and look for a doctor..."

"It is not a big deal. You are worrying far too much."

"I'm starting to feel a bit sleepy right now, but I cannot go to sleep like this. I will gladly carry you both to the nearest doctor, so I can sleep without any worries."

"Just shut up and go to sleep already!"

How scary! I raise my voice and thrash my arms around creating a loud *gashan* *gashan* with my armor.

Eventually being convinced, Percival nodded once..... and then tried to pat my helmet. I don't trust his words when he says, "It's alright then," and I take as much distance from him as I can. Since he is like this, I do not think that *I* will be able to sleep without worries.

But I am stuck in this carriage, so there is nowhere for me to run.

Percival says that he is okay, but he has tricked me like that before. But I should not get sidetracked by him, so I turn my gaze to Alexis.

"I also felt that numbness, so it does not seem to be your curse."

"Yes, and it does not seem like I was bitten by something either."

"I have this appearance(heaviness)¹, so I cannot think of see if I have any bite marks or bumps..."

When Alexis started looking at me in a strange way, I grabbed some of the cushions off the seat and covered myself with them. His eyes quickly dropped to his feet.

If it was Alexis alone, then the possibility of it being the result from some bad luck of the curse is high, but I had also become numb this time. However, it did not affect all of us as Percival claimed that he had felt nothing. Same thing with the driver. When Alexis called out to him, his only response was a look of confusion while holding the reins.

Does it have something to do with the sitting position? For example, at that moment, the wheels rolled over something, and the vibrations carried up into the carriage. In the first place, we jumped up and cried out at the same to time it has to be something like that right...?

So while I was thinking about that, Percival gradually stood up.

Did something happen? Did he notice something?

Alexis and I both turned to look at him, and while receiving the gazes of the two people, Percival said something without saying anything before slowly approaching me.....

I was lain sideways. *Pon* *Pon* and the idiot kept lightly patting the waist of my armor.

He is sleepy.

“...He did say he was starting to feel sleepy earlier I suppose.”

“Mmm. I was still thinking about the numbness, so I didn’t really pay him much attention though...”

I wrinkled my eyebrows inside my helmet. Percival is trying to lightly coax me to rest, but it is impossible for me to sleep with the constant *pon* *pon* *pon* from him constantly hitting my armor. I could actually fall asleep pretty quickly if I could rest by myself, but I do not bother saying anything like that to him since he does not listen in the state he is in.

Even when he starts singing a couple lullabies–quite poorly I would like to add–I do not say anything.

I try to struggle free, if only to show my resistance, but he is holding me firmly down while patting my helmet and showing a stupid grin.

This lullaby is creating a really annoying environment, so I try to pretend I am already asleep. Unfortunately the bothersome sleepy Percival is not fooled by the fake snores coming out of my helmet.

My thoughts quickly become split. One half being spent on what that numbness could have been, and the other half being used to figure out how I am going to survive these next fifteen minutes of hell.

“Oh.”

A small voice called out the moment Monette and the others had crossed the border.

The place is a complicated valley a short distance away from the border. A place that is impossible to find for those who visit this valley without knowing the trick. It is a beautiful piece of nature that would make one want to look around once you get there.

Contrary to the scenic landscape, within the hidden space, a luxurious mansion was constructed, and it was here that the person who had called out was tranquilly sipping tea.

When she felt Monette’s party cross the border, this woman looked up from her tea and smiled. She was amazingly beautiful when she did so, and any man who saw her would immediately fall in love while any woman would be overcome by jealousy.

But there were neither men nor women around to see that smile, and the only other living creature was a cat that was sleeping on a shelf hanging from a nearby wall. No matter how beautiful smile it was, it did not seem to affect cat who was peacefully sleeping the day away.

Still, when its master called out, the cat awoke and perked up its little ears.

“Concetta, we apparently have guests. Please go and pick them up.”

As it was ordered to, the cat called Concetta replied once with a hoarse response, and slowly opened its eyes. As it rose to its feet, the cat stretched itself out on top of the shelf before jumping down and landing on the ground with a *plomp*.

The cat stretched itself out once more before turning its eyes forward and making its

way to the door. It moved slowly and lazily, but when watching it move with its beautiful fur and graceful air, it was the picture of elegance.

Watching the back of her cute cat, the Lord nodded once in satisfaction,

“Customers after so long. I will have to do my best to give them the best hospitality.”

and she happily laughed in a low voice.

Chapter 23

Moonlight and Blood Ink

The sun began to fall shortly after crossing the border, and it became dark in the blink of an eye. Travel continued on throughout the night, but the speed of the carriage became moderate before it slowed down to a crawl and what was once a constant rattling became a slight vibration. If you could look outside, the scenery would surely be passing us by at a snail's pace, but even with the light from the stars and moon, nothing but the inky night was visible outside the windows.

There is still a bit of distance to town however there are no street lights, and we might topple the carriage if we rush. That is why it is best to advance slowly, stop the carriage at a suitable spot, and have the horses and driver rest periodically.

Inside such a carriage everyone is taking turns on watch, and right now I am the only one awake. Occasionally, I look outside the window, and sometimes I talk to myself with some idle chatter. I did not feel like doing anything tonight, so I spent some time gazing at the two who were snoring away.

Alexis is sleeping soundly.

He is holding the curse I drew before he fell asleep firmly in his hand. Perhaps he has faith that it will provide him with a good night's sleep because he is clutching it to his chest as if it were a chunk of gold.

The prince is sleeping on the basis that it is a spell that I drew, but when he says he cannot figure out what the picture is supposed to be, how can he know what the spell is supposed to do? It is obvious to any normal person what a cute kitty-cat it is, but for an oblivious man like him, I could have drawn a sad kitty-cat and had him suffer all night from my curse if I wanted to.

I looked at the slovenly appearance of Alexis and, "I should have picked a bit of a better pose..." I muttered to myself.

I wonder why I drew up a kitty-cat with its limbs spread out...

Oh, Alexis' thin finger is right on the crotch.

For some reason, I feel like the atmosphere was ruined somehow... No, I myself messed it up. When I initially drew the charm, I had no idea that Alexis would cuddle it like some preschooler holding a stuffed animal. So I drew a cunning and bold kitty-cat, and Percival asked me, "A stable?"

Next to Alexis, Percival was sleeping against the wall with some cushions underneath him.

When he told me to go to sleep first, he said, "I am feeling a little tired, but since you are also probably feeling sleepy from before, I am sure you will sleep through whatever happens." Because he looked completely serious when he said it, I beat his face in with a cushion, but he looked like he was sleeping peacefully now. Even so, occasionally I will hear a slight rustling, but it seems like the usual wrinkles between his brows are being straightened out as the night has gone on.

".....They are both sleeping, right?"

Carefully observing the situation of the two men, I quietly removed my left gauntlet.

Tonight there was little moonlight, and the carriage reduced what little light there was to a minimum. Even if either Alexis or Percival woke up, they would not be able to immediately tell what I was doing.

It is impossible to gather one's bearings in this darkness, such as whether a left hand is visible.

I keep telling myself this with bated breath, and I reach for my pouch that is next to me. It is not parchment that I take out, but rather just some ink and my pen. I realized that I had less ink than I thought, and I would have to replenish it soon. If it was my life in the ancient castle, then I would just postpone it and say that I could just take care of it the next time I had to draw up a spell, but that type of mentality is dangerous when on a journey.

"It would be troublesome if they saw, and those troublesome people would act even more troublesome as a result. Let's finish this quickly."

There is no one to hear me, but I still mutter my words out loud while dismantling the pen I love.

Next I took out a small knife that fit nicely in my hands. When I removed it from its sheath, the silver blade would pick up the light even inside the darkest carriage. Although it is small, it is as sharp as would could expect. When cutting through a piece of parchment as a test, it slid through it as if it was cutting air.

I wipe the knife's blade once with a handkerchief, and then I press it against the forefinger of my left hand just as I did to the parchment.

I pressed the knife's edge up against my skin, and at the same time, my brows creased underneath my helmet.

Of course it hurts. Every time I get to this point, a cold fever passes, and my chest tightens as if I had just finished a marathon. Even so, I still press down on the blade, and I deal with the pain as my skin and flesh are parted. A red line is drawn, and a ball of blood bubbles out on my finger. A steady line flowed down my finger, and I swapped the knife with my pen before the overflowing blood could spill on to the floor.

I set the tip of the pen against the flow of blood before taking a deep breathe. The bleeding stream began to flow into pen's tip. If the bloodflow ever started to slow, I pressed down on my finger to allow more to ooze out until my finger went numb, and I switched over to a new finger.

The bubbled up blood at the tip of this finger trembled along with the vibrations coming from the carriage's movement, but it was still easily sucked up up the pen. In no time at all, after repeating this process over and over again, more than half of my supply had been replenished. By that time, the blood flowing from my finger had slowed by that time, so I quickly wiped my finger off with a handkerchief and stopped the bleeding.

Finally, I shake together the blood and ink to complete the concoction.

And, at the moment that everything was finished, the moon came out from behind a cloud and a shimmer of silver light poured in through the carriage's window....."Monette?" and a small voice came out form the darkness.

When I looked up in surprise, I saw that Alexis had partly raised himself up in his seat, and he was looking at me. His dark brown eyes were wide open with astonishment, and when I noticed his gaze was turned to my still slightly bloody finger, I hurriedly hid my left arm behind my back.

“Monette...”

“A-Alexis, you’re up. You know it’s still too early to switch shifts...”

“Just now.....”

“Well, I was supplementing my ink reserves, but that’s done now.....”

I had also shoved my backpack behind my back as well to make it unseen by Alexis.

It is a handicraft that I had woven together myself to be cheap and easy to replace, but I have had it for years now. It is easy to put on over my armor without having to really pay any attention. Although tonight I cannot really slip it on tonight because my fingers really hurt, and because my body feels stiff, and because Alexis may have saw me...

I don’t know what to do, but my breathing is becoming more and more shallow, and it is getting harder to breathe inside my helmet. My heartbeat is outpacing the carriage’s rattling wheels, and I could swear I hear it banging away at my chest plate as if it were some kind of drum.

He must have seen.

My left hand. My left hand was exposed in the moonlight...

He probably saw my ugly arm and was reminded about just how ugly I was that day.

“Oh, I... hands.....”

“Monette, sorry, I...”

He saw it.

Alexis’ mutterings were always low and quiet, but right now he was even more so. But right now, I could not really care less about him and his confusion. My short gasps for air are echoing in my helmet, and something is strangling my neck.

He saw it.

My eyes are swimming in my head, and my line of sight is bouncing around inside my

helmet. I can't find anywhere to run to, and there is something beating on the back of my skull. Why is this carriage so damn narrow?

If I could fit, I would have already taken my armor, shoved myself out of the carriage window, and ran back to the old castle.

While all these thoughts were flurrying around inside me, Alexis roared out, "I'm sorry!"

At the same time, he reached out towards Percival who was sleeping next to him, and he vigorously pulled out the cushion that Percival was using as a pillow. The dull thud of Percival's head smacking into the window startled me and caused my eyes to focus.

"Haaaaaaaah?"

A voice echoed in the now utterly silent carriage.

Then Percival, who was moving around in a sluggish stupor, looked up appearing to be still very tired. When he blinked, his eyes remained shut tight for so long, I thought he had fallen back asleep for a second, but they eventually opened back up as he roared out "I'm still sleepy."

Alexis turned his face away from me, and even with my shallow, rapid breathing, he was still able to notice my sharp, icy glare.

As such a scene was beginning to play out inside the heavy atmosphere of the carriage, Percival gradually rose up with his sleep deprived expression, and he placed his hand on Alexis' shoulder. He tapped Alexis' shoulder lightly with a *pon* *pon*. It was dark, and Alexis was not moving, so Percival was unable to see Alexis' still open eyes.

Percival then left Alexis, and this time he approached me. For me, he would usually go in for a hug, and I would try to run away, but this time, I stayed as still as a statue while thinking peaceful thoughts.

Of course, this was in the mindset of, "I am already sleeping, so you don't need to help me fall asleep."

Percival seemed to buy it as he nodded satisfied before returning to his seat and entrusting his head back to the window.

Peace and quiet and darkness returned to the carriage.

Afterwards, Alexis mutters to me in a quiet voice that he would take over watch duty.

I grasped my left hand with my iron gauntlet so tightly that it hurt.

Did you really see it?

How long did you see it?

What did you think when you saw it?

I'm too scared to ask any of the questions running through my head and could only reply with a small "Yes," before he answered, "Good night Monette."

I took a deep breathe and tried to bury all my anxiety away, but as I lied back on the cushions and closed my eyes, I thought I could hear the word, "Misunderstood," echo inside my helmet as I drifted off.

"I don't know what happened last night, but please try to wake me up a little more normally next time."

Percival was complaining to Alexis while rubbing his head. Morning had come, and the sun had risen a few hours ago. When you looked out the carriage's window, you could see our destination, the city, off in the distance.

I did not feel like talking about last night, and when Percival started to make his complaints, I kept quiet while lying back on the carriage's cushions as Alexis continued to apologize while not touching on any reason why.

Chapter 24

Touching Sheaths in the City Accustomed to the Bizarre

The city where the horse-drawn carriage stopped at could not be said to be large compared to the urban area that I live in, but there are still a lot of people coming and going. When I listened in, I found out that there is a beach a half a day away, and apparently many merchants along with ordinary people come by in order to get their first looks at the sea.

Rather than an area where you would stop, plan, and prepare for a long voyage, this city is more of a crossroads that people just pass through.

Because there were mostly stalls rather than set stores, the second you step into the city, you are bombarded with the voices and calls of salespeople trying to separate the money from their potential customer's wallets. Those merchants looked positively rabid entreating the men and women passing by who would most likely not be here tomorrow. It was that kind of terrifying scene that I found myself dragged towards.

There were many interesting, beautiful, or cute things lined up along the road. Due to my armor, I found it much easier to peruse the stall venues rather than the set shops that I normally look through. Add that to what Percival had told me earlier—that they had already sent word ahead and booked me the most expensive room at a hotel famous for its room service and delicious orange juice—and I was ready to enjoy my time in this city.

So for a while, I took my time roaming the streets and checking out the street stalls.

The Idira family is a noble house large enough to have one of their daughters be engaged to the prince. If a daughter of such a family had secluded herself and was constantly wearing armor, then there is no way that such an interesting story would remain within a country's borders. People talk, and the border station is wide open.

Therefore, even in this town it is not surprising that people would know about me, but the looks that they were giving me were strange. They would all look over at me, but after a second, they would turn away. It is not like they were looking at me with disgust or hate like some other people did; it was more like they just did not care. I was just in their line of sight.

For example, whenever I would drop by the stalls, the people would be surprised for a moment, but it was only for that moment.

Indeed, when a couple running a stall looked at me, they clearly had some curiosity in their eyes, but when we started talking, the conversation quickly changed into me buying my meal. To them, it was far more important that my hunger be satisfied than any interest they had about why someone would become an armored girl.

It seems that this street is filled with stalls selling food from across the sea along with the local cuisine, so rather than any real interest in an armored girl, they were too busy trying to convince me to buy their food.

“No way, I have spent this entire day talking about nothing but food.”

“People come through this town from all over the country, and that’s not including the fellows I see from across the sea. I’m sick of being surprised at every single one of the bizarre customers I get to meet.”

“Is that so?”

“This one time a circus came through, and it was awful! Compared to them, some armor girl is nothing notable.”

I couldn’t help but smile as the shop keeper let out a loud and boisterous laugh.

Indeed, for these people, rather than a noble girl walking around in a suit of armor, I would have to actually be a walking suit of armor to hold their attention.

It is something that was unimaginable in the urban area where I used to live. Of course, even in a place like this, there were still one or two people watching me like they were looking at some strange animal. There were a few people whose stares I could feel, but they diverted their eyes when I turned to them, only for their eyes to return when I turn back around. There was one person who came up to me and asked if I was hot in here after beating on my back like a drum.

I told him that I was not hot, and then I walked away.

“What a nice city.”

Despite that horribly disgusting interaction, I still found myself smiling underneath my helmet.

Let’s visit this town again with Robertson when this is all over. I will sell off all the wine at the old castle for living funds, and I will live a quiet life by myself in this city where people rarely harass me. I could buy groceries and supplies every day instead of once a week.

But indeed, it does seem that the combination of an armor girl and spider is a rare occurrence... So I continued to wander the street stalls, and eventually I started to talk to a vendor with a sweet smile who ended up shaking his head shortly after I arrived. It is said that conversations and face-to-face meetings is an expectation in this town.

“Even if you are just looking, nobody will have any complaints. But if you just walk around not talking to anyone...”

“They’ll think I’m a bad person?”

“Well... It certainly doesn’t help.”

This shop owner who had actually called me over to his shop took the time to tell me more about the city, and when he was finished with his story, I made sure to take a mental note to be more personable with the vendors I visit.

Once he was finished though, I noticed what the nice stall owner was selling. Hair accessories the size of your palm that were imitating flowers. Inside one of the ornaments that the shopkeeper held out to me were lightly colored stones interspersed inside the silver petals that shined beautifully even inside his hands.

I took a look at everything else lined up on the shelves. Among the miscellaneous accessories, this hair ornament clearly stood out as an expensive item which had been carefully kept inside a box to prevent any damage from occurring to it. No, maybe it is kept inside a box because nobody would look at the other hanging accessories if this one was on clear display.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

It is. It would also go perfectly with my eyes, but even if I say that it would go perfectly with my eyes, it would not matter because you cannot see my eyes due to a silver helmet!

“People in this city are so cunning.”

The street vendor and I laughed together as I took the hair ornament that he was holding.

It is light, contrary to the glamorous look would suggest, yet it feels solid and well made. The workmanship given to the petals depicts a pattern I have never seen before, and when I asked, the street vendor told me that he had bought it from a peddler from across the sea.

The street vendor told me that he has not decided on a price yet as he cannot decide what something like this would be worth. I take another good, long look at it. My mind has already decided that I am going to buy it, but my heart was still caught on the fact of whether or not I could wear it.

During my hesitancy, a shadow passed over my hand.

“Hair accessories?”

Looking back at the familiar sounding voice, I saw that Percival was standing behind me.

His eyes were gently looking at the hair ornament in my hand. When he muttered the word, “light” while admiring the ornament, my gaze also shifted back to my hand. When the angle changes, the decorated stones receive the light in a different way, and they change color. It was a fascinating beauty that changes every time you move even a little.

“Are you buying it?”

“I’m just thinking about what to do. It’s cute, but even if I buy it there’s no point wearing it with the helmet...”

“I don’t think so.”

My eyes shifted away from the ornament and back to him. Did I mishear what Percival

said? But his blue eyes were still looking at only the hair ornament. There was no humor in his expression or jokes on his lips.

I tried to ask him what he meant, but before I could, he lifted his hand, and he took the hair ornament from my hand. In the back of my mind, I imagined what I would look like while wearing this silver flower in my hair as Percival held up the ornament.

To my head.

To be more accurate, to my helmet.

“Yes, it looks nice.”

“...But inside...”

“This color is really beautiful. Since Monette is silver all over, adding a flash of color like this could really add a little sparkle.”

“...You know, the person inside is not silver all over.”

I shut my eyes tight for a second and held back the urge to slap Percival. Meanwhile, Percival kept looking at the hair ornament for awhile before he let out a small gasp as he realized his mistake. After he turned away and sweated for a moment, it was easy to tell what he was thinking.

I could not bear to watch him sweat as he tried to figure out what to do, so I turned my eyes away from the stall entirely. A man and a woman were standing together alone in an accessory store—although with the armor, it might be hard to tell that I am a woman—yet nobody is paying us any mind. People might give us a glance as they pass by, is this town just this used to bizarre spectacles?

“...Hey, who is that inside the armor?”

“Eh, probably just some middle-aged guy who thinks armor looks cool.”

Or so I overhear.

The place where the street vendor who was talking to me until now had suddenly disappeared at some point. He is probably hiding and smiling to himself right now.

Whatever. I let out a sigh inside my helmet before starting to walk to the next shop.

“Monette, this...”

“I will not buy it after all. Even if I put it on underneath the helmet, nobody would actually be able to see it.”

I brushed off my pauldrons with a flick of my wrist, and told him that I would be back at the inn for dinner before continuing my walk around the street stalls.

Percival watched Monette’s silver back as it disappeared into the crowd, and when she was gone, his senses suddenly returned to him. His eyes turned back to the ornament in his hand, and when he went to put it back.....”Aren’t you going to buy it?” a voice spoke up behind him.

Percival jumped up in surprise, and when he spun around, he saw his lord looking at him curiously.

“Prince Alexis, I thought you were going to the inn.”

“Because I booked us a room, I thought about going for a walk. I was going to head back shortly, but then...”

Alexis’ deep brown eyes turned towards Percival’s hand. The flower hair ornament fit snugly in his palm.

“Are you buying that?”

“N, no..... It does not suit me.”

Alexis returned a smile to Percival’s joke.

But his smile slowly transformed into something more calm. He watched Percival slowly move to put the ornament back on a shelf.

“.....If you’re not going to buy it...”

“Prince Alexis?”

“If Percival won’t buy it, then I think I will.”

Alexis looked unwaveringly up into Percival’s eyes.

His expression looked resolute, and you could feel the hidden meaning behind those words. In response to his declaration, Percival’s hand which was about to return the ornament to a shelf shook, and it stopped a short distance away.

“That is...”

“Of course it won’t suit you. I cannot wear it either, but...”

If you are not buying something for yourself, then you are buying it for someone else—or so Alexis was saying with a jealous look. Alexis’ gaze seemed to be saying that Percival should let go of the ornament as soon as possible. Chances are, the second that Percival lets go of it, Alexis would take the ornament.

Then he would call out the street vendor still hidden away, and he would buy it. What he was going to do with it after he bought it does not even have to be said.

Imagining the scene, Percival moved his hand once again.

Bringing the ornament closer to him instead of towards the shelf.

“Miss Monette seemed to be quite taken with this, so I will buy this...!!”

Alexis nodded with a bitter smile, as Percival made such a declaration.

Not knowing that such a scene was taking place, Monette was making her own plans.

“You know, it is a full moon tonight, and I thought about going to a nearby lake. Would you like to come with me? Dress up stylishly for the evening, and I will have a chef prepare a good fish for us to eat.”

I was talking to a well-fortunate cat that I met on the roadside.

It rubbed its belly and let out a *nyan*. I have never talked to this cat before, so is that a yes or not...?

1. Another meaning for 'touching sheaths' here is fighting over the heart of a woman.

Chapter 25

The Cat and Witch Bathe in the Moonlight 1

After returning to the inn and finishing dinner, I took a look at Alexis's foot. He had been bitten by a poisonous snake, and his skin had swollen and turned yellow with some bright pink polka dots popping up here and there. It really was quite the fashionable look.

When I had reached my room, I removed my armor and relaxed in the bed of the best room in the hotel. Right when I was starting to get comfy though, there was a small *ton* *ton* on echoing from my door. I took a look at the time, but it was still too early for room service to stop by. How strange.

"Miss Monette, are you awake?"

After several seconds of knocking, I heard Percival's voice come from the other side of the door.

I rolled out of my nice, comfy bed and started to make my way over to the door. I had just taken off all my armor, and in addition, the lightening magic had worn off on it. I thought about recasting it when I had first removed it, but the bed looked so comfy..... curse these idle thoughts.

"Miss Monette, I have something I want to give to you."

"...Can't you give it to me tomorrow?"

Does my voice not muffled by the helmet sound ugly to your ears? I pressed myself against the door, anxiety brewing in my heart.

Because it was the best room in the hotel, the door was built solidly, and it was obviously locked. So it's all okay, or so I kept telling myself, but the thought of my unmuffled voice being heard caused my heart to run a marathon. If anyone were to enjoy a conversation through the door like this, then the only thing I could call them would be masochist.

However, I was able to endure my nerves and mortification, sealing away the trembling of my voice and locking it away deep inside my chest.

He could not have noticed the conflict that was occurring behind the door, but did he have questions about why the door would not open? After a few seconds, Percival asked what was wrong. When I told him that I had taken it off, I tried to lower my voice a bit to make it deeper and hide my natural voice.

I started to rub my arms together. Instead of the usual loud, hard clang of the metal, my bare skin is quite soft isn't it?

"You took it off?"

"Yes..... In order to renew the light weight magic spell, so....."

"Took it off... light weight... unarmored!?"

"...That's right, I'm unarmored."

In response to Percival's astonished voice, I answered with a sigh and wrapped myself back up in the blanket on top of my bed.

"Unarmored." What kind of word is that? Is it even a real word? It seems all this anxiousness has turned me stupid.

"I am sorry. It is just weird for me to hear that you are unarmored."

"Eeh? Is it because Percival thinks the armor is Monette?"

I gazed around my room while sweeping away Percival's remarks.

It might look like a display piece when set down like it is, but the armor lined up against the sofa certainly stood out compared to the rest of the gorgeous room. That thing is Monette... or at least that is what I started to call it inside my head while looking at it.

Then when I was about to sigh again, I heard a cough from the other side of the door.

Apparently he seems to have realized the insensitivity of his remarks, and he now wants to change the conversation in order to start off fresh.

“That’s why, I have something I want to pass along...”

“To Monette, or that person always wearing her?”

I said so with a little bit of malice, and I heard a cough a lot louder than the previous one in response. The voice yelling, “They’re both the same!” was rough and sounded like it came from a sleazy type of guy, but I still ended up laughing in spite of myself.

“What do you want to pass on?”

“Ah, well, it’s a sugar confection that looked tasty while I was looking around.”

So he bought it. At the thought of what type of sugary treat Percival had with him, I unwrapped myself from my blanket, if only a little.

When this journey started, the idea of getting something from Percival was not even funny, and when he bought me one, I refused to even look at it. After that, Percival harassed me with his usual behavior whenever he gets sleepy, and I accepted the sweet as payment for forgetting what had happened—although I would have wanted to forget about it even if he had not offered a bribe.

Perhaps he wants a repeat scenario of when I dropped that sugary confection in my armor? He is trying to supply the ammo for my embarrassment.

While I was running through the scenarios of why he might do something like this, Percival must have been getting impatient as he called out, “Well?” from the other side of the door.

What does he want? With the door, I cannot see what expression he is making, and I obviously cannot open it to check.

“In that case, please leave it in front of the door. I will take it when Percival leaves.”

“Oh, I got it. Well, I mean, about this though.....”

“This?”

“No, it’s nothing... I will give this as well on another occasion...”

“This is?”

What story? I am confused.

However, Percival would not go into detail about whatever “this” was, and when I asked for more, he did not answer me and instead just told me good night before quickly disappearing down the hallway.

I was very confused, but I ended up shrugging and pushing it out of my mind. I walked towards my suit of armor next to the sofa, cast lightening magic on it, and grabbed the left behind confection after putting the armor on.

“Alexis is constantly attracting bad luck to hamper us, and Percival is really troublesome when he is sleepy. With these two people, traveling like this can really be a pain.”

I threw the sugar confection in my mouth while making my complaints heard. The moderate sweetness and aroma spread inside my mouth, and my expression naturally melted inside my helmet.

I was currently walking inside a forest that was a short distance away from the town with a fancy looking kitty-cat joining me at my side.

After I had cast the weight reduction magic on my armor, I decided to take a leisurely night stroll. As I left the inn and walked for awhile, this cute cat appeared from out of nowhere, and he has been walking beside me ever since. He would diligently follow me along, but occasionally, as if he knew where I was going to go, he would take a step forward leading the way.

Such a mysterious cat. Fighting back the urge to just get on my hands and knees and cuddle up to him, I peeked back over my shoulder where he was strutting along. He had a fascinating color scheme with a pale hair color mix of white and gray with a splotch of black around the nose. Most interesting were his beautiful jewel-like eyes that were a deep blue on the right and a bright yellow on the left.

Whit his slim and supple body, you could easily feel a fascinating charm. But even if he was fat, the loveliness of a cat would not change, and its soft, flowing tail was beautifully swaying with every step it took.

“Hey, do you hate insects or like to bully spiders? If you are fine with it, how about

living together when I move to this city?”

I decided to send out an invite.

A cat and a spider, dissimilar, but could they coexist?

I walked around aimlessly, entertaining such peaceful thoughts right up right up until I saw a sight that took my breath away and blew off any other idle thought I had. It was the type of beauty that most people would only ever see at most once in their lives.

The full moon floating in the sky was reflected on a lake’s surface like a radiant jewel.

Even though there were no decorations or craftsmanship involved, the natural sight provided a beautiful scene straight from a fairytale. But most of all, there was a magical energy that played on the senses in the air...

The area was a power spot that only a witch could feel. Together with the full moon, this power enveloped me, a still fledgling witch, in its warm embrace.

“Amazing... To think a place like this really exists.”

The whole experience brings me to awe as I walk closer to the lake.

The water felt warm when I immersed my hands at the lake’s edge, and ripples radiated away from me as I stroked the water’s surface.

When I pulled out a piece of parchment from my pouch, I wanted to hit myself when I noticed that parts of it had gotten wet. “I should have pulled it out before starting to play in the water,” I tell myself.

The cat was resting in front of me with the lake creating a perfect background as if everything had been set up beforehand for me.

“I can draw this! With such a beautiful model, I will be able to draw even better than usual.”

Sizing up my subject, I used one hand to measure up the cat, and with my other hand *Sha~!* my pen rocketed across the parchment. I was giving the cat a bit of an intimidating air, but he would still look cute so it will be fine.

.....There is a bit of sand on its hind legs, but I'm sure it will be pleased with the details.

"Good, apart. I should clear out any people."

Thinking so, I started casting a spell on the ground.

I took a small breathe before reciting the activation words. At that moment, the cats ears perked up along with the tip of its tail, and it started to curiously look around itself.

It must have felt a change in the air, so I petted the tip of its nose in order to calm him down some. Nevertheless, to be able to quickly adapt to a human's affairs and to notice the effects of a spell, you really are a mysterious cat aren't you?"

"It's alright. I just cleared out any prying eyes for a bit."

The cat eventually calmed down underneath the palm of my armor.

The previous spell is now active. My spell now covers the whole area, and while it will not last long, people will not come by this lake so long as it is still in effect. Anyone who was nearby will confusedly make their way away, and anyone coming over here will unconsciously end up going in a different direction.

It is a simple spell to use, but it is effective at driving away any unnecessary onlookers. However, uneasiness still remained in my heart, so just for the sake of doubt, I drew two more spells into the ground beside me. Is it a little excessive?

However if my skin is going to be exposed, I will end up restless without at least this much preparation.

I took a quick look around to confirm the spell's effect, and I started to take off my armor.

Chapter 26

The Cat and Witch Bathe in the Moonlight 2

Taking off my armor piece by piece, my skin was gradually exposed to the night air.

Only wearing a white camisole and my underwear, I felt a little tinge of fear rather than anxiety for the first time in years, but because of the overflowing magical power from the lake, I was calmer than I thought I would be. Or perhaps it is because of this cat that was in the middle of sniffing every piece of armor that I took off.

Bemused, I removed all of my armor before I dipped my feet into the shining pool of water. It was not cold, but it wasn't really warm either. It was serenely pleasant, and I could feel my aches and pains disappear."

Sitting on some rocks, I moved my legs around inside the water a bit causing waves to ripple around the edge. *Pshaw!* Then I violently kicked the water's edge, disrupting the waves and kicking up a few droplets of water that sparkled in the moonlight. What a beautiful sight. To think that there was ever a time in my life where I could live without such a spectacular view. I feel so comfortable.

Nicest of all, the moonlight poured down onto my exposed legs floating inside the crystal clear pool, filling me with magic power from the tips of my toes up throughout the rest of my body.

And for awhile, the only sound that could be heard was the water dancing along the lake's edge, but then the grass began to shake.

Something was there. My line of sight reflexively turned towards where the grass had been disturbed.

But whatever had disturbed the vegetation was nowhere to be seen. After watching for awhile, the leaves began to move again, but whatever it was, it was gradually moving away from me, and eventually the sounds of leaves rubbing against one another became smaller as well. Still, I kept staring in the direction that the sound had come from even after everything had long stopped moving and silence returned. Soon, only the sound of water droplets, trickling down onto the lake's surface could be heard

echoing inside this enclosed space.

“What was that.....”

I muttered to myself underneath my breath.

It was certainly a living thing that moved through the plants. However, whatever that ‘something’ was, it was most likely an animal as when it was discovered, that ‘something’ just kept moving without tripping itself or hastening its escape. Not to mention I placed a spell to drive away all unwanted visitors. I actually double and triple-placed the spell.

Only a witch slayer would be able to get by that, and they have all been dead since long ago.

The only thing that that ‘something’ could be that would act like that and bypass my spells is an animal. Therefore, there was no reason for my heart to beat right out of my chest. Animals and humans have a different sense of beauty, and of course, they are both different from a spider’s. I lived with Robertson at the old castle, and I was made aware of the differences when I picked up the courage to remove my armor in front of him for the first time.

The previous shaking is probably from an animal that had come to drink the water but had decided against it when they saw a human present.

Judging from the sound, I cannot think of it as a small animal, but could I say it was the size of a person from the sound and how the trees moved? Maybe I am overestimating the size, and it was actually a weak child who felt threatened by me.

“The poor thing probably just wanted some water.”

I spoke to the cat sitting beside me. It had done nothing but stare at me since I started playing in the water awhile ago, but once whatever that ‘something’ was had disturbed the bushes, its eyes had shot open and its gaze had also been fixed on where the noise was coming from.

It seemed to be very wary, so I tried to calm it down by stroking its back..... but it managed to avoid my outstretched hand. Does it not want to be touched by a wet hand? So I decided to poke his nose instead. A single drop of water stuck to the tip which he ended up licking off with a *pero*.

It seems that his vigilance was placated a bit, and I ended up returning a bitter smile when he started looking up at me with his eyes closed and relaxed.

“I wish you could join me. This lake is full of magic power, and I’m a witch... You could become my familiar.”

I really said it only as a joke, but the cat might have understood my feelings because he started rubbing his nose against my arm. I settle him down and he comforts me. Such a good kitty.

He ended up jumping down from his seat next to me to a rock a little ways below us, and from there, he dipped his tail into the lake. Once the fluffy tail hit the water, the hairs at the end of it started to swirl around along with the waves my feet were making.

What on earth is he doing? Right when I was thinking that, the cat slowly raised his tail out of the water, and then slapped it back down with a *pat*.....

And then his fluffy body began to shine with power.

The racket of iron armor beating against itself echoed out as I charged down the corridor, skidded to a halt, and started pounding on a door.

It is possible that my gentle pounding may have been a little rough, but as this is an emergency situation, I feel that I should be excused.

Besides, thanks to that, I heard the people on the other side of the door scrambling to respond immediately. When the door swung open, Alexis’s head popped out.

“Monette, what’s wrong?”

“Alexis, this child... Hm? Where’s Percival?”

“If it’s Percival, he is doing some work outside..... Eh? Is that cat shining!?”

Alexis’s eyes popped out of his head when he saw what I was holding in my iron hands.

But I suppose that type of reaction is normal. The cat really is shining after all. Anyone would be captivated by his beauty. Especially his tail. When he waved it around, the

light would leave a trail creating radiant artwork wherever we went. Of course, he was an adorable cat before he started to glow, but all of those features were augmented with this illustrious light.

I looked back and forth between the cat and the bewildered Alexis, and while Alexis was enraptured with this strange sight, I tried to explain this cat's identity. However, at that moment, a rough voice interrupted me.

"Oh Concetta, tonight you are shining especially well."

The speaker was a passing waiter for the inn.

I swallowed my words as the waiter came towards us while Alexis looked more confused than ever—shifting his gaze back and forth between 'Concetta?' and the waiter.

"Who is Concetta?"

"That's this child's name. It shines like this sometimes."

The servant stretched out his hand and started to gently pet the shining Concetta's head.

Concetta made a sound deep in its throat, blinking accordingly. When I started to pet the side of his neck along with the waiter, the purring became louder and melted in my arms.

What a mysterious cat..... No, maybe this goes beyond what you would call just a mysterious cat.

Well, whatever. Concetta is adorable in my arms, so I scratched his nose a bit which made his tail light up all the more. Alexis was the only person who really cared though. The waiter's petting became a little more vigorous, and between the two of us, we had Concetta rolling around in my arms.

"So Concetta..... belongs to a witch?"

"Yes he is a magic little kitty. He usually lives with his master in the valley, but every once in awhile he comes down here to play and shine a bit."

While answering Alexis's question, the waiter looked up at the clock, and suddenly remembering he had a job, turned a shade of blue shockingly similar to Concetta's beautiful glow and left down the hallway. I watched him go for a second, but my attention was once again preoccupied my Concetta after.

This shining is certainly flashy even for a witch's familiar. But in this town, even Concetta is treated like this. Indeed, a noble lady who always wears armor certainly lacks impact when compared to a glowing cat.

But I guess it is okay to have a slight larger reaction.

While thinking so, I continued to watch Concetta resting in my arms, but he..... Originally this cat was walking around with his eyes half closed, but now his eyes now were trembling and misty.

Alexis and I watched him fight to stay awake in my arms. It was a sight that could be called strange. In a way, it was stranger than his glowing tail that left light trails as it orbited around.

Even though that waiter's words are still dancing around on my brain, it is impossible to get worked up with something like this looking right at me. Besides, Concetta is not going anywhere, and his eyes can no longer stay open at this point.

"...For now, let's talk about it tomorrow."

"...Agreed."

The tension is irreparably low now, so Alexis and I agreed to talk tomorrow.

The next morning.

"After all, this is way too amazing!" Once I woke up, I managed to regain some of my excitement, so I took Concetta and raced down to the inn's dining room. By the way, Concetta's glow fell off sometime while I was asleep, but whenever he shakes a little, glitter disperses into the air.

I pushed the attitude of last night's waiter into the farthest corner of my mind, raising my tension to its maximum. I made a straight dash to the table those two were seated

at. Alexis, who's mouth was half full of bread, noticed my approach and lifted his head up to look at me. He looked like he was already almost finished eating. Percival was still preoccupied with his morning soup, but I have no doubt that he knew I was here.

"Concetta is a witch's familiar!"

Once again, it is possible that I was a little rough in my entrance, and it could be said that my excitement was possibly a little exaggerated and unnecessary. Of course, when compared to that lack of tension perpetuated by a certain waiter, I can definitely say that a little excitement in this type of situation is certainly better than none at all.

Even though something like this is obviously a fact,

"Good morning Monette. Good morning Concetta. Breakfast?"

Alexis was still in a tensionless state. At least look a little surprised please.

And Percival, he never even raised his face at my colorful entrance. All he has done is sigh deeply with his nose buried into his soup.

"...I miss the lake."

I grumbled in melancholy.

Chapter 27

The Lady of the Lake and the Depressing Departure

“She looked so noble and mysterious with the way she received the moonlight off of the lake’s surface. The glow of the water wrapped around her... oh what beauty! I feared that if I lingered my gaze would defile her, so I quickly left.”

“Percival, you’ve told this story 11 times already.”

“Wrong again prince. That was his 13th time telling it.”

“Hauh.”

As I let out a loud, sarcastic groan, Percival completely ignored me and continued to recount his riveting tale.

Last night, in order to procure some extra traveling expenses, Percival took a small job and entered the forest by himself.

There, he discovered a woman illuminated in the moonlight, and he was taken by her beauty...

Now he won’t stop sighing, staring off into the clouds, and telling Alexis and I about every little, inconsequential detail. As many as 13 times..... No, it’s 14 now, and I am honestly too annoyed at this point to care about a single word he is saying.

“It’s at 15 already,” Alexis was muttering while holding Concetta.

He was right. The story kept changing since it had first been told–this morning. As time goes on, Percival seems to be remembering more and more as one adjective was quickly becoming twenty.

“The beauty, the elegance in how she moved, and that transience that burned my heart just by looking at her–she was most certainly a noble existence. Surely she is a princess from a foreign country who must hide herself away for some reason, only for her figure to end up being revealed by the moonlight on the lakeside.....”

“I was by the lake, and I did not see nor hear anyone.”

How did we miss each other? That’s the thought that keeps running through my head.

Last night, I entered the forest just as Percival did, and I enjoyed a little soak alongside the lake. But I did not see any sign of some lakeside maiden. On the contrary, with the several spells I placed, it became impossible for anyone to approach the lake, so it could be said that it was obvious that there was no one else there.

So this ‘Lady of the Lake’ came either before I arrived or after my spell dispersed. Or perhaps there is another lake in a different place?..... I cannot deny the possibility that Percival has finally snapped and it was all a hallucination.

Although in the end, the story has nothing to do with me, but my words seemed to have caught Percival’s attention. His blue eyes were no longer staring up at the clouds, and they were now looking a little more serious, a little more focused, and squarely at me.

“Miss Monette was also at the lake?”

“Yes. I was playing by the water with Concetta.”

“Rust.”

“I will not rust.”

Percival nodded his head as if he had been convinced by some powerful argument. But near the end, I could hear him mumble a few things about how “if I am going out at night, I should let him know” and “whether there is a cause to be wary or not, a man would be worried if their friend was walking around at night alone, so I should let him come with.”

Honestly, it makes me feel a little uncomfortable, so I gave Concetta’s head a little pat before changing the subject.

“Perhaps Concetta was sent here by the witch to guide us.”

“That would mean that the witch is aware of us. I wonder if she saw us somewhere.”

I gave Concetta one last good pet on the back of his shoulder before handing him back

to Alexis as he started voicing off times where the witch might have seen us. It is hard to tell him though that he is most likely correct and incorrect.

The other party is a witch—a genuine witch who wields knowledge that has been passed down and improved for generations. Even without having to actually walk around, she could easily sense when someone has entered her territory.

Above all, I am another witch, and Alexis holds a curse. I am not sure what kind of technique she used, but there would be no way for us to respond. Surely the witch who lives in the nearby valley saw that a foreigner had entered her territory and ordered Concetta to guide them.

The only question is, is it an act of hospitality or hostility?

Either way, the witch is willing to meet.

Saying that much, Alexis's expression softened slightly.

With me by his side, it is true that Alexis had not received too many incidents from his bad luck curse, but if that was all he wanted, then there would have been no need for this trip. No matter that Alexis is a prince, with the other party being a witch, there was no guarantee that he would have been granted an audience with her. Although I would have liked to see him try to force a meeting against all those spells. Even then, though, he would not be able to see her if she just turned herself invisible. Or she cast a spell to confuse him so that he would never be able to find his way out of the valley.

Although I had prepped him for such possibilities, here was a guide sent by the witch the very first day we arrived to town. All the little tragic scenarios I worked my way into his head were blown away into nothingness.

Although I too wanted to meet her, I was still wary.

The witch we are about to meet could be the very witch who placed the curse on Alexis in the first place. It could be that she is inviting us over, and Alexis could end up in even worse condition than he is now.

That is, it could be a trap.

Once I made them aware of this, Percival's eyes became a bit of serious, and his attention focused. Alexis on the other hand just gave me an overexaggerated nod to

show that he understood before saying, "It's still good." There was no fear nor hesitation in his demeanor.

On the contrary, he thanked me for warning him and smiled.

Uncomfortable.

I turned away from the both of them and started to rub Concetta's stomach.

"Um, I have something unfortunate that I have to report to you Monette."

Compared to when he talked to me before, Alexis's spirit seemed a little bit dimmer.

After such a mood swing, I could not help but tilt my helm wondering what had happened. Immediately after leaving the inn and preparing for our departure, Concetta seemed ready to guide us on our way, and he has been resting at my feet this entire time. What could be so unfortunate during a time when haste must be made?

But not only Alexis, Percival was also blatantly avoiding eye contact with me, choosing to instead focus on a fluffy looking cloud hanging in the sky. I motioned them to hurry up and get on with it with my iron gauntlet.

"According to what I have heard, it seems to be necessary to go through the forest in order to reach where the witch lives."

"Alright."

"The valley itself is quite the severe terrain, and it starts immediately after the forest..... so....."

"So?"

"..... so we can't ride a carriage."

".....Huh?....."

"That is, from here, on foot....."

As time went on, Alexis's words continued to get smaller, and I could not hear anything he said after the word, "walking." But that was all I needed to hear. I promptly turned on my heel back towards the inn, and I told them, "I'm not going."

I am a little sorry, but there is absolutely no way I am going to walk through a treacherous valley and forest on foot. But at that moment, Alexis and Percival's hands clutched my arms, holding me firmly in place.

"It's not impossible! I will carry the baggage, so let's go!"

"I don't want to!"

"Miss Monette, please wait! I will carry you the whole way!"

"I don't want that even more!"

"This isn't a joke!" I cried.

But Percival and Alexis were not going to withdraw, and their hands only held onto my armor all the tighter. If I were to return to the inn right now, they probably think that their journey would end here and now, and that belief made them not want to let me go. As a matter of fact, they had already started to drag me, and my iron boots gouged out the ground in front of me.

They were truly desperate. The odds of them being able to meet with the witch would drop in a single stroke if I was not with them. Well, it might be more fitting to say that it would drop to none. In fact, Concetta, who was sent to guide us, saw me try to go back to the hotel and ended up making his way back as well. From that attitude, it can be inferred that the only one truly invited was me.

In order for Alexis's curse to be put to an end, I must face an evil forest and a treacherous valley.....

Based on all that, all three of us were desperate, but I was outnumbered.

No matter my petitions and objections, I was reduced to baggage and dragged along.

Chapter 28

Through the Valley Where the Witch Lives

“Whatever happened to, ‘I absolutely won’t force you to do something you don’t want to do?’ Liars.”

While I was muttering my complaints inside my helmet, Concetta was walking right alongside me, zigging around my feet, rubbing his glossy coat up against my boots.

Meanwhile, Alexis and Percival were quite aware of their guilt and continued to silently march through the woods—only speaking out whenever Alexis was attacked by some insects or snakes.

After awhile, the two of them started to look around them and stopped pattering forward. Naturally, I stopped walking right behind them.

They were looking at the foliage around us intensely. Before departing, I overheard the owner of the inn describe a few of the dangers inside the forest, and they seemed to be comparing those stories with our current location.

Looking around myself as if to imitate them, I saw a small hut in the distance. It must be a landmark for people making their way through the forest.

While thinking about that, I went ahead and took a look at the rest of our surroundings until my helmet made its typical metallic grinding noise as I tilted my head. I feel like there is a strange incongruity in the appearance of Alexis and Percival who are still looking at the hut.

I wonder what it is. Originally, the two were not the same height, but was there actually a full head difference between the two? No, it’s more than just a head..... more..... Rather, it seems like the height difference is actually growing right now.....

“Percival, are you two standing in a swamp?”

“Oh, well the ground is a bit slack, and there are a few places that are said to be bottomless, but..... Prince Alexis!”

He finally saw what I was saying and noticed that Alexis was gradually sinking into the dirt. Percival immediately grabbed hold of his arm.

Alexis had also returned to his senses by now and looked down at his feet, but by now it was already too late and the swamp had swallowed his ankles. With just the power of his two legs, it was impossible for him to get out.

“Prince Alexis, calm down and try not to move too much. I will lift you!”

“Wait a minute! If you get too close, then your feet will be swallowed up as well.....”

“Damn, the mud won’t give me any leverage..... Miss Monette, it’s dangerous over here! Move away to safety!”

With my heavy armor, I wouldn’t be any help even if I wanted to, so the second I realized Alexis was sinking, I moved to safe, solid ground. I most definitely did not take my distance because I hold some petty grudge. “As you said, I will absolutely not get near.”

Of course my boots are now a little dirty from the mud. Hmm, maybe if I were to soak myself in the swamp water, but then the muddy water would get in through the armor’s gaps..... While carefreely thinking about how best to polish up my armor after all this, I pulled out a piece of parchment from my pouch and started to draw. I squinted through my helm and took extra care with my lines this time around since I was drawing a portrait of Concetta when she was leisurely walking around my legs earlier. Once it was all finished, I placed it on top of the mud.

By now, Alexis and Percival had no room to care about appearances or the surroundings. Both of Percival’s feet had sunk into the muck, and Alexis was only becoming embedded deeper. It was getting to the point where Percival would have trouble saving himself let alone the prince. Although it was a slow progression, it was steady, and after an hour, Alexis would be completely buried.

How irritating. Taking one last look at my masterpiece, I thought about what a pity it was before shoving it deeper into the mud.

Grabbing hold of my baggage, I hugged Concetta close to my chest and hid behind a tree a fair distance away..... ,

“Bomb.”

and I cast my incantation.

At that moment, all the banter and panic from before died away, and the screams of the two men were all that was left in its place..... that and the large amount of mud flying towards me. It scattered around in all directions, polluting the surrounding grassy fields, but thanks to the tree's protection, I managed to keep my armor clean and Concetta's glossy fur sparkling.

I left the shadow of the tree after the mud was finished falling where it may, and I rejoined my two companions.

Alexis and Percival were both sitting despondently on the ground, covered from head to toe with bits of mud from the marsh. I wrinkled my nose underneath my helm at the sight and covered my visor with my gauntlet.

When I asked them to please not come near me, they both nodded powerlessly..... *Plop* and a chunk of mud fell out of their hair.

The only sounds that could be heard in the forest after that was the sound of feet being dragged through the mud, the *kashan* *kashan* of iron boots walking, and the occasional chirping of birds alongside the mewling of a cat.

Soon the ground tilted downward, and the forest gave way to a deep valley. Once the valley was fully in view before us, Concetta started to stir. Her fur began to glow once again with magic power, and she jumped from my iron arms to the ground below. Taking a few steps in one direction, Concetta then stopped, turned back towards me, and meowed.

“Is it that way?”

“Perhaps. Let's follow...”

I broke off midway through my sentence because the direction that Concetta was directing me to go with her tail was a place where people should not go. The rocks jutting skyward were clearly telling me to go away.

Obviously there was no staircase, but the rise was also lacking anything that could be used as a handrail. I blinked a couple times before taking a deep breath.....

“N-.....”

No way! I swallowed those words before they could be said.

If I outright refuse, then both of my arms will be grabbed and dragged because the muddy Alexis and Percival are standing right next to me. Both of their deep brown and blue eyes are set right on me. They will act the second I say something.

I refuse to be carried by some mud-covered guy..... and so a tear comes to my eye as I realize I have no choice but to make the climb.

When climbing the rock, Percival headed up first.

He made it look so easy, grabbing hold of any odd rock, he was able to find his footing and scaffolded up the rock wall. Once he was at the top, he had us pack up the luggage, and we hoisted that up. Once everything was taken care of, it was Alexis's and my turn to climb up by hand. Percival tells us it is easy, but obviously Alexis—who spent all his time perusing academics in the castle—and me—who enjoyed my solitude inside the old castle—would have a harder time than some muscle-brained guard.

Especially me with my full-bodied armor.

Although I had used magic to eliminate any weight that the armor has, there is still an issue with its size and hardness. For example, I can't wedge my foot between these stupid rocks! This shape is really unsuitable for rock climbing.

Percival stretched his arm out towards me, offering to allow me bypass that last rock and help me up.

I grabbed hold. The appearance of a handsome-looking man reaching his hand out is a rare sight, and if it was a regular girl, their cheeks would surely be died crimson.

While pointlessly thinking about such things, I kicked off the dusty rocks as his thick arm pulled me to the top. Percival's other arm wrapped around my back to make sure that I did fall backwards, but since I was covered in iron, he was directly touching anything, so there was no need for any embarrassment on that point.

If it was just that, then there wouldn't be any problems.

“Ugh.....” But then Percival grunted while he was helping me up.

Even though with the luggage, and even when helping Alexis up, he did not leak out even a squeak—yet he grunted when picking me up. For a second there, I thought it might have just been a noise he made that just meant, “Let’s go,” but no, it was definitely a type of sound you make when you are lifting something heavy.

If he was able to bear Alexis’s weight and held back because he was afraid of being rude to his prince, then surely he could have extended me the same courtesy.

“Percival, you are extremely rude.”

“What?”

“The way you grunted earlier, you were trying to say that I am fat or something right?”

When I confronted him about it, his eyes went stupidly round.

Was he the type that could only realize his own malice when it was directly pointed out to him? And even if there was no meaning in that grunt, then when he realized how I took his words, then he should have apologized for the misunderstanding and we both would have walked away. Instead, he does something else.

“I am saying that you’re fat?”

“Are you going to deliberately grunt and then just say it was nothing?”

“No, rather I think..... I pictured you more muscular than anything else.”

“Hah!?”

“Well, I just always pictured Miss Monette to be muscular with hard abdominal muscles underneath that armor.”

“Excuse me! This is no longer in the realm of just being rude!”

I shouted out.

It is no longer just about whether or not he grunted when lifting me up. Why on earth would you imagine a young lady like myself as some super macho woman with huge

muscles and hard abdominal muscles? As a matter of fact, where is he getting the idea that I have that kind of strength in the first place? I understand that he does not believe I am fat, but I am extremely dissatisfied with this as well.

I told him that he was not even close while kicking a stray pebble down the cliffside we had just climbed. Percival obviously apologized. He tried to make up an excuse saying, "But the armor.....," but I was in no mood to listen. When I dismissed his excuse, I thought he was going to say something else, but he instead just shook his head and said, "Nothing."

So frustrating.

With our anger exposed to one another, we continued following Concetta's directions, walking along the valley's edge, and eventually climbing up another group of rocks..... and once again, a hand reached down to help me up.

".....Percival."

"Come on. I'll help you up."

"If you grunt, I'll curse you."

"I know. I won't grunt."

I refused to take his hand until he promised not to grunt. Even as a joke.

Then I took hold of the offered hand. Once I was lifted to the top, I took a look at the lying luggage.

Concetta, the most easy-going of our group, was resting on my trunk. Ever since we first started the climb, she has been resting on top of the trunk and was carried up along with it. He was always careful not to move around on the luggage, so Percival did not mind carrying him up. Still, no matter how cute or noble of a cat he is, even if he is our guide, this was still a bit too unfair.

So envious..... Thinking so, I flicked Concetta on his nose. A short nya came back as a reply.

Watching our interactions, Alexis and Percival shared a look.

They gave each other a deep nod after which Alexis took hold of all the luggage, and Percival gave a large smile while spreading out both his arms.

Almost as if he was saying, "Come on in."

Actually, Percival really was saying that out loud. Meanwhile Alexis was standing next to him saying, "C'mon Monette. Don't be shy."

I looked at the both of them for awhile, unsure of what to say. So I decided in the end to say nothing. I walked past them both, giving them nothing besides a cold glare for their troubles. I completely neglected them because I have nothing to motivate me to associate with this display of theirs.

Concetta seems to agree with me as he jumped off of the trunk and followed after me. Once the two of us had passed them by, I did not forget to kick up a little sand with the back of my foot.

Meanwhile the two were left frozen after being completely ignored.....

"Miss Monette, please respond! At least tell some kind of joke.....!!"

"Why should I respond to something so troublesome?"

"Even Concetta won't look at us....."

To the two who were following after us, being troublesome, I looked back to try and glare at them through my helm..... but I was stopped by some letters drawn on the rock wall.

At first glance it only looked like a crack in the rock, and you would not notice it if you were not a witch. They were magic words. The type of writing that only a witch could read.

"Welcome. Would you like sugar in your tea?"

I made a small smile when I saw those letters, and I started to pet Concetta who had moved by my side.

"Sugar for two."

Chapter 29

Armored Girl and Senior Witch(?)

There was a crevice covered in shadows by the surrounding rocks, and when I looked in, I could see that the road continued on through it.

Is there a door back there? Inside the rock face, it almost looked like there were some disproportionate doorways embedded into the rock, but there was an order to them that seemed to say, "There is something here."

However, I was only able to find it because I noticed and understood the magic words on the wall. Without them, I never would have looked into the rocks' shadows, and as a matter of fact, I never would have thought to look up here in the first place if Concetta was not acting as a guide.

You need Concetta and a person who can read magic words in order to reach this place.

Actually neither Alexis nor Percival had noticed my discovery, and they had continued walking by until I drew their attention back over.

"The witch is here?"

"Yeah, there's no mistake. This place is definitely a witch's house that cannot be found except by another witch."

When I gave him my affirmation, Alexis gulped nervously.

He was prepared, but I could see the tension in his creased brow. Percival as well was not lacking tension as he examined that pathway through the crevice with the utmost vigilance.

With these two so on edge, I could feel my own heart beating intensely underneath my armor. For the first time, I was about to meet a witch. A real witch. Whether the two of us will get along well, whether she will accept me as a witch, the anxiety was keeping hold on my heart.

Completely oblivious to what was running through our heads, Concetta jumped forward into the crevice and let out a small nya to signal us that we should follow. The way he was skipping along, it was quite obvious that he was excited to see his master again.

When we reached a large, wooden door imbedded in the rock, Concetta let out another small nya. A few second later, the door slowly opened, and a woman appeared.

Monette marveled at this woman's beauty, and even Alexis and Percival found their breaths caught in their throat.

Brilliant black hair elegantly swayed like ocean waves every time she took a step. A slim body wrapped up in a dark black one-piece that emphasized her long limbs with a shawl wrapped over her to protect her shoulders and chest.

When she saw Concetta, a soft arc spread with her shapely lips across her face as she lifted the cat in her thin arms. When she rubbed Concetta's cheeks with her porcelain white hand, she appeared like a saintly mother, but she had an air about her that made her seem like she wasn't even real.

This person was a real witch..... I couldn't take my eyes off her, and the witch in turn pointed her gaze towards me after giving Concetta a kiss on the forehead.....

"Hello! I welcome you beginner witch! Make yourself at home. Ah, but the two men are filthy. Wash yourselves up first."

The first part was spoken very tenderly. A sharp contrast from the cold tone she took with the other two.....

The name of my fellow witch(?) is Gina Abarkin. The Abarkin family is made up of a long line of witches, and Gina is a witch(?) with expertise in the culmination of knowledge gathered during that long line.

A wonderful mansion was built behind the door where she(?) came out of, and on our way there, she told me she lived there with Concetta. She guided me inside to a table where a couple cups of tea had already been prepared. It was such a wonderfully

decorated room that I almost forgot we were inside a valley.

As expected of a witch(?)..... While I was marveling at the scenery around me, Gina was the first of us to speak up saying, "I know what you want to talk about." From there, she affirmed that she had nothing to do with the curse plaguing Alexis.

She told me that she had heard rumors about the 'unfaithful prince' and the 'armored girl' before, and at the moment that I crossed the border, she knew that there was magic involved with both of them. She also figured out that we were both crossing the border together in order to meet with her.

So she sent Concetta over to act as a guide. When Gina said his name, Concetta started to move about in her(?) embrace, rubbing his nose against the palm of her hand. His nose was petted, then his head, and then not yet satisfied, he rubbed himself up against her palm again. His eyes remained in a half- closed state of ecstasy as his body continued to roll around on Gina's lap.

The figure of Gina stroking Concetta was beautiful, "You will get fat if you keep lazing around like this....."

though her voice was just a little cold.

"I am sorry, but I know nothing about Alexis's curse."

Gina made a blunt declaration to Alexis while stroking Concetta.

Even though he did not have the opportunity to explain why he was here, she was still able to figure it out, and she instantly shot him down. Alexis simply nodded back, relaxing a little bit of the tension he had built up. He released a deep breath, and a painful expression crossed his face.

There was relief that Gina was not the criminal there, but he must also feel a bit of despair as well now that he knows the solution is still further down the road. A cold sweat had begun to form on his brow, and he could not hide the uneasiness in his expression... what had he even come here for?

"I could tell who cursed you if I saw them though."

Gina made a rather bold claim as if it was just a matter of fact. I stopped mid-sip of my tea to look back up to her-But without saying anything more, she was just casually

dropping two lumps of sugar into her tea. She truly is a real experienced witch. I had a little doubt towards that bold voice of hers for a second, but a witch will not go back on something they said under good will. It is a pride in their own self-declarations...

When I asked, it seems that no matter how venerable a witch is, it seems like it is difficult to pick apart a spell that they have never seen before. In addition, the curse affecting Alexis is too aggravated and effective; she would not know where to even start in examining it.

Even so, it seems that you can identify the person who cast such a spell at a glance. It is a basic skill for witches. As a still beginner witch, I lack this skill. I could not even tell that Alexis was cursed by looking at him. If the witch who had cast the spell was standing right in front of me, I would never be able to tell.

This is the skill of a witch who has had her skills passed down for generations. I watched Gina in blank amazement, and noticing my gaze, Gina in turn smiled at me. The same sex... probably the same sex..... it was such a beautiful smile that it made even my cheeks blush red. For the first time ever, I was thankful for my helmet covering up the weird expression I was probably making.

While I was blinded by Gina's overpowering beauty, Alexis called her name to try and bring the conversation back onto him while deeply bowing his head. He had just washed off all the mud off of him, and a few water droplets dripped off his still wet hair.

"I am sorry to suddenly appear like this with my issues, but please, can you lend me your strength?"

Following along with his prince, Percival bowed his head down and entreated her for her help as well. Before this witch's curse, they were just powerless humans, and they knew no other witches they could ask for help.

These two's pleas brought me out of my infatuation, but I did not bow my head, instead moving my gaze between the two of them and Gina.

"Hey Monette, what will you do?"

"Me?"

"Well, if Monette wants to remain in this town, then I will not go. Let's live together

here.”

Completely ignoring Alexis and Percival’s honest pleas, Gina instead turned towards me and offered the opportunity of a lifetime. My eyes went round inside my helmet. I had never thought that she would ask me about my opinion on the matter, and it was accompanied by the invitation to live together.

The two men had already turned their heads away from Gina and towards me, but them doing so is absolutely pointless. My answer was obvious.

“I’ll return home.”

“Oh? So you will leave this town?”

“There is someone waiting for my return... Because there is a spider waiting for me.”

The memory of Robertson crawling along the wall back at the old castle as I bid my farewell returns to the forefront of my mind.

Once I said so, Gina was visibly surprised. The ‘armored girl’ she heard about surely would live alone in an old castle. That’s why she suggested we live together.

But I am truly happy. For me, there is no more appealing an invitation than moving out of that old castle, in a country where I am the only witch. So I will go home once, and I will bring Robertson back with me to this town.

When I told her my plans, Gina laughed happily and nodded her head. In her expression, she(?) showed her utmost smile to welcome me, causing me to blush once again inside my helmet.

“Then Monette will return here once again.”

“Yes, and I would also like to learn about Alexis’s curse, so if you can, please help Gina.”

“I’ll do it.”

“Fast.”

I’m happy about her reply, but the prompt decision is throwing me off a bit.

I would like you to hear the story to the very end such as how long the journey would be, or what the journey would entail. Alexis and Percival were also left dumbstruck at her prompt decision.

Gina noticed our reactions and laughed while boldly saying, “I’m happy.”

“Witches enjoy visits from other witches. Plus, you’re still a beginner witch. There is no witch who wouldn’t be overjoyed right now.”

Gina’s joyfully laughing face did not appear to carry any lies in it, and she started to gently stroke my helmet with her thin hands while holding on to my shoulders.

The movements of her gentle hand made me unconsciously narrow my eyes. It feels a little embarrassing to be treated as a child like this, but I am happy to be accepted as a fellow witch.

“But please put off our departure until tomorrow—there are many preparations to be made. Monette will stay with me.”

“Yes, thank you for your help.”

“The two men roll around somewhere else and go to bed.”

“Wow, so sloppy.”

I kept my laughter at the men’s lesser treatment inside my head.

When directed to the room they would be staying in, Percival objected at first, “Putting the prince on the floor.....” but he was barely able to stop himself. His mouth hung agape, and he looked like he had just swallowed something bitter, but if he said anything more, Gina might change her mind about helping them.

As for Alexis, he was happy with the thought that if he slept on the floor, then his bed could not collapse under him—forcing him to sleep on the floor.

It seems like there will not be a problem with leaving them alone. Judging so, Gina then directed me to the room I would be staying in. Concetta jumped out of Gina’s arms, taking the lead for us three as we headed deeper into Gina’s house.

Chapter 30

Magical Spring Onsen

“Monette, are you aware that there are places where hot water loaded with magic power spring out in this area?”

The idea of ‘hot water containing magic power’ left me a little confused, so when I tilted my helmet to the side, Gina began to explain more while handing me a towel.

It was said that the ground of this land was complex, and there are many gaps between the rocks where hot water can bubble up to the surface. There also seems to be an area where magic power can get mixed into the underground streams, and many other witches end up visiting this place for that very reason.

There are witches who just come and go as they please, and there are some witches that stop by to say hello to Gina before heading over to the hot water. There was even one witch who likes to send Gina souvenirs strapped to Concetta’s back when he walks by while she is relaxing. But this could all be attributed to the capriciousness of witches, and Gina did not try to drive them away. She actually welcomed the crazy little visits that resulted whenever a fellow witch came by, and she was giving a big welcome to the famous beginner witch armored girl.

Overall her eyes were shining as she boasted about her pride and joy territory, so I ended up giving her a bitter smile while taking the outstretched towel.

“I’ve already cast some magic to repel any prying eyes, so if you’re worried about that, please relax and enjoy yourself Monette.”

“Thank you.”

“Also if you take Concetta in that direction, could you wash her for me? That child always loves to enter the hot water.”

As Gina was telling me how much Concetta loved the hot water, he magically appeared as if on cue.

As I was looking down on him, he was looking back up at me. Does his eyes half closed mean he is affirming what his master is saying, or is he just sleepy? Somehow I am leaning towards the second answer.

Nonetheless, since the surroundings have already descended into darkness, Concetta's shine will be imperative to guiding me to the hot springs in the first place and is very much appreciated. When I gave his head a good stroke, his fur began to shimmer once again as if he was telling me he was ready to leave.

So I took Concetta in my arms and left Gina's mansion.

Kashan *Kashan* My armor created its usual loud racket as I walked through the mansion and out the door. On the way, Concetta started to feel sociable and began to go *Nya Nya Nya* as we continued on into the valley. Exactly the sounds you would expect leaving from a witch's house isn't it?

Then awhile later, Gina suddenly raised her face because she felt another house enter her territory. Not only that, but they had already ignored the human repelling magic and were heading straight for Monette. As a matter of fact, Monette had placed her doubled down, no, tripled down on the spell, but none of them held up.

Gina confirmed the signs before sinking into her chair with a sigh.

"It's that kind of curse."

Unfortunately, the words she muttered under her breath did not reach anyone's ears... of course, not even underneath Monette's helm.

"When all of this is finished, I will move here with Robertson, so can we get along as neighbors?"

As I talked about my future plans, Concetta was leisurely swimming through the hot water while shining brightly.

As Gina said, the hot water bubbling up from the broken crevices in the rock were overflowing with magic power, and even though it was not a full moon, the

oversaturated magic power cause the water's surface to radiate light. Concetta had been swimming in this luminescent onsen ever since we got here. While his fluffy hair continued to sway on the water's surface, the appearance of Concetta gracefully performing the doggy paddle even though he was a cat was beautiful. I narrowed my eyes as I allowed myself to shed off the tension.

Of course, I was not wearing my armor right now.

I was truly hesitant to strip naked, so I was still wearing a thin dress, but when I stretched out my arms, it wasn't a coat of iron but actual skin that was reflected off the water. A cool wind started to blow and brushed up against my skin. The body reflected on the water's surface was obviously not muscular nor did it have hardened abdominal muscles.

"Percival should be sorry for trying to make a fool out of me calling me some muscular woman. Right Concetta?"

When I asked for consent, the Concetta who was happily swimming along turned towards my direction and started to swim towards me.

The way this gorgeous cat kicked and clawed with the hot water was mysterious, and the trajectory that his glowing tail took while swaying slightly beneath the water's surface created a rippling illusion that looked like a falling shooting star that had lost its course.

When he reached where I was sitting, Concetta climbed onto me, and I held him closely to my chest. As I climbed up out of the hot water, I wrapped up his body in a soft towel to fluff up his matted down fur. Afterwards, I wiped down my own body and slipped my armor back on.

The armor had weight reduction magic applied to it, so it naturally had no weight in my hand..... yet it still felt particularly heavy tonight. Is it because with me enclosed in this thick case of iron, I can no longer feel that soft night wind?

Starting to think that way, I sighed inside my helm.

How comfortable would it be if I could enjoy the refreshing feeling of the hot water and then return home while feeling a cold night breeze on my warmed up limbs.

Occasionally my hair would rustle along with the wind, and I could look up at the night

sky without having to squint through an iron frame.

Somebody would be walking next to me, and we could naturally look at one another. I could talk without iron masking my voice, I could listen with iron muffling their voices.....

Imagining myself in such a situation, I uselessly shrugged my shoulders.

Being able to take off my armor and enjoy myself, even if I can imagine it, there is no way I could imitate it. It is a dream inside another dream, and just imagining it is pointless.

Throwing aside pointless thoughts, I instead turned my attention to the present. Currently, a loud suit of armor was shambling down a deserted road with a glow-in-the-dark cat walking alongside it. It's the setting of a good ghost story. Laughing to myself lightly, I made my way back to the mansion.

“Miss Monette! Miss Monette!”

After finishing my soothing bath, I locked the door to my room tightly and threw myself on the bed.

This room, which Gina had so graciously provided me, was large, luxurious, and the bed was so soft that it would not lose out to those luxury beds at any inn. When I lied down, my body comfortably sank into the fluffy cushions, and my exhaustion was sucked further in.

All of my problems melted away, and right as I was about to fall into a blissful sleep, a loud banging started resounding from my door followed by a constant, “Miss Monette! Miss Monette!” being repeated endlessly in the meanwhile. I slowly and disgruntledly got up out of my bed. The pounding and yelling continued on while I grabbed my armor from its resting place in the corner of my room, and it echoed inside my helmet after I finally managed to get it on. Once my armor was completely fastened, I slowly trudged over to the door and threw it open.

Obviously it was Percival who was standing there. He must be really excited because as soon as the door opened, he stormed in as swift as the wind.

“Monette, the Lady of the Lake! She was there!”

“Lady of the Lake? She was in such a place?”

Appearing for a second time, and I am starting to get suspicious. A persistent occurrence cannot be just written off as Percival’s general delusions... This could be troublesome. I should close the door if I get a chance, but unfortunately this star-eyed man is keeping his foot firmly planted and not giving me any gap to run away. Unscrupulous.....

It seems that Gina had asked him to pick some herbs that were growing in the area. Although he initially had reservations about it, when she claimed it was part of her ‘guide fee,’ he didn’t have any other choice than to go along with her request.

And then he found his Lady of the Lake.....

“She looked brilliant even in this dark night... Perhaps my Lady of the Lake is actually a water fairy.”

Percival’s excitement was reaching a new high, and I couldn’t help but narrow my eyes inside my helm. You’re getting so worked up over a water fairy yet you have been traveling alongside a witch all this time.

“By the way Percival, I never expected you to be the type of person to enjoy a woman’s nakedness while they are taking a bath.”

“I didn’t look.

“A glimpse.”

“I didn’t see anything! I would never dare her elegant self so boorishly. So beautiful..... surely she is a foreign princess traveling to keep her true identity of a water fairy a secret!”

“That’s... certainly quite the set-up. All that aside, it certainly feels a bit.....”

A thought suddenly struck me.

Gina had said that there were multiple places where hot water boiled out of the rocks. Of those, there are several locations where the hot water mixes together with

underground magic power to form a magical spring onsen. She recommended one for me to use because she had human repellent magic placed there beforehand.

It sounds like Percival headed out around the same time as I was soaking in the hot water and found that Lady of the Lake of his. As I continued to think about it deeper, the deeper the crease in my brow beneath my helmet got.

A so-called Lady of the Lake appearing near a town is one thing, but up here in the rocks is something completely different. There is no easy way to get up here; just large mounds of rocks and boulders. Speaking of places to stay, there is only Gina's mansion.

Normal people would not be immersed in hot water up in such a place, they would not even come to this area in the first place. However the Lady of the Lake was seen bathing in this place.....

The behavior of this Lady of the Lake is really is causing an itch at the edge of my helm.

Why..... I sorted out my thoughts and took a small breath before turning back to Percival.

Perhaps, this Lady of the Lake is really.....

“Percival, this Lady of the Lake. I think maybe.....”

“Did you figure something out?”

“I think she is another witch.”

As soon as I told him my hypothesis, Percival's bright blue eyes opened wide in shock.

Chapter 31

The Armored Girl's Personal Curse

"The Lady of the Lake..... a witch?"

"Yes. When you saw this Lady of the Lake of yours, I was nearby, so she was probably there for the same reason I was. The Lady of the Lake went there to soak in the embedded magic power."

"I see..... That's..... No, usually you..... but witches aren't like that."

"A word that should not be heard, falls apart."

"My head hurts."

Percival let out a deep, long, defeated sigh.

His expression was still a little wistful for his Lady of the Lake's beautiful appearance, but it was quite obvious how low his heart had sunk. A little annoyed, I couldn't help but mutter, "I am a witch too," underneath my helmet.

As I told him before, even a witch would die if they are beat upside the head with a brick. We are still people, so it is not like she could never be a person's lover, but for Percival, witches are people who can curse you. Powerful magic that can ruin a person's life in addition to their overall quirky and flighty attitude, even if you did get one to fall in love with you, there is no telling how long that love would last. So it's probably better for him to cool his head and take the next few moves with a light step.

But completely ignoring my intentions, Percival picked his head back up and asked me with his big blue eyes, "What does that mean?"

"Well because she is a witch, what would you do if she were an evil witch who enjoyed cursing people?"

"But there are good witches who enjoy helping people."

“.....Well, sure I guess.”

I am not too sure what to say about that.

I figured that the girl Percival saw was a witch, so I was wondering how vigilant Percival would be and if he would lament the fact. Even so, he accepted it rather quickly.

“.....she is a foreign princess traveling the countryside while hiding her identity as a witch water fairy.....”

No, he has already reworked his setting to fit the information. Fast. This rebound came way too fast!

There was absolutely no hesitation in his expression. Rather, he seems to actually be a little glad to have found out more about the girl in question. I ended up laughing about the whole silly thing and told him, “Well, it’s good to see you so excited.”

Percival gave me a bitter smile and nodded. His bashful expression gave him away, and he looked just like a small kid. Looking like that, all I could really do was shrug my shoulders inside my armor.

“Would you like to go looking for her?”

“.....There is no point in finding the girl for you.”

“Witches are witches. If it means that I could pick up something new, then I will do everything I can to cooperate.”

I’ve been dragged in this far, so it’s not so bad to go on until the end, I tell myself.

Of course, after that I will firmly curse both Percival and Alexis. I may be cooperating now, but I have not forgotten the resentment from dragging me out of the old castle.

“Ah, but please fix the chair that Alexis broke before that. Even if I move to this town, fix the floor.”

I remembered my broken table and chairs left behind, scattered on the floor. Even if there is no need for Percival and Alexis to fix them, they should still mend the large hold in the floor for any future residents.

Finding Percival's Lady of the Lake and the witch who cursed Alexis..... it will be some time before I get my turn to curse them both.

While I was calculating the time, Percival interrupted my thoughts with a small laugh and said, "We don't need to look for her." His words took me a little off guard, and when I looked back up to him, I saw that his blue eyes were pointed squarely on me.

"Your Lady of the Lake, you don't need to find her?"

"Mm. After all this, I will be sure to fix the chair, fix the table, fix the floor, and you can curse me then."

"...Percival."

I quietly called out his name underneath my helmet. His eyes were still fixed squarely on me. It looked almost like he was excited to be cursed.

His gaze looked somewhat hot and excited. I tried to move away just a little bit..... ,

"Please quickly go to bed."

and I tried to close the door.

Percival got in the way though saying, "I'm not sleepy." His eyes which were burning hot before were now boring into me with an increasing sharpness. In other words he was staring at me. It was his usual eyes.

On the other hand, I was holding on to my suspicions and kept my eyes on him while slightly inching away from the door. If he is sleepy, then he will surely move to grab me. Let's slam it shut the instant he moves his hand off the door, slamming it into him if we must.

"Coming around with this timing, when did you get sleepy?"

"I said I'm not sleepy! I am..... serious, I think....."

".....Serious?"

Percival's restless expression caused me to tilt my head inside my helmet once again.

He is really serious about me cursing him. I mean, as you wish I suppose.

Staring me down, looking directly at me through my helmet's visor, was he trying to tell me something? Whatever it was, he gave up soon enough, letting his hand off the door and stupidly scratching the back of his head. He ruffled up his own golden hair, and I ended up forgetting to shut the door on him and just kept watching him.

".....I didn't expect Miss Monette to just offer your help like that..... To tell the truth, there was no one on my side anymore, I said some rude things to my family, and I have been cautious of everyone around me for quite awhile now."

I remembered the arrogant attitude that Percival took when we first met and then the small breakdown he had afterwards.

A year ago, everyone turned their backs on Alexis even though he had been regarded as a good man just before. The rumors spread from an unknown source and were easily accepted. Percival was the only one to not turn his back on Alexis.

He was scared, and he ended up clinging to my armor while crying about how he felt like he had been dropped off in a different world.

I know that fear.

In an instant, everyone turns on you, and you begin to think that they might be a completely different person from who you knew your whole life. It's like the ground suddenly gave out from under you. Like waking into a dream.

At that moment, it was like all the vigilance I had towards Percival disappeared.

Is it possible that we are the same? Two people just scared of what the outside world is capable of.

.....Well, it not just that.

We might be similar, but we aren't the same.

".....Miss Monette?"

I was called back to attention by Percival calling my name and raised my face back up to him.

He has no way of seeing what happened or knowing what I was thinking, so I shook my helmet from side to side. Still, my unease was impossible to hid, and Percival's expression was mixed with anxiety.

In response, I told him clearly that, "I'm okay," patting his shoulder with a *pon*. Iron helmets are really convenient. Even if it is hot inside them, they can easily cover up your temperament and muffle your voice.

"Please be prepared. I will have an amazing curse ready for you."

"Y-yeah. Please do."

"I will make sure Gina assists me to make it extra horrible."

"With two witches, I'm sure the effect will be considerable."

"I feel like you will be beaten upside the head with a brick in the next three days."

"...that's..... I'll be prepared."

Percival's back shook slightly and his body started to tremble when the atmosphere went dark after my disturbing prediction.

I smiled at such a figure and tried to end the story by starting to close the door.

When the door was halfway closed though, he suddenly apologized saying, "I'm sorry to just barge in," for which I replied, "You should be." There was no obligation for me to listen to him, and it was already late in the night. It could be said that arriving so late and banging on one's door without a prior appointment was quite impolite.

When he said, "I shouldn't have barged in to a young lady's room like that," I responded to him, "Are you sure you don't mean an armor cabinet?" Is this a win or a loss?

"Good night Miss Monette. Tell the lady inside the armor good night for me as well."

"Yeah, yeah good night. Please don't come back and get plenty of sleep."

To Percival's sarcastic goodbye, I responded with an equal dose of sarcasm while shooin' him away.

I watched him go through the visor of my helmet and shut the door after he had disappeared.

With my armor lying down on the floor, I was thinking atop my bed in my quiet room.

Of course it was about the curse plaguing Alexis.

His public perception was overturned a year ago, and it has only gotten worse since then. As a matter of fact, there is also the issue of him not being in the country at the moment. It's possible that people might be going around right now saying, "The unfaithful prince fled the country!" while treating him like a fugitive.

It is natural that Percival would be wary of his surroundings. Although he is not directly cursed, he is still suffering from the fallout and can be considered a victim.

.....Nevertheless.

And thinking up to this point, my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by another knock on my door.

When I gazed at it wondering who could possibly be knocking this time, a "Miss Monette," from the same voice as earlier came in.

"Percival, visiting a lady's room this late at night is rude, and doing it twice isn't any better."

I shrugged my shoulders, slipped on my armor, and headed to the door.

Did he forget some important detail to his story and felt bothered to come back? I ended up giving myself a small smile at the idiocy of it and opened up the door.....

And I was immediately hugged by two extended arms.

“I was careless.....”

“Miss Monette, I have misunderstood you. You are a good witch, and I have never before known such a gentle and kind woman.”

“Yeah, this is frustrating. I hate my own inexperience.....”

“Please curse me with everything you have when all this is over. I can be your experimental subject for all your magic.”

His arms were wrapped tightly around me, and all I could do was groan loudly. But there was no way for my feelings to reach Percival’s ears when he is sleepy like this, and he just kept petting my helmet with his hand.

Do I have to wait 15 minutes for him to start acting like a proper adult again?

Yes. I raised the white flag in my mind. His arms were no longer singularly embracing my chest plate, so I did my best to struggle, but the second I showed my resistance he tightened his grip. Everything I did was futile.

This was the difference between our strength. A witch is still human, and my grip is slightly below average from any other girl my age. I cannot escape from a full body embrace from Percival who is training his body every day.

A stream of sighs escape from my lips, and a wave of exhaustion hits me all at once. Fifteen minutes passed by like watching paint dry ending in Percival silently returning to his room. I didn’t watch him go this time; instead choosing to slam the door behind him and release a deep sigh inside my helmet.

Is he the only one not affected by the curse?

Bah.

The question I asked myself before was quickly thrown to the back of my mind.



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