









ヴェンデリン (五歳)

「ああ、わかったよ」

「まるで子供だな」

「バウマイスター伯爵、いい加減、現実逃避をやめるのであるな」

俺は魔法の袋から手鏡を取り出して自分の顔を見てみた。
というか、魔法の袋も、他の装飾品も、ローブすら随分と大きくなったような。
ローブに至っては、完全にブカブカではないか。
そして、手鏡に映った俺の顔も……。



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Chapter 1 - Let's Try and Do a School Festival

"...That's all. Okay, today's lesson is over."

"Stand up! Bow!"

"""""""""""Thank you very much!""""""""""

The new adventurer prep school in Baulburg has mostly become like any other normal prep school...is what I hear. I don't know about the other prep schools, but I have introduced the custom of greeting and bowing at the beginnings and ends of lessons, making use of my experience from my previous life.

After all there wasn't anything like a fixed greeting form in Breitburg's prep school.

Depending on the teacher, we have at least bowed at the end of a lesson with everyone.

Even the teachers quickly left the classroom as soon as the lesson was over.

Because of the situation being like that, I introduced the same greeting form as it was used in Japanese school.

At first I thought that it might run into opposition, but as it defined clear borderlines, and since the teachers didn't seem to dislike being politely greeted by the students either, it became a common practice within a short time.

Headmaster Hendrick, who visited to inspect the school, liked it as well after seeing it carried out here, and has apparently tried to introduce it at the capital's prep school, too.

『Many among the kids wanting to become adventurers have no clue about manners. If they can learn at least some, their future prospects might improve somewhat.』

Hendrick, who was a veteran adventurer, is fully aware that there's a long life ahead after quitting the adventurer job.

As there are also times where the students will take up jobs other than adventurer, depending on the circumstances, he seems to think that they must be taught a basic understanding of courtesy, but he apparently struggles with the implementation.

The students believe that it's more profitable to use that time for hunting as a part-time job, or want him to teach them other combat-related skills.

If it's just a greeting at the beginning and end of a lesson, it doesn't take that much time.

Since they are taught by someone, it's possible to educate them that they should at least express their gratitude.

It's not that they don't think about something like that, but among adventurers there are bad cases who can't even greet others.

I haven't met such a bad case yet, though.

"Who's in charge of sweeping today?"

"It's us."

"We will do it quickly."

"I will do my best."

In addition, I created a rotational cleaning duty system at Baulburg's prep school. Because the grannies and housewives in the neighborhood are in charge of cleaning as part-time jobs at other prep schools, the students don't clean themselves there. However, given that we're so short on hands that we barely managed to find a dormitory mother right before the dormitory's opening, I set up a duty system where we clean our school by ourselves. The cleaning duty would make a full round in the magician class once every ten days. Today six people including Agnes, Cindy, and Betty are in charge of the cleaning.

"Well, it's because we've got different rules than the other classes. Anyway, let's start the cleaning."

"Okaaaay!"

After Agnes' group gives a lively reply, they begin to clean, using their 『Telekinesis』. The cleaning of the magician class also serves as magic training. First they lift up the chairs in the classroom with 『Telekinesis』, placing them atop the desks. Next they move those desks into the back of the classroom with 『Telekinesis』.

"Make sure that the chairs on the desks don't fall down. Have the desks move side-by-side."

"Okaaay!"

Since I'm supervising the cleaning, Agnes and the others use their magic with utmost effort, moving the desks around.

"Once you're finished with that, you will gather up the dirt with dustpans and brooms."

"Okay!"

Of course I have them move the brooms and dustpans with 『Telekinesis』. I gave them advice whenever their way of sweeping was wrong, or they didn't manage to scoop up the dirt because of a bad placement of the dustpan.

"Next you will wring the dust cloths."

"Okay!"

They draw the dust cloths that had been drying outside the classroom to themselves with 『Telekinesis』, wash them out properly after soaking them in the water of a bucket, and wring them tightly.

I had them redo it whenever their wringing was half-baked, their washing was too crude, or the water spilled out of the bucket.

Once that was done, they wiped the area of the floor assigned to them with the dust cloth.

Of course I had them redo it if their way of wiping the floor wasn't good enough.

"Pheeew...it's quite tough."

"Right? Even if it's just cleaning, it turns into magic practice if you come up with a good method. Precisely controlling what you're targeting will also be of help when hunting monsters."

Once the cleaning was done, I had them move the desks to the front.
Afterwards I had them repeat the whole process for the back part of the classroom.
Oh, right, they will also need to clean the windows.

"I'm tired."

"Even cleaning is surprisingly difficult if you do all of it with magic."

"If you're worn-out, it's hard to focus on the control."

It's Agnes, Betty, and Cindy, the top three of the magician class, but they are down in the ropes because of the cleaning with unfamiliar magic.

"As you can see, cleaning is also a part of the training. Make sure to do it seriously."

Since I have theoretically explained the advantages of cleaning in the magician class, doing the cleaning in turns became normal for them after this.
But...



"The other classes are completely lost cases!"

"It's because it's not like cleaning will become training for them, right?"

"But it will, won't it?"

"You might be able to trick a noble wife with lacking exercise into that, but they're adventurer rookies. The amount of their exercise is great to begin with, and since there're many hunting spots around Baulburg, they actually incline towards hunting part-time rather than cleaning, you know?"

Just as Erw says, the system of cleaning in turns hasn't really stuck with any class other than the magician one.
Or rather, at least clean up after yourself!



"Dear, the school has finally settled down, hasn't it?"

"Elise, you're soon going to enter your stable period, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Around the time when the prep school in Baulburg finally settled in, the bellies of Elise and the others have become big, and they're apparently entering their stable periods.

"The stable period, huh?"

"Yep. I think it will now be alright as long as they don't do anything unreasonable."

Since Amalie-san has given her approval as well, I can feel some relief.

"However, it's rather difficult to hold lessons with this belly."

"I wonder whether it would be better to stop for now."

After we've built the prep school in Baulburg, Elise and my other wives have been working there as temporary teachers while making sure to not overdo it, but as expected, it might be high time for them to soon take a break.

"Will it be okay if so many temporary teachers take maternity leave all at once?"

"We'll manage one way or another."

It makes Ina worry, but Elise and the others were temporary teachers to begin with. At this point, I just have to do my best as a soon-to-be father.

"I mean, there's just one magician class anyway."

It's just as Luise says. Given that the other classes don't have any magicians, there's nothing that Elise and the others would need to teach them, no matter what.

Because Erw and my retainers also give lectures about weapon handling, camping methods, and practical hunting skills every now and then, our prep school enjoys a good reputation for having a curriculum catered more towards actual battle than other prep schools.

Because of that, the number of applicants seems to have increased for the following years.

Headmaster Percho is very busy with the necessary preparations.

Headmaster Percho was a veteran adventurer in the same party as Headmaster Hendrick.

He's become the headmaster of Baulburg's prep school on the recommendation of Headmaster Hendrick, but with him being new in the position of headmaster, he appears to be swamped with the management of this school that's growing in student numbers.

Prep schools with a long history have few places where you can earn some money with part-time hunting nearby, but because it's easy to earn money as there's plenty of hunting grounds close to Baulburg's prep school, it also boosts the number of applicants for the school.

"Are the numbers of school buildings and dormitories going to be enough?"

"That part should be alright."

"You sure are confident there, Wendelin."

"I mean, Headmaster Percho is there."

I'm Earl Baumeister.

It's not good for me to do everything myself. Leaving tasks to those capable of them is very noble-like.

"That's correct, but somehow I have a bad feeling about it."

That damn Therese, she makes it sound as if I'm dumping all the troublesome work on Headmaster Percho.

Well, it's the truth, though.

"And that's why..."

"Switching the topic all of a sudden?"

"I have entrusted the management of the school to Headmaster Percho after all. Anyway, I have a nice suggestion."

"Nice suggestion? What kind, hubby?"

"I thought we could hold a school festival. I'm sure it will be fun."

.....

Huh?

Even though it should be a very great idea, everyone has gone silent for some reason.

I mean, even if it's a prep school, it's still a school, right? Since it only lasts a year, I'm confident that it's something great to make wonderful memories by doing a school festival.

So why is everyone staying silent despite that?

"Say, Wend. A school ceremony means you're going to hold a festival at the prep school, right?" ¹

"What else could it mean?"

"School, ceremony, so that's why doing a festival? Everyone thinks the same, right everyone?"

All of them nod upon Erw's question.

"Why would you do a festival at a school, hubby?"

"Because it's fun."

"Just that?"

"..."

Huh?

¹ The ceremony/festival mentioned by Erw here is about a religious festival.

Just now I have realized for the first time after Katia pointed it out.

I wonder why are Japanese schools holding festivals?

I know that it has the slogan of being linked to education, but how has education anything to do with selling takoyaki and yakisoba at stalls, or running coffee shops?

If you say it's for the sake of opening a restaurant in the future, I guess it'd turn into social studies on how to prepare a restaurant, buy tools, and stock up on ingredients as cheaply as possible.

Putting it like that, it might actually be quite useful in this world.

Alright, I've consolidated my thinking.

"In the first place, the majority of the adventurers at the prep school will need to do normal jobs after retiring, right? Especially the students who aren't magicians."

Excellent talents likely won't have any troubles in their second lives as they'll be hired by nobles to capitalize on their experience or become teachers at a prep school.

However, all others will need to do other jobs after they stop being adventurers.

That means, running a stall or shop during the school festival will be for the sake of that time.

"In short, it's a kind of social studies."

"Adventurers are crude, and there are some who are also considered a nuisance by ordinary people. That means, it will allow them to invite and mingle with visitors from outside by running shops."

"You got it!"

Lisa is really quick-witted.

Given that they won't acquire any social skills by going back and forth between the prep school and the hunting grounds for their part-time work, I will have them run shops at a school festival, and also invite Baulburg's residents.

By doing that, I'm going to aim for an improvement of their image through the suggestion that adventurers have many normal people among them as well.

In that case, it'll also be easier for them to spend their second life in the Baumeister Earldom after their retirement.

Of course, those, who achieved greatness as adventurers, will be able to do as they please as long as they don't commit any crimes.

"I will have them set up shops, prepare the tools and ingredients, and of course keep books. I won't mind giving those students, who sold the most, a reward either."

"Well, it's a common pattern for adventurers to start restaurants after retirement. I guess it's fine for them to get a feel of it during a time like this."

"There's many of such people, yeah."

"Some of my acquaintances have done the same. There's also some who had to quit after failing at it, though." (Katia)

Indeed.

There are many people who succeed in saving a decent amount of money before their retirement as adventurers.

It looks like there's also adventurers who use that money to start a restaurant after retiring, but there's naturally a never ending stream of people, who fail at it as they were in a 『combat occupation』.

Katia's acquaintances might be like that as well.

"Normally you would work at other restaurants, and then open your own after getting some practice."

"Wilma, your opinion is sound, but there's people who don't consider things that far. It's because they've got the money anyway."

Because they have money, they open a restaurant on a snap decision, and go into the reds because of a lack of customers. Since adventurers tend to be ignorant of the world, there's apparently many among them who do badly or have their money stolen by their employees.

"Okay, I see. So that means the number of adventurers running into such failures after retiring will decrease if you have them actually do it at that school ceremony of yours."

"That's how it is. After all this is also linked to education."

I explain to Luise that the school festival ultimately is a place of learning.

"Wend, if you want to do it, just go for it?"

"Okay, then let's do it."

It's decided with this.

I will hold the very first school festival of this world at the adventurer prep school of Baulburg.

"Umm, dear."

"What's wrong, Elise?"

"How about you make presentations of what's usually studied in class, while you're at it?"

Nothing less of the diligent, perfect superwoman Elise.

For her to notice the part that's lacking the most in a school festival...although this would actually be the correct content...and is usually covered by a cultural festival...

However, I'd like to exclude that part since it's boring. On a day, where I'd be forced to listen to presentations with a strong tendency to make you sleepy by just hearing them while being told stuff like 『Sensei, please listen』, I'd definitely keep nodding off.

I'm going to cut out this element, which seems to be the original intention behind school festivals, on this occasion.

As if I'd allow it to spread in this world!

"Doing something different from normal also serves as recreation. It's a good idea to at least separate the period of the school festival from everyday's lessons and studying."

"I see. It has the objective to change the mood a bit."

"Correct."

A school festival also has the goal of being refreshing.

Well, that's a fairly lame excuse, but it saved me because Elise doesn't know about real school festivals.

I end up feeling slightly bad about it, but either way, I've decided to hold a school festival at the prep school.

* * *

"Therefore, let's split the magician class in around ten teams and set up shops. I will also provide a reward to the teams with good sales. Also, since the people of Baulburg will also attend on the appointed day, make sure to run the shops properly. The other classes will set up shops in the same way, but please coordinate with them so that there won't be too many overlappings in what's being sold."

I explained to the students that we would run a school festival in a week, and what a school festival was about.

Given that the explanation is done now, I leave the rest to Agnes.

It's not like it's been officially decided or anything, but before I realized, Agnes had become something like a class president.

"We will go with the same teams as for the cleaning duty, okay?"

"""""""""""Okay!""""""""""

Her classmates immediately accept Agnes' suggestion.

Nothing less of a class president.

Moreover, using the teams for the cleaning duty is a rather decent idea.

After all it'd take time if they started to argue about the compositions of the teams.

If people were to be left out, I'd hate it since it'd be like bullying.

"Also, let's make sure that the ten shops don't sell the same stuff. All teams, please decide what you want to sell, and write it down on the blackboard."

"Agnes is really doing well, isn't she?"

I don't think I could pull it off so well as someone who has never been part of the class committee in my previous life.

"Then, please discuss it among the teams."

Agnes is truly excellent.

And then, ten minutes later, every team has written down what they plan to sell on the blackboard.

"Juice, juice, juice, juice...baaahh——! Don't you guys have creativity, or what!?"

I scold the students only now that I have become a teacher myself.

"Everyone going with juice, the guests' bellies will bloat!"

"Sensei, that's not the biggest of concern here."

It looks like I have lost my cool a bit too much.
Having my wrong focus pointed out by Cindy, I calm down.

"Everyone, no matter what shop you're going to run, you will sell things that have to be made with magic. After all this is magic training, too. Make sure to do it seriously. As for juice, did you consider whether you can stock up on so many fruits in Baulburg?"

In the first place, something like juice shops should be highly contested by the other classes. This magician class won't be approved of doing this in the first place.

"Please make sure that the shops don't overlap as much as possible."

"Okay, since I'm good at ice magic, our team will run a sherbet stall."

"That's a great idea."

A male student, who can use ice magic and ranks highly within this class, suggests that he wants to do a sherbet stall using fruits.

Something like this can only be done by a magician, or rather, since it'd be expensive to borrow a magic tool, it's better for our class to handle this part.

"Next?"

"How about I sell meat while showing off how it's grilled with magic, seeing how I can't use anything but fire magic? It's something I've seen being done in the capital."

"That's fine as well."

What, so they can come up with proper ideas, if they want, can't they?

It's common for the goods of stalls to overlap on festivals, especially big ones, but if there's a performance along the lines of showily grilling meat with magic, it likely won't pose a problem even if it's similar to other stalls.

"What else?"

"I have made wine with grandpa in my childhood. It's not really all that delicious, though."

"Not delicious?"

"It has no taste. It actually only has the alcohol component, so grandpa drank it after diluting it with fruit juice."

"It's easy to obtain the fruits of the Demon Forest in Baulburg. It won't pose a problem if you dilute it with the juice of those fruits, and sell it like that."

I see.

With her magic, I guess this female student can't produce anything but a white liquor-like wine with just the alcohol content.

I can do it as well, but depending on your ideas, it might be actually quite convenient since you can produce various alcoholic beverages with it.

Let's adopt this one as well.

"I wonder whether I should catch fish at the river and grill it with fire magic?"

"How about selling fruits that have been cut with 『Wind Cutter』?"

"Let's use both!"

Being young is wonderful.

Good ideas appear in succession, and it looks like the preparations for the school festival will go well.



"Uwaaah, what a beautiful ocean."

"This lets me really feel that I'm in a southern region."

"Sensei, let's swim."

"Cindy, leave that for later."

Since all the stands that will be set up for the school festival have been decided, we're going to obtain the ingredients that can be procured, or rather, can be caught outside the Demon Forest today.

The location is where I previously enjoyed a seafood barbecue with Wilma. It's a coastal area that has sandy beach patches located south of the Demon Forest.

Come to think of it, back then Wilma beheaded a serpent with one swing of her big ax, didn't she? What a nostalgic memory.

"Wend, you sure are amazing to conclude something so outrageous with 『nostalgic memory』, though."

"I'm sure Wilma thinks the same."

"Well, Wilma is someone who doesn't get excited easily..."

Today Erw has come along as guard in addition to Agnes, Cindy, and Betty.

"Sensei, are we going to sell a serpent at the stalls?"

"As expected, we won't find any around here, don't you think?"

I answer Agnes' question.

A port has already been built close to this place, and because the guards of the Earl Baumeister House are naturally stationed there, serpent sightings have mostly come to a stop, it seems.

Do the serpents consider it bothersome as they will be attacked at places with many people? They apparently stopped appearing right after the port was built.

I suppose this is why they don't appear often near port cities.

"Today's objective is the seafood of the southern seas."

As a result of discussing with the class what stalls to set up, the idea of grilling sea food with fire magic had been put on the table.

There will also be stalls selling grilled river fish with salt, but after all, there's nothing better than seafood coming out of the ocean.

However, procuring that in Baulburg is expensive.

Accordingly, Agnes' group and I have come here to catch it on-site.

Besides, because I'm also planning to provide ingredients for many other stalls that will be run by the other classes besides the magician class, this is nothing you could call favoring or stealing a march.

"Given that we have to catch a lot, it will be quite difficult."

"Procuring it in the nearby port city would be cheaper, no?"

"Humph!"

"Uguh!"

Damn you, Erw, don't bring up a sound argument here all of a sudden.

"If we were to buy up a huge amount of seafood today, it might backbite us since it could increase the prices for seafood in Baulburg."

Because I'm the lord, I must make it possible for my fief's population to buy things at stable prices.

"Sensei, you're a sensei after all."

"On top of being an amazing magician, you're even gentle as a feudal lord."

"You have my deep respect."

See!

Aren't Agnes and the other two properly acknowledging my conduct?

"Additionally, I'd like to keep the prices of the goods sold at the school festival as cheap as possible since the citizens will be invited as well."

Once a year I will have normal people come into the prep school, and if I can have them mingle with the adventurer rookies to some extent, it'll probably make it easier for the students to work as adventurers after they graduate.

Since it will also serve as a place of mutual understanding, it's better to keep the goods for sale as cheap as possible.

If we were to sell them too cheaply, the merchants of Baulburg would possibly get angry, but I've talked it over with them in advance, telling them 『They're amateurs running stalls on a festival that will be only held once a year』.

Even considering the number of students, there are limits to how much we can sell at the festival.

"Hence you see, Erw-kun, a lord must consider such things as well, okay?"

"Sensei, you're a magnificent person."

"I was also deeply moved after hearing your arguments just now, sensei."

"Nothing less of our sensei."

The praise from my cute students feels really great.

"Even though it's just because you wanted to do it yourself..."

"Humph!"

That shitty Erw, his abs are damn hard.

"I've told you that it hurts, dude!"

My elbow has started to be painful.

Still, it's no surprise, seeing how that damn Erw has hung around with me for a long time now. He has immediately realized my true motive.

"Anyway! Today you will catch the seafood you can catch here. Since the other three members of your team are doing their best in building the stall, you've got to give them a peace of mind by catching a lot."

""""We will do our best!""""

"Should I help out, too?"

"Of course."

Erw is a precious male helper.

What's the point in not putting him to use.

"I'm your guard..."

"There won't be any assassins in a place like this."

"You can't say that with absolute certainty..."

"Erwin-sama, we're here as well."

"If something should try to attack sensei, I will burn it with my 『Flame』!"

"I will tear it to pieces with my 『Wind Cutter』!"

"Your students are scary."

Erw smack-talked Agnes and the other two, but it'll be fine if I punish him by working him like a horse later. We started the gathering of seafood at once.



"Erw, did you manage to catch some?"

"I got plenty, but not at the level of Wilma."

"Wilma is a professional. It looks like Agnes' group is doing well, too."

We've started catching seafood, but the point is to not lay too much waste in the area. Each time Erw dove down with his great motor reflexes, he caught a great amount of big shrimps and shellfish. If you could catch such big amounts in Japan, I'm pretty sure that plenty of fishermen would flood the place.

"Sensei, I've got lots."

"I managed to catch this many, sensei."

Agnes and Cindy covered only their head with a modified 『Magic Barrier』, and caught fish by diving for extended periods of time in the ocean.

It's such a big haul that they have Betty carry it in an additional net.

"It's Agnes' and Cindy's victory."

"I can't use magic, so my time underwater is limited, though..."

Erw complains to me that it's no real match since the handicap is too big for him.

"The scenery is really nice."

Since we've come to catch seafood by diving today, Agnes and the other two are wearing one-piece swimsuits.

I prepared those since they're necessary for fishing.

I prepared them because they're necessary! It's not like I did it with any ulterior motives, okay!? I'm different from Erw whose eyes immediately became lewd after seeing the three in their swimsuits.

"You're saying that, but seeing you in your swimsuit is an ugly stain to the scenery, Erw."

"As if you could say that about others!?"

The assessment of a dude in trunks is mostly the same in any world.

"Wend, how did it go for you?"

"I caught plenty."

Using a fake trawl with Betty, we succeeded in catching a great amount. This will also be kept fresh by putting it in my magic bag. I'm sure it'll sell for good money if we sell it after grilling it on the festival day.

"Sensei, next I will pull the net."

"And then it'll be my turn."

Given that it's a special training of pulling the net by synchronizing with two people while floating above the sea with 『Flight』, I pulled the net with Cindy next, and afterwards with Agnes, allowing us to catch lots of fish.

While I was pulling the net with one of them, the other two caught shrimps and shellfish by diving into the sea.

"Pulling a net while flying through the air is also a training to use other magic and move around at the same time as you use 『Flight』. Being able to act above the sea is overwhelmingly advantageous for an adventurer. Even though it becomes difficult to hunt monsters as you grow old, you might be able to earn money with fishing."

"Sensei, you're amazing after all!"

"There's no waste in your training, sensei, is there?"

"I will put in more effort, too."

Maaan, the praise by my students really feels wonderful.

"...Those girls are alright since they've got magic, but I'm already at my limit..."

Which reminds me, Erw should have been catching seafood by diving all the time, but I wonder how it's going on his side? As I pondered about that, Erw collapsed completely exhausted on the sandy beach.



"I'm dead tired,...but grilled shrimps are great."

"Erwin-sama, we've also grilled shellfish. Sprinkling them with the soy sauce we received from sensei...tad-ah!"

"This is also quite delicious."

We've managed to secure the planned amount of seafood within a few hours, and thus we've decided to grill them over a net and eat them as lunch.

Erw, who has been diving all the time since morning, seems to be completely exhausted, but once he received grilled shrimps and shellfish from Betty, he heartily dug in.

He should also be delighted over being waited upon by a cute girl.

"Sensei, is around this much okay?"

"It's not good to catch too much."

There are limits as to how much the prep school's students can cook and sell in a day, and if we catch too much, the seafood around here will be completely gone.

"Sensei, what are we going to do if they're sold out?"

As might be expected of someone having a big bro who runs a restaurant, Betty pays attention to such things, too.

Given that her brother has been like this in the beginning, she thinks that it'd be better to be able to provide food for as many customers as possible.

"It's an event lasting one day, and it won't be professional restaurants either, so it's better to make sure to not have left over too much instead. Having slightly too little might also turn into a great recipe for people to get excited over the next years."

It's because the guests will come again to get to eat at the school festival's stalls next year for sure.

"Besides, the guests, who will still be hungry, will go to the nearby restaurants on their way back home. Since it's not our main occupation, it's a bad idea to steal all of the pie from the neighboring restaurants. After all it's also an event for the sake of mingling with each other."

"I see! As expected of you, sensei!"

"For you to have thought about it so deeply!"

"Amazing!"

Maaan, it's just old man's wisdom, including some parts from my previous life, but it sure feels nice to be praised by my pupils.

"Seriously, how skillful of you to come up with such fake reasons for the sake of satisfying your

own greedy desires."

"Humph!"

"Uguh...I hit bull's eye, eh!?"

Erw, who received my elbow strike, continues to further counterattack while revealing a pained expression.

What a persistent guy.

"Umm, Earl Baumeister-sama, how did you fare today?"

At that point, an elderly fisherman, who lives in the nearby port city, shows up to check on our situation.

He's the one who provided the information about this place, but it looks like he's been curious about the outcome of the seafood gathering.

"It was a big help thanks to you."

"I'm glad to hear that."

We continue to chat while also offering some of the grilled seafood to the fisherman.

"Which reminds me, it seems you didn't manage to catch any of the 『Devil's Familiar』."

"Devil's Familiar?"

"Yes. The places where you can catch them are limited, but they're as big as a person, possess eight legs, and their body's surface is slimy. Since its outward appearance is abominable and eerie, the locals call it familiar of the devil."

Hmm, it must be that creature, no?

They are normal in the northern regions, and the people of Mizuho love them too.

"It actually has a light consistency if you boil and eat it. This will taste quite good."

There's no mistake.

Going by his story, it's slightly bigger than the ones in the north, but I guess they live here as well, huh?

An edible octopus.

"I suppose it's unusual seafood. We will catch it and go back home."

"You've decided way fast there!"

Erw raises his voice in surprise due to my prompt decision.

Or rather, Erw, even though we've been hanging out together for such a long time, you believed that I'd make any compromises when it comes to food?

"But, sensei, I've searched most of this area, but didn't find such creatures."

"I haven't seen anything like that either."

"Me neither."

Agnes' group tells me that they haven't spotted any octopuses.
Come to think of it, I haven't seen any myself.

"The Devil's Familiars live inside holes in rock walls, anyway, places where it's easy to hide.
Searching while focusing on places where a Devil's Familiar might be is the trick behind catching them."

I see. You search by concentrating on spots where an octopus would want to hide.
I guess you could call it searching by understanding an octopus' feelings.

"Well then, let's at once..."

"Sensei, I will do it!"

Agnes volunteers, resulting in her going to dive first.

"I think around this area?"

"Understood, sir."

Following the elderly fisherman's advice, Agnes dives into the sea.

And then, after several minutes have passed, "Is that girl going to be alright?"

"Yeah, she's fine."

I mean, Agnes has secured her some air to breathe by covering her head with a spell that uses an application of 『Magic Barrier』.

"To be able to dive for such a long time, magic sure is handy to have."

The fisherman admires Agnes, saying that there's only few even among the diving masters, who can stay underwater for such a long period of time.

"She's coming up."

As we've been chatting, Agnes seems to have caught something.
Once she surfaces, Agnes splendidly lands on the sandy beach after further using 『Flight』...as I thought that, something was wrong with her.

"Senseiii——! I can't get it ooo——ff! Somehow it's slimyyy——!"

Oh, I got it.

I grasp the situation in an instant.

A huge octopus that's bigger than Agnes is coiled around her body.

The octopus' legs are crawling across her one-piece swimsuit. With the octopus' mucous being slippery, it's turned into a considerably terrible situation.

"Ooohh! This is great!"

"Is that the right time to say that!?"

"Ouch!"

I drive my elbow into Erw who blurts out incomprehensible stuff.

It's really bitter that I can't drop my fist on his head due to our difference in height.

"I recall my younger days...with grandma..."

By the way, the fisherman geezer was the same type as Erw.

Or rather, just what the hell did you do with your wife in your younger days!?

"It's not a situation to think about such unnecessary stuff! Agnes, calm down and let sensei handle it!"



"Okay."

Given that I can't get close if Agnes keeps struggling, I first tell her to calm down. Because she's become docile right away, I stab a long auger, which I took out of my magic bag without a moment's delay, between the eyes of the big octopus. A scheme of using a long auger is necessary since it's a big octopus.

"Agnes, you okay?"

"Sensei, you saved me."

I feel like she's exaggerating way too much, but since a big octopus looks like that, it might be very disgusting for a girl.

"Somehow I'm slimy all over."

"It will be fine if you wash it away with ocean water."

"Sensei, you're a calm, adult man, aren't you? Thank you very much."

Agnes thanks me and starts to wash herself in the ocean.

"By the way, this thing is quite eerie."

He might have seen a big octopus for the first time. Erw looks as if saying, 『Is this really edible?』.

"It's very tasty, but because of its appearance, it's unpopular. Since the church' priest in the port city preaches, 『It's the Devil's Familiar!』, this term has become its nickname."

As obvious if you look at Agnes, it's difficult to catch them, and they won't sell either. Because of that it's an ingredient that's only being enjoyed by the fishermen or locals, the old fisherman explains.

"It's something you will understand as soon as you try tasting it."

We decided to cook this big octopus at once.

"You just have to remove its intestines and its mouth part, and properly rub the slimy patches with salt."

"Wend, you're strangely well-informed about this."

"That's because it's easy to imagine."

Of course I actually knew about it, though.

"We prepare it in the same way, too."

"Sensei, I've boiled water in a big pot."

"Thanks, Betty."

Once the big octopus' slime comes off, I put it into the pot with the boiling water, legs first. It'll take some time since it's a big octopus, but the preliminary preparations will be done once it's completely boiled.

"Let's sample it."

I cut off the tip of its legs with a knife, and eat it after dipping it in soy sauce. My first octopus in a long time was delicious.
It might have been even better if I had wasabi.

"It's got a deliciousness that doesn't match its appearance."

"It was worth all the trouble."

"The moderate consistency is nice. Since its taste is light, it might be usable for many various dishes."

"Sensei, I want to eat more of it."

We enjoyed the boiled octopus body to our hearts' content.

"Then, next I will go as well!"

There's still a lot of the octopus left, but the amount is definitely lacking to use it for a stall at the school festival.

Accordingly Cindy declares that she will catch a big octopus as well, and starts getting ready.

"Cindy, Agnes has gone through such an experience, so I don't think it's necessary for you to be unreasonable."

"No! This is also an ordeal to improve my magic! Given that Agnes has accomplished it, I will also do my best!"

"But..."

"I'm off!"

Cindy throws my objections to the wind, and dives into the sea.
And once again, several minutes later...

"Senseiii——! Why is it clinging all over my bodyyy——!? Is it because it's a devil's familiaa——r!?"

A predictable tragedy has struck again.

Cindy, who had a big octopus cling to her whole body, forcibly uses 『Flight』 and lands on the beach.

It's a spectacle that makes me kinda feel like some kind of instinct is triggered at the bottom of my heart.

"Oohh! It appears like something inside me is changing..."

"Don't!"

I delivered an elbow strike against Erw who blurted out something weird, following the same pattern as with Agnes.

"In my youth, with the neighboring widow..."

Come on, geezer, I'm telling you that no one cares about stories of your youth.
I bring down the octopus once again by stabbing the long auger between its eyes.

"Sensei, thank you."

"I'm next. Leaving aside big bro, I might be able to teach Rosa-san about a good ingredient. I'm off!"

"It's not like you have to catch it yourself, though..."

As Betty seems to feel left out as she's the only one who hasn't taken on the ordeal from me, she ignores my objections, and jumps into the sea.
And then, as expected...

"Why is it twining itself around a place like thaa——t!? You damned devil's familiar! Don't touch that place!"

Unfortunately, what has happened twice, happens thrice.
Betty also lands on the beach while having her whole body covered by octopus legs.

"Don't put your legs into my swimsuiit!"

"Go for it, Devil's Familiar!"

"That's not what you'd cheer on here!"

How many times does it make today?
After delivering an elbow blow against Erw, I kill the octopus with the long auger.

"I see, if I get young women to catch devil's familiars from now on..."

This fisherman is planning something outrageous there!
Agnes and the other two were fine since they could escape the ocean with 『Flight』, but for people, who can't use magic, that's a dangerous way of fishing.

"Really? Won't it be fine as long as they stab the octopus between the eyes with a long auger?"

"That's true, but..."

Afterwards, the catching of big octopuses proceeded well, and we succeeded in catching a lot more than expected during the ingredient gathering of that day.

* * *

"Well then, it's the start of the adventurer prep school festival!"

At last it's the long-awaited day of the school festival.

At the same time as I launched a 『Fireball』 into the sky as replacement for fireworks signaling the start, the gates open, and many residents of Baulburg stream onto the school's premises.

All sorts of stalls are lined up on the grounds, which are usually used for training, after having been prepared for this day over the course of the last week. Baulburg's residents immediately buy the food that piques their curiosity, and start to eat.

Because of the cheapness stemming from it being amateur stalls, the goods at all stalls sell like hot cakes.

The students also seem to be very busy with cooking and serving their customers.

"Come, come, and look! I'm going to throw fruits into the air like this and cut them up in bite sizes with my magic."

"They have been frozen with magic in advance."

"These boar skewers freshly roasted with my prided fire magic are piping hot as you can see."

"We're selling big shellfish, shrimps, and fish we've procured through a special route. Please try them out, no matter what."

"Grilled meat of valuable guinea fowls that were brought down with magic at such an unbeatable low price! It's first come, first served."

"How about some shaved ice? We will finely shave it with our secret magic! There's also plenty of different syrup flavors!"

The magician class, and also the other classes are more successful than expected, selling their food really well.

I will provide a reward to those selling the most, and since the earnings at the stalls will be evenly split among the stall members, everyone is working at the stalls full of motivation.

Among all that, Erw and I head to the stall run by Agnes' group.

In reality I wanted to bring Elise and the others along as well, but with this crowd of people, it would be problematic with their big bellies.

I mean, Roderich protested against it vehemently.

"I think I will bring back some souvenirs later. For Haruka-san."

"You're right. I will do the same for Elise and the others, too."

I'm pretty sure that they feel disappointed about not being able to come here even though it's the long-awaited school festival.

At least bringing back some souvenirs is the duty of any gentle husband.

"Come to think of it, dishes using that devil's familiar are being sold at the stall of your pupils, aren't they Wend? Is it going to be alright?"

"Fufu, it's fine, it's fine. After it's a stall that was designed by me personally."

"Isn't that kinda unfair?"

"That's why they will be excluded from the sales competition."

As expected, even my partiality won't go that far.

Since their sales should do accordingly well, I think they will earn more than enough money if they split the profits.

"You sure are confident...Wut!? It's really packed!"

Just as I had predicted, many people are lining up at their stall, which is selling food using big octopus, probably because of its novelty value.

"They've got an iron plate with a fairly peculiar shape, don't they?"

"I've made a special order. On my authority as Lord."

"You'd go this far..."

I think you can make a rough guess, but the dish I have Agnes' group cook is 『Takoyaki』. Because I've gotten my hands on fresh octopus at long last, it woke the urge to make takoyaki in me.

The boiled octopus is the catch from the other day. Wheat flour and eggs can be bought anywhere. Soup stock, red pickled ginger, tenkasu, green dried seaweed, katsuobushi, and green onion is cheaply sold in Mizuho.

I could cheaply procure the sauce and mayonnaise from the Arterio Company.

The iron plate was somewhat expensive because it was a custom order, but it's no problem since it's reusable.

Once I had gathered all the necessary components, Agnes' group only had to repeatedly practice how to properly roast the takoyaki.

Given that it's necessary to allow the takoyaki iron plate to blend with oil, Agnes and the others started their practice three days ago.

Moreover, they're using magic.

The regulation of the heating, smearing the oil on the plate, pouring in the batter, adding the octopus and other ingredients, and flipping over the roasted takoyaki, all of it is done with magic as a demonstration to the customers.

In other words, the more customers visit their stall, the more of a magic training it'll become for

Agnes' group.

"What spartan training."

"I think Agnes and the five others will be able to continue roasting takoyaki until they run out of ingredients. The school festival is training, too."

Even the other classes besides the magician one have obtained their ingredients, such as meat and river fish, through hunting and fishing by themselves.

They have borrowed the necessary tools by negotiating with the neighboring restaurants, and they've also negotiated the prices so that they could stock up at fair prices. The school festival is a place of learning, not only as adventurers, but also as fully-fledged members of society.

Though, the word for a fully-fledged member of society doesn't exist in this world.

"Everyone, how is it going?"

"No matter how much we grill, there's no end in sight."

Agnes is grilling takoyaki with an air of busyness.

She must concentrate since she's roasting them with magic, so it's probably better for us to not get in her way any longer.

Because I'm the owner of this prep school, I must inspect all stalls. While buying skewers at times and eating them with Erw, I continue my rounds.

Once lunchtime came around, the number of guests grew even further. Since all stalls were completely sold out about two hours after that, that spelled the end of the school festival.

As it was much more of a hype than expected, the school festival was a full success.

At this rate, I think the next few years will be fine as well.

The awarding for the sales was carried out as well. A team that had been selling grilled meat skewers, which used the boar and rabbit meat they had procured through hunting, won the monetary reward.

Of course the takoyaki stall of Agnes' team sold the most, but it's been excluded as per my initial rule.

"Meat can't be taken lightly."

"It's what you'd want to eat first of all, I guess."

People probably get an urge to eat meat once they see a place where it's actually grilled.

Once the awarding ceremony came to an end, it was a bonfire & dancing event for only those involved with the festival.

But then again, since the nights become quite dark in Baulburg as there's few street lamps, it only lasted until the sun went down.

The students had some fun while exchanging their respective dishes and ingredients they set aside.

"Sensei, I've become quite skilled."

Once I head over to the takoyaki stall, Cindy holds out a takoyaki she has grilled herself.

When I sample it, it has the same taste as the takoyaki I ate in my previous life.

"This might be something that big brother's store could sell as well."

"I think that would depend on the ingredients?"

Since it's a dish that heavily relies on Mizuho ingredients, it might be necessary to make the takoyaki with ingredients that can be procured locally to keep it cheap. I explain all that to Betty.

"I think he's capable of at least coming up with a trick for that. Brother is more or less a cook as well."

"I guess so."

As always, Betty is quite strict with her big brother.
Though, without that strictness, he might drift off into a weird direction again.

"Sensei, we've also prepared a share for your wives, so please take them with you."

"Thanks, everyone. I appreciate you looking out for me."

"It was lots of fun."

"I want to do this next year, too."

"Cindy, repeating the class doesn't work at the prep school."

"Ack, you're right!"

Like this, the school festival ended safely, and it was decided that this event would be held in the coming years as well.

Moreover, Headmaster Hendrick, who came to have a look at the school festival, introduced it at the capital's branch as well, and following that, the event called school festival continued to spread among the other prep schools.

* * *

"It's quite delicious. But..."

"It's good, but..."

"You're right, it has a good taste."

"It's great. But, I have a question."

"Yep, me too."

"That's true, for what reason, right?"

"Is it the local cuisine of some place?"

"I've never heard of it."

I brought back the takoyaki made by Agnes' team as a souvenir, but Elise and the others seemed to have an issue with the dish called takoyaki after tasting it. They gave praise to its taste, but they ate it while tilting their heads in confusion.

"Is it that weird?"

"Say, Wend-kun."

"Yes?"

"I wonder, why did you put your back into the devil's familiar, which you caught in the south, for this dish? I feel like it would have also been fine to go with meat, fish, vegetables or even cheese as filling."

"Why, you ask..."

Now that she mentions it, she's certainly right there.
Why are octopuses put into takoyaki?
It's something I've never thought about.

"Isn't it because it's delicious?"

Since I honestly don't know myself at all, I answer Amalie-san's question with an evasive reply.



In the end, octopuses didn't spread in Baulburg at all. Takoyaki imitations reached the point of being sold even at street corners, but it was commonplace to use fillings other than octopus, such as meat, fish, or cheese.

Unfortunately, the popularization of true takoyaki would take place in a far more distant future.

Chapter 2 - Wendelin's Ordeal

"This is an underground ruin that had been created during the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization. Unfortunately, its degradation over-time is quite intense. There are only a few archaeological documents, too. Of course it does not hold any of the treasures you adventurers are looking for. Since it is located within Baulburg, it will be reconstructed into a guard garrison with a basement after you have inspected it today." (Arnest)

"No treasures, you say? That's bad luck."

"Cindy, even if treasures were here, I'm sure that they would have been carried out a long time ago."

"It's probably just as Agnes says. At a point in time when prep school fledglings like us can enter this place for training, it's obvious that the place will be cleared from treasures."

"So they've already been taken out...? That's really a shame."

"Limited to this place, there has not even been anything here that could have been taken out, little ladies."

The lessons of the prep school are basically carried out only within the school, except for a set number of events.

However, there are many underground ruins within the Baumeister Earldom. Among those, there are also some existing inside Baulburg.

The search and investigation of those ruins finished a good while ago. Same can be said about this underground ruin as well.

There are no treasures here, and we couldn't confirm anything of archaeological value as desired by Arnest or any traces of such because of the intense degradation, but since the underground part can be recycled, we've decided that it will be remodeled into a new garrison for the guards.

Given that the guard unit is an organization to keep up public order, having a warehouse or jail in the basement would be convenient.

The point of today's training is to allow the adventurer prep school's fledglings to take a peek at an underground ruin of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era before the reconstruction starts.

The one in the role of lecturer is Arnest who has hidden his long ears with a magic tool.

At first he was unwilling and acted all cheeky despite being no more than a freeloader, but once he learned about being able to investigate another, new underground ruin, he was all for it.

As Arnest had apparently also taught at a university, he gave faultless explanations to the students of the magician class.

Having said that, because this underground ruin is truly no more than a stone basement, the interest of the students seems low.

Seeing how they're aiming to become adventurers, it's only natural for them to desire finding treasures in an underground ruin.

"Everyone, since you can't enter places like this until you become adults, make sure to grasp the atmosphere of an underground ruin before going back today."

""""""""Yes!""""""""

There's like no way that prep school students would be allowed to enter an unexplored underground ruin. For now, a place like this is the limit.

"The atmosphere changes by just going underground, doesn't it? Even if it's simply learning about something like that, think of it as a good experience."

I explain to them that they should at least remember the atmosphere when going into the underground for the time being.



"Earl Baumeister, you will keep your promise, won't you?" (Arnest)

"A——ah, yeah, yeah."

Once that day's underground ruin field trip ended without any hiccups, Arnest strongly insisted on being allowed to help out in the investigation of new underground ruins as reward for having acted as temporary teacher.

For an earl like me, something like breaking a promise is an absolute no-go...just when I thought that, I actually had forgotten one very important issue.

"Elise and the others can't join right now, and if it's just me, it won't work, you know?" (Erwin)

"Come to think of it, there was that as well."

Until Erw pointed it out, I had completely forgotten about Elise and my other wives being on maternity leave.

Even though their bellies are sticking out pretty much by now...

Regretting to have made a promise that I couldn't keep, I suggest to Arnest to postpone it.

"Did you not say that nobles will keep their promises?"

"I haven't said that I won't go. It will be after Elise and the other give birth and recover their instincts as adventurers."

It might take two or three years, but it's not like I particularly lied.

Arnest can simply write plenty of thesis during that time.

"Therefore, it's not possible right now."

"Still that is not good. Because the Baumeister Earldom is dotted with countless underground ruins, I will be troubled if they are opened during that period of time."

What an unexpectedly hasty guy despite his longevity as a demon.

"Even if demons might live much longer than humans, that does not mean that they are particularly patient either."

"But, you see..."

Since I don't want outsiders to know much about Arnest, I cannot afford entrusting him to other adventurers.

Because my retainers, who usually help out in the excavation, don't have the necessary combat strength, they are unsuited as companions, too.

"Humans and demons have to resign themselves to their fates at times."

"Ughh... Then I will change the request to a purely scientific investigation."

With those words, Arnest takes out a map and shows me an underground ruin located in a place that might as well be called just outside Baulburg.

"It's an underground ruin that has been discovered just the other day. Its safety has been confirmed through an investigation by the guards. Me and my disciples are in the process of applying for permission to enter that place. Thanks to the special trait of governmental offices to be always slow, I do not know when I will be given permission."

"You've just casually blamed me there, haven't you...?"

If it's an underground ruin next to Baulburg, it's not strange for the guards to block it off after an investigation.

Children might go in, or decorations and the building stones forming the ruin might be stolen, even if there's no treasures.

Recently we're lacking houses in Baulburg due to the rapid growth of the population. I've heard stories about the building stones in underground ruins being stolen as materials for such houses. Arnest's application not going through...is because only a few of my retainers know about this guy. There's absolutely no way for me to make a directive like 『Make sure to give him preferential permission to scientifically examine underground ruins because he's a demonic scholar sheltered by the Baumeister House』.

"Oh, the underground ruin over there, huh?"

"You know of it?"

Erw knows about the ruin Arnest mentioned.

"I think it's an underground ruin with only two floors and no treasures in it. The interior ornaments are very gaudy, so an archaeologist might like them."

In short, it doesn't have much of a monetary value, but its scientific worth is rather high.

"Then I'll go along with you to that place."

"With just us three?"

"Is that a problem?"

If the guards are watching that place, we just have to borrow some of their people.

"They have only stationed people to make sure that no one trespasses on the grounds there, so I think it would be a bit unreasonable to borrow those people. And even without that. The guards are already short on men as is, so it would be kinda pathetic if we increased their workload with something like that." (Erwin)

In that case, it'll be necessary to find personnel to guard me?

"It will not be a problem with those little girls." (Arnest)

"Little girls?"

"The three who are your pupils, Earl Baumeister." (Arnest)

Arnest is telling me to use Agnes and the other two as my guards.

"I am just going to do a preliminary investigation inside the underground ruin anyway. Since there will not be any danger, those little girls will be plenty."

Even though they're young, all three are magicians with a bright future ahead of them. It's not difficult to appoint them as guards, albeit only for form's sake. Since they are minors, it's actually not all that good, but I'm a noble and the lord of this land. Just as I had been assigned to the subjugation of Grade Grand as minor in the past, it won't be a problem even if I request them on my authority as a feudal lord.

"I think that will work. If we add those three, it won't be an issue."

Albeit minors, all three are magicians, and it's a guard duty in an underground ruin without any dangers at all.

If I were to ask other nobles I might be told that it's a luxury, or way too excessive.

"I guess I'll try asking the three..."

It'll be fine to do so in the afternoon when the prep school's lessons have ended, and if I add some extra part-time pay, I don't think that it'll be an issue for them. Given that it won't be much of a work in the first place, it might please them as a good part-time job with a decent pay.



"Bodyguarding sensei in an underground ruin? I will take you up on that."

"Sensei, I will also do my best."

"I wonder what kind of underground ruin it's going to be."

Since the three gladly accepted the job when I sounded them out about it right away, we would head out to the underground ruin investigation, accompanied by Arnest.

* * *

"I see...I guess that means it has a highly scholarly value."

"Oo——h! This is more than I had expected."

In the afternoon of the next day we dive into the underground ruin that has been discovered at the edge of Baulburg.

Two guard members have been keeping watch at the entrance. According to them, they are guarding this place in a shift system to prevent ruin looting.

Once we enter the ruin, the ceiling and walls are blanketed with three-dimensional, carved dragons. The ruin has a temple-like structure with many dragon stone statues of various shapes spread out. All statues seem to be made out of marble, and the engraved dragons are overflowing with impressions of being alive.

Arnest, who sees that, runs around all over the place and frantically takes notes while being in a very happy mood.

I'm deeply moved at first as well, but...if you look at such things for thirty minutes, you'd get bored of it, right?

"Sensei, is this underground ruin a temple?"

Agnes asks as she looks at the ruin together with me.

"I wonder? There could have really been an ancient religion worshiping dragons a long time ago."

"Such a religion really existed, but it is unrelated to this underground ruin." (Arnest)

Arnest answers Agnes' question in my stead.

"That's a bold declaration."

Making such a bold declaration must mean that he's quite confident in his own theory.

"The carved dragons in this place are magnificent, but they have a completely different design from the ones I encountered in religious facilities revering dragons during past excavations. I think they only have the objective to serve as ornaments."

"I see."

Decorating almost all of a two-storied basement with dragons, eh...? Just why was this underground

ruin actually built then?

"That is something I plan to investigate scientifically in the future. By the way, where did Erwin go?"

"Huh? Now that you mention it..."

Even when I look around me, I can't find Erw anywhere, so I try asking Agnes who has been looking at a dragon carved into a huge stone pillar.

"If it's Erwin-sama, it seems he has gone to the toilet."

"He should have said something first, damn it...!"

It's not like we can urinate in this ruin, but fortunately it's close to the city.
Given that it doesn't appear dangerous around here, he's apparently gone outside to borrow a toilet.

"Well, whatever. Arnest, are you about done?"

"Yes."

Because today is a preliminary examination for a full scientific investigation, it appears that Arnest has nothing left to do here after around one hour.
Once I inform him about going back soon, he agrees without any complaints for a change.

"Agnes, Cindy, Betty, we're going home."

"Already?"

"I feel bad about getting paid for only this much."

"It's only been one hour so far."

Agnes' group ends up feeling guilty about receiving a bigger pay than usual for such a simple job.

"It has ended faster than expected, but you three have properly performed the duties assigned to you. Don't worry about it."

"But, we've just been looking at the underground ruin."

"Protecting me that nothing happens to me is your job. And in fact, nothing has happened to me. All that's left is to return to the surface. It's not necessary to worry about it since you have succeeded at your job."

Agnes is a diligent girl as expected, isn't she?
She feels that it's wrong to get paid for such a simple job.

"That's how it is, so let's go back."

"Sensei, what's that?"

Immediately after I give the order to withdraw, Cindy has apparently spotted something. Once I look in the direction she's pointing to check what it might be, I see a single rat over there. I think that's the first living being I see in this ruin since entering.

"A rat...?"

"Sensei, considering that it's a simple rat..."

"Huh? This is..."

Once I look once more closely since Betty has pointed it out, I notice that it's not a living rat. It has ingeniously camouflaged itself by properly growing out fur, but on a close look, I can see that its skin has a metallic sheen...

"It is an artificial product. Moreover, it is quite old."

Arnest declares that the rat is man-made.

"It is a valuable, scientific specimen. You can also use it for researching its magic technology."

After all it's an artificial rat with a size identical to a real rat. That means we can expect a development in magic technology if we research this after catching it.

"I will catch it then, okay?"

Understanding that, Cindy defenselessly approaches the rat to capture it. She probably thinks that it's not that dangerous since it's an artificial rat. However, that's a careless thinking for an adventurer, and moreover a dangerous conduct. I try to stop her in a hurry.

"Cindy! Don't approach it carelesslyyy..."

"Eh?"

In the instant when Cindy looks back due to my yell, I sense as if some kind of magic is shot out of the artificial rat's mouth.

Until now I couldn't sense any mana from the rat. Just what kind of trick is that...? No, right now is not the time to worry about that.

At this rate the magic will directly hit Cindy.

As a 『Magic Barrier』 won't be in time either, I unconsciously thrust Cindy away to the side, receiving the rat's magic with my own body.

Since it's no magic I can see with my eyes, it shouldn't cause any direct damage.

Still, I think Erw might have gotten angry if he had been here.



"...? Huh? Nothing in particular has changed?"

I was hit by the rat's magic, but I don't particularly feel any pain or whatsoever.
However, somehow I feel like my line of sight has become awfully low...

"Cindy, you okay?"

"Yes... But, sensei, you are!"

"Me? ... Oh? I feel like you have suddenly grown, Cindy."

After all, I'm currently looking up to Cindy's face.
Just what the heck is going on here?

"Sensei! You can't call that nothing!"

"How is your body's condition?"

Worrying about me, Agnes and Betty run up to me as well, but I feel like both of them have become quite big.

"Earl Baumeister, you need to take a straight look at reality. It is not that the three of them have become bigger. Try taking a look in a mirror."

I take a hand-mirror out of my magic bag, and look at my own face.
Or rather, somehow I feel like the magic bag, the other decorations, and even my robe have become fairly big...
Speaking of the robe, isn't it way too baggy?
And even my face as it's reflected in the mirror is...

"I totally look like a child, don't I?"

I recall the time when I had just been reincarnated into this world.

"Earl Baumeister, will you stop escaping reality already?" (Arnest)

"Yeah, I got it."

In fact I had mostly noticed it after I got hit by the rat's mysterious spell.
However, so far I've never heard of a spell like this, leaving me with a feeling that it couldn't be true. Still, seeing my own body having actually become small like this is, you know...

"Your robe and clothes are too baggy, so it's probably hard to move in them?"

"There's that as well, but I wonder what Elise and the other are going to say after they see that I've become so small all of a sudden?"

Even though they are soon going to give birth, I don't qualify as a father like this, but rather as a big

brother?

"That is what you call escaping from reality." (Arnest)

That damn Arnest...poking his nose into the business of other people...

"Sensei, I'm terribly sorry...but, you're cute."

"Sensei, while we've been with you...how adorable."

"Sensei, are you alright? You're really cute."

And then I end up getting surrounded by Agnes and the other two while being told that I'm cute.

"Little ladies, you have fairly nice characters." (Arnest)

For some reason I've become a child after being hit by the rat's magic.



"I am going to chase after the rat." (Arnest)

"Why?"

"Going by my estimation, the rat who has turned you into a child, is a cutting-edge magic tool of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era. It is an artificial rat using special magic that will change an adult into a child. I suppose that dispelling this spell is connected to the rat's destruction."

As I'm bewildered in my current state, Arnest suggests something outrageous.
It looks like the rat, who has cast the spell, must be destroyed for me to return to normal.

"Won't the spell run out at some point?"

"That might normally be the case, but the artificial rat has continued its activity for a very long time while hiding down here. That means, it would be smarter to also consider the possibility for Earl Baumeister to remain a child. As long as the rat remains active by replenishing its magic through some kind of method, it is correct to assess that the spell will keep running." (Arnest)

Arnest explains his view when asked by Agnes.

"In other words, the rat mustn't get away?"

"Correct. If it remains hidden somewhere, Earl Baumeister will remain a child until his death."

That shitty demon says this as if he's talking about today's weather.

"Victory goes to the one who makes the first move! 『Flame Arrow』!"

In that case matters are simple. I shoot a fire arrow at the rat that's several meters ahead of me. It's impossible for me to miss at this range...

"No way!"

My 『Flame Arrow』 doesn't seem to carry the firepower it should upon impact. Even after directly hitting the rat, it didn't have an effect at all.

"Chu."

"It's totally making fun of me there."

Betraying its appearance, the artificial rat seems to be made quite sturdily. I couldn't destroy it with my spell just now.



"Earl Baumeister, artificial rats do not make fun of others. It is your imagination." (Arnest)

"..."

Don't tell me what I already know!
It's just a figure of speech!
Either way, for my magic's power to have fallen this far...

"At the same time as your body has reverted to that of a child, your mana has also reverted to what it was at that age." (Arnest)

In short, I have around as much power as back when I started to learn magic, I suppose.
Estimating it from the 『Flame Arrow』, my actual power has completely deteriorated to an elementary level.

"That rat is storing mana. It will not be destroyed by something at the level of your current magic, Earl Baumeister." (Arnest)

"Don't say it so calmly!"

"What a mess! In that case, I will handle it!"

"Me too!"

"It's a waste since you're so cute, but...no, that's not it! You damn rat!"

Learning that I wouldn't be able to destroy the rat in my current state, Agnes and the other two try to shoot their own spells at the rat.
However, before they can, the rat hides behind a stone pillar with dragon carvings.

"Waaaiitt——!"

"It's pointless to hide!"

"I'm gonna break you!"

Agnes' group quickly goes around the stone pillar, but they immediately return while not knowing what to do next.

"What's wrong, all of you?"

"The rat has escaped into a hole."

"What did you say!?"

I also confirm it in a hurry, but there's a hole big enough for a rat to pass through at the base of the pillar.
It looks like the hole is connected to the underground.

"Hm——m, this is..."

"What's with the 『Hm——m』, Arnest?"

"It seems like this underground ruin is extending even further down."

"Did the guys, who investigated it before, sleep or something?"

Once you follow the hole at the base of the pillar, a new space extends at a lower floor...
...Isn't kinda odd for them to not have noticed this?

"If you look at the hole, you will see that it is new. When all is said and done, I suspect the rat, which had lived further down, dug a hole and came out to check since it got noisy above its living place due to the previous investigation." (Arnest)

I see. I guess that means the rat started to become active due to the sounds of the previous investigations, and it just encountered us when we came to this place today.
I feel sorry and reflect in my heart for having doubted my retainers who investigated this place before.

"Anyway, I guess we should join up with Erw first..."

If we don't destroy the rat after joining up with Erw, who's gone to the toilet, and searching for a path connecting to the place below, I will remain a child...

"Oohh! You will occasionally find them in the demon country as well, demons preferring to run around naked." (Arnest)

"As if that's the case here!"

Since my clothes have become too big after I suddenly became small, it just slid off now that I started to run around.
Only the robe has barely remained on my shoulders, but it's quite heavy for a child's body...
My mana has decreased, and I'm stark naked...can it actually get any worse?

"Anyway, we have to destroy the rat as fast as possible." (Arnest)

"How about capturing this underground ruin with the whole force of the Earl Baumeister House?"

At this rate it might be dangerous to head deeper down into the underground ruin with our current lineup.

It's a bitter choice, but we'll retreat from here for the moment...just when I thought that...

"There's a further continuation of this underground ruin beneath this hole...we must destroy the rat as fast as possible."

"If you remain a child...we'll get scolded by our classmates, sensei."

"For the sake of catching that rat quickly...I'll widen this hole with magic!"

Seemingly believing that they had to save me, Agnes' group is about to widen the hole used as an escape route by the rat with magic.

That's quite hasty of them...they must be quite flustered.

Since it's a ruin with such a rat around, there's no doubt that we can expect other things outside our expectations, such as traps, awaiting us down there.

I try to stop the three, but...before that I notice how the eyes of the dragon carved onto the pillar light up.

"Arnest!"

"The carved dragon is reacting to the raising mana of the little ladies."

"So, what's going to happen?"

"I do not know the answer to that either."

However, the reply shows itself right away.

A magic crest, which I've kinda seen before, surfaces beneath our feet.

At the same time, I can't move my feet as if they've been glued to the ground.

"There was something like a magic crest here?"

"My guess is that the eyes of that dragon serve as something similar to a projector casting the magic crest. Sucking up the ladies' mana, it transcribes the crest beneath the feet of its target. This underground ruin is a winner." (Arnest)

"Is this the time to be happy about it!?"

I feel a deja vu from the magic crest surfacing at my feet.

It is resembling the 『Deadly Inversion Regulation』 we experienced back during our adventurer debut battle.

Since that was also a legacy of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era, it's very likely that we'll be flung somewhere just as it happened back then.

Moreover in a worrisome state of lacking combat power with me being a child, Erw being absent, Arnest being the wrong man for this, and Agnes' group being inexperienced.

""Sensei!""

"Now that it has reached this situation, nothing can be done about it anymore. You three, make sure to stay calm."

The instant I thought that this was the wrong way to give advice, the magic crest at my feet got even brighter, and I lost consciousness, being plunged into a deep darkness.

* * *

"Ugh...so I was transported to some place, as expected..."

"Sensei, are you okay?"

As I open my eyes after having been sent somewhere by the mysterious magic crest, I meet Agnes' face right in front of my nose.

It seems she's been looking after me after I fainted by giving me a lap pillow.

Because my body has reverted to that of a child with a low magic resistance, it has apparently needed time to recover. It looks like everyone has waited for me to wake up.

"Oohh, it seems like you have woken up." (Arnest)

"Sensei, can you move?"

"Somehow...huh?"

I try to stand up as is, but I get dizzy and fall back onto Agnes' lap.

Unfortunately it appears that I've currently only got the stamina of the five-years-old me immediately after reincarnating into this world.

Just having mana is already a gain.

With my mana capacity being at elementary level, I won't be much of a combat power, which means I'll need to rely on Arnest and Agnes.

It's unknown what's awaiting us ahead of this point, but a magician-only party is way too lopsided.

Erw not being here is a real bummer.

"Sensei, you have to rest for a bit longer."

"It's unfortunate, but it looks like my current state is as you can see."

Anyway, right now I must recover the stamina I lost through the transfer.

I'm having Agnes giving me a lap pillow, but I don't have the leeway to get embarrassed about it. There's no one else besides us here anyway...

"I want to investigate this underground ruin as soon as we return." (Arnest)

"Say that after we manage to get back."

After all, the possibility of investigating this ruin depends on whether we can safely return to the surface in the first place.

"Agnes-chan, let me take over."

"Please do. I'm going to explore our surroundings a bit."

"Agnes, don't go too far. Make sure to search with 『Detect』."

"Okay, I got it."

Given that they don't have the time to just bother with me, the one with the biggest mana among

them, Agnes — leaving Arnest out of the quotation here — has Betty take over in giving me a lap pillow, and immediately begins to investigate the vicinity with 『Detect』.

"There are no responses typical of monsters around us."

As I thought, I guess we won't know any details unless we actually move further in after I recover.

"Sensei, is the area beneath your head not too hard?"

"It's okay, I'd say."

Agnes' thighs were quite soft.

Seeing how she's the top student in the classroom, she probably spends a lot more time studying at home than getting physical exercise.

The thighs of Betty, who hunts often, are tighter than those of Agnes, but smooth.

I wonder how Cindy's thighs feel...bah! Am I some perverted old dude!?

Right now's not the time to check out stuff like that!

"Sensei, sorry. Because I carelessly approached the rat..."

Cindy feels depressed over being the one at fault for us being stuck in such a situation.

"Cindy, with the circumstances being what they are, worrying about things that already happened won't change anything. For now we should only think about how to safely get out of here. That is something important for adventurers."

"Okay!"

As I stroke her head while saying this, Cindy finally recovers her usual cheerfulness.

After all it'll become a big impediment for our escape from this place if she loses heart.



"The dizziness is gone at long last."

"Sensei, laying down for a bit longer is..."

"Betty, I thank you for worrying about me, but there's no guarantee that we will be safe here forever. I'm already fine."

"Sensei, please tell us right away if you get tired, okay?"

"That's a matter of course. After all, I have this body..."

For the sake of getting back to the surface, we start scouting out the vicinity first.

Since nothing has attacked us while I was taking a rest, it means this area is safe for now.

"Earl Baumeister, it would be better if you were to change your clothes." (Arnest)

"You're right."

The clothes I've been wearing are baggy, and the robe is too long and heavy, resulting in me dragging it along the ground as I walk.

Accordingly I quickly put away my clothes and the robe into my magic bag, and take out the clothes I wore during my childhood.

"Those have lasted quite long." (Arnest)

"I just had forgotten to throw them away."

It proves to be lucky that I have a poor man's mentality of thinking that I might use them for something someday, and that I'm sloppy as in finding it a pain to throw them away.

They're slightly worn-down, but it's not like I can't wear them.

While at it, I also take out and equip the lightest short wand, given that I can't use anything higher than elementary magic at the moment.

This should up the fire power of my magic a bit.

"Good grief...what an outrageous disaster...eh? Why are your faces so red?"

I notice the girls looking my way with blushing faces.

"Sensei, please tell us before you change your clothes."

"I'm sorry, but we're in a state of an emergency right now."

I don't want to waste a single second, and my body is currently the same as that of a child.

I tell Agnes that it doesn't matter that they've seen my naked body.

"Sensei, it's also an issue of tact."

If it's a party of men and women after they've become adventurers, it's not like they won't ever see the naked body of the opposite sex by accident.

Such times are the wrong occasions to be oddly conscious of it, not to mention getting aroused. It'll be a problem if it'll cause an influence on the party's teamwork.

I explain to Agnes and the other two girls that they should quickly get ready to move without minding it.

"Understood. We won't look at the small sensei."

"Now listen...it's because I'm a child right now."

That damn Betty. Taking her attitude towards her big brother into account, I wonder whether she isn't actually an S.



"...Considering that it's a corridor, it sure is spacious. I can't see all the way inside..."

"The width and height is around ten meters. It is extending quite far ahead." (Arnest)

Once I have finished changing clothes, we quickly start moving from the place where we had been transferred to.

We continue proceeding through the corridor, or rather the cave looking like it had been merely drilled through the rock, while relying on magic lamps.

"My pace is..."

Since I've become a child, my steps are small and thus my walking speed is slow, so I'm troubled. Agnes and the others have dropped their pace to match me, and since I get tired quickly, we have to often take breaks.

Being unable to do what I had been normally capable of until now is truly tough.

"Sensei, you okay?"

"Want to join hands with me?"

"It might be better for me to carry you."

"Agnes, make sure to only concentrate on the front. Cindy, if we hold hands, one of your hands will be blocked, which will be no good. The same for you, Betty. If you carry me as rear guard, won't I be in danger instead?"

Currently, Agnes is walking in front watching for any dangers, Cindy is protecting Arnest and me in the middle, and Betty is cautious of our back, but since all three of them are only paying attention to me, I give them a light scolding.

"Proceed in the formation we have decided on in advance. There are times where you will be attacked by monsters or fall into traps when you act on your own accord."

I caution them strongly since it's a matter of life and death right now.

"Even if you warn them with such a body, it lacks persuasiveness." (Arnest)

"It's none of your business!"

I loudly retort at Arnest who makes a witty remark.

Going by amount of mana, this guy should be our strongest combat force, but he's really difficult to use.

"You're also cute when angry, sensei."

"..."

Of all things I end up being called cute even by Agnes who I had considered the final bastion of rationality. It proves that Arnest has spoken the truth, but I don't want to admit that at any cost.

"So, is this going away at some point?"

"That is impossible seeing how the rat has not been destroyed. That rat is a guard to prevent intrusion into the ruin by casting a spell to turn the invaders into children." (Arnest)

Because the invaders will weaken in mana and strength if they are turned into children, it'll become easy to repel them.

"There is nothing here that would be of scientific value." (Arnest)

Arnest seems to be disconcerted with this underground ruin where he can't see anything but rock face as we advance.

He hasn't been looking as joyful as usual.

"Nothing but corridors, caves, and spaces. That will not be able to stir my imagination." (Arnest)

"It's truly nothing but a cave. Still, I wonder how long that will continue to be so?"

"As invaders are sent here through a magic crest, it is a space with some kind of purpose." (Arnest)

It won't be anything good anyway. I've understood that much at the 『Deadly Inversion Regulation』.

"For a magic crest to be projected by the eyes of a dragon carved into a stone pillar, that was unexpected for me as well. Since we also discovered the rat that came from underground to check the situation as a result of us being noisy above this underground ruin, it can be called a lucky break." (Arnest)

"You have it nice, being so carefree, don't you?"

I guess you can also describe it as his nature as a scholar.

Thinking that we could immediately chase after the rat if we widened the hole beneath the stone pillar was a mistake.

To think that there would be a trap that'd send us down here through a transfer crest with the mana, when the three girls tried to use magic, serving as a trigger...

We had been totally unprepared.

Elise or Lisa likely wouldn't have carelessly used magic at that place.

"Because we were transferred, it's also become difficult to return through 『Teleport』."

"It should not be that far away from the basement beneath Baulburg's suburbs, but I think it will at least be a distance that can obstruct 『Teleport』." (Arnest)

Even if not, it's impossible for me to use 『Teleport』 with my current amount of mana.

In addition, there's many other spells I can't use because of lacking mana.

Right now I'm no more than a burden.

"Sensei, it's exiting towards a space that looks like a room."

After walking for around ten minutes, we come out in a room, or rather a space that's spreading out a bit.

Just when I wondered whether this corridor would end in a dead end here, there's a pedestal made out of stone in the middle of the room. A dragon statue with an overall-length of three meters has been placed on top of it.

On a closer look, it seems like there's an ascending stairway behind it.

"That means we will be able to go up a floor if we climb those stairs." (Arnest)

"It's a well-made dragon statue."

"It's an object from the Ancient Magic Civilization's era."

"What are you so carefree for..."

Even if I might be in the body of a child, it's obvious to me.

Or rather, leaving the beginner Cindy aside, Arnest must have noticed it long ago.

I instantly shift into my combat mode.

"You three, get your 『Magic Barrier』 ready."

I order Agnes' group to immediately enter into their combat stances.

Arnest...I can't believe that this guy will move upon my orders. Besides he possesses more mana than me.

Even if his initial response will be slightly delayed, he probably won't die that easily.

"Eh? What's wrong?"

"I mean, that dragon statue is..."

"Then it must be a man-made object..."

"No, that's our enemy."

"Earl Baumeister, look closely above the head of that dragon ornament." (Arnest)

"Picking a fight with me, eh...?"

The artificial rat, who has transformed me into a child, has taken up position on top of the dragon's head.

I wonder, should I interpret this as the rat manipulating the artificial dragon?

"All things considered, 『Detect』 doesn't work on that rat."

"It has been built in such a way. It is a highly-efficient structure allowing the usage of special magic by miniaturizing it to the extreme. Earl Baumeister, I would like you to defeat it as undamaged as

possible." (Arnest)

"I can't really promise you that."

After all, I'm not of much use in combat right now, so I have to make Agnes' group fight as the main force.

"You got to do your best then, Arnest."

"My magic attribute is 『Darkness』. It is a magic focused on manipulating the minds of people, demons, and living beings. In other words, it will not work against these artificial creatures. What I can do is to protect you, Earl Baumeister." (Arnest)

With those words Arnest deploys a firm 『Magic Barrier』, sheltering me within. It looks like he has acknowledged my value as sponsor for the sake of his underground ruin excavations.

"That thing is what you'd call a dragon golem."

"Do your best, little ladies." (Arnest)

"Agnes, Cindy, Betty, it's not an enemy you can't win against with the mana of you three. Calm down, and fight while remembering our lessons."

""Yes, sensei!""

I make Agnes' group calm down with that speech, and immediately after the three confront the dragon golem, it roars, and we're plunged into battle.



"Remember our lessons...let's go, Cindy, Betty!" (Agnes)

The three begin to fight the small dragon golem with the oldest, Agnes, acting as leader. Going by amount of mana, age, and personality, I believe that it's the most sensible decision for Agnes to be the leader.

"Betty! Cast the 『Magic Barriers』!"

"Sure thing!"

First Agnes entrusts Betty, who's good at using 『Magic Barrier』, with the defense which you can't miss in battles against dragons. Thanks to the 『Magic Barriers』 deployed with appropriate strength and timing by her, the dragon golem's breath attacks are blocked with ease.

"I guess the timing and intensity of her 『Magic Barriers』 gets a passing mark..."

"Earl Baumeister, that is quite the strict assessment." (Arnest)

"Well, their lives are on the line here. Besides, I'm a sensei."

"With that appearance?"

"Don't say it!"

It's not like I've become a child because I like it.

The battle between Agnes' group and the dragon golem currently seems even with both apparently sounding each other out.

Since it's not a practical lesson, I have to help out in the worst case, but with my offensive abilities right now...

I don't know whether I'll be of much use, but I need to get ready to reinforce them at any time.

"It will not work out like with the bone dragon subjugation you mentioned previously, Earl Baumeister."

"It'll be a joint effort. Agnes' party is holding out well."

In the first place, me being forced to fight such a monster as a 10-years old, and moreover by myself, was abnormal. Agnes' group is handling it quite well considering their lacking experience. If it were other students of my class, Arnest and I might have already been dead by now.

"In other words, being partial is not only bad either." (Arnest)

"Don't call it being partial!"

I'm just keeping an eye on excellent students, okay!?

He sure keeps saying whatever he wants, and yet he's totally useless with his huge amount of mana!

"Anyway, I'll back them up. Remove the 『Magic Barriers』 once I give you the signal."

"Roger." (Arnest)

I take the handmade bow which I used long ago out of my magic bag.

It's rather questionable whether I'll be even able to cause a single scratch on the dragon golem with it, but the objective isn't to cause damage.

I remove the arrowhead of the short arrow used by children, install a reasonably big magic stone instead, and after nocking the arrow, I aim at the dragon golem who's repeating a hit and away offensive against Agnes and the others.

"What do you plan to do with that?"

"It's gonna be a distraction."

Even if the rat and the dragon golem are man-made, it should interfere with their visual perceptions, seeing as they got artificial eyes.

The magic stone at the arrow's end will be used for casting 『Flash』 in front of the dragon golem's eyes.

"Even without you going out of your way to add a magic stone to the arrow, it will work as long as you use your magic, Earl Baumeister."

"It has another aim as well. Arnest, Agnes, Betty, Cindy, close your eyes!"

Upon my signal, Arnest lowers the 『Magic Barrier』 temporarily, Agnes' group strengthens their 『Magic Barriers』, and all of them close their eyes.

Immediately following, my arrow flies all the way to the tip of the dragon golem's nose, and before hitting its head, the installed magic stone casts a light that only dazzles.

Unable to use anything but elementary magic at the moment, there's a limit to my power, even if I use it as dazzler with 『Flash』.

Not to mention that the opponents are artificial. The effect should be fairly limited.

Accordingly, I also make the magic stone at the arrow's tip burn, causing a fierce 『Flash』 to burst forth in front of the dragon golem's eyes.

If they have such an intense flash light up right in front of them, it ought to scorch the lens parts of the golem and rat's eyes.

"A plan to limit their visual perception, huh?"

"Correct."

They'll quickly recover from the dazzling, but if the structure of their artificial eyes has been scorched, their visual input will be limited until it gets repaired.

"Agnes! A part of the rat and dragon's eyes should have been burned. Use the blind spot created by that!"

"Okay!"

I think the battle ought to become a bit more advantageous for Agnes' party's side with this.

While I'm thinking this, Agnes' team completely switches to offense.

Entrusting the control of the 『Magic Barriers』 and their defense deployment to Betty, Agnes fires a follow-up 『Fireball』 at the dragon golem, and Cindy follows suit with a 『Earth Lance』.

"I guess their firepower is sufficient."

Since they've fired spells, which were concentrated to the limit for the sake of economizing on the mana, their spells should deliver decent damage if they hit.

However, this dragon golem is quick.

It skilfully dodges the spells of the two.

"I suppose their mobility goes up in proportion to their decreased size...Agnes, don't fire the magic in a straight line! Why do you think I reduced its visual field?"

Even though I went out of my way to scorch their eyes with 『Flash』, spells that are simply shot from the front will be dealt with by the rat and the dragon golem.

The other side has its visual perception only impaired partially, it's not like they can't see anything at all.

"Cindy! From the right side!"

"Okay!"

Once I instruct her, the focused 『Flame Arrow』 shot by Cindy draws a big curve, trying to penetrate the golem's wing from the right. However, the dragon golem flicks it away with its tail before it can land.

"Sensei, it was no good."

"It's not like it failed completely."

As I thought, the 『Flash』 seems to have damaged a part of its visual perception. It was late to react against Cindy's spell, and only barely repelled it after getting instructed by the rat. Looking closely, a part of the golem's tail has melted due to the arrow's heat. Even though it would have usually dodged this, it probably had no choice but to repel the arrow with its tail because of its narrowed visual field.

"Agnes, from the left now!"

"Yes!"

Next, Agnes aims a 『Wind Cutter』 at the dragon golem from the left side. Her spell hits the wing, and tears off the wing's tip.

"All of you, did you understand?"

""""Yes!""""

Due to the series of instructions just now, it's become clear that the golem's visual field on the left side has worsened quite a bit. Accumulating damage by abusing that fact is the ideal move. Agnes and the other two have comprehended that as well.

"These kinds of products of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era are certainly powerful, but if you damage them once, it's easier to chip away their combat power afterwards. They can't heal themselves with healing magic or potions after all."

There are some that possess a mechanism of automatically repairing themselves in front of your eyes, but you just have to make sure that they can't get away with it.

"Ey!"

Cindy shoots yet another 『Flame Arrow』 from the dragon golem's left side. This one also hits, leaving a big hole in the golem's left wing behind.

Apparently judging that it'd be bad to allow them to attack any further, the dragon golem launches a counterattack, capitalizing on its small body.

Without clashing against the walls or ceiling of the cave that can't be called spacious by any standards, it spits its breath attacks at Agnes' group while flying around at a super-low altitude.

However, this is also blocked by Betty who focuses on the 『Magic Barriers』.

As if giving tit-for-tat, Agnes fires a focused 『Flame Arrow』 at the golem from the left side.

This one hits as well. The golem probably hated having its wings shot any further. By sacrificing half of its tail, it prevents the loss of its wing.

"The combination of the dragon golem's magnificent artificial intelligence with the rat's artificial intelligence is splendid."

"On whose side are you!?"

Even though he'd die if we actually lost...this is the reason why he's called scholar.

"It is dusty."

"So you say, but what's the point in whining about it, seeing as it can't be helped anyway..."

Arnest complains while brushing away the big amount of dust, which has been whirled up due to the dragon golem's high-speed maneuvers.

As if he's got anything to complain about dust when he's usually doing excavations anyway.

He's a guy where I don't quite get whether he's whimsical because he's a demon, or whether he's moody because he's a scholar.

"Uh-oh."

Just as I think so, he swiftly deploys his 『Magic Barrier』, blocking a stray breath shot that had been aimed at Agnes' group.

"I am useful." (Arnest)

"No doubt."

As expected, Agnes' group has their hands full, dealing with their own circumstances right now.

"It won't hit!"

"Agnes, we'll corner it in the cave with two spells!"

"Oki, let's match our timings!"

Still, although they seem to come up with their own plans, the golem easily dodges their two spells even after being cornered in a corner of the cave, and adds a return attack on top of it.

"Agnes-chan! Cindy-chan! Hurry!"

Betty, who's deploying her 『Magic Barriers』 while dealing with the golem's attacks, starts to get

flustered as her mana relentlessly keeps dwindling away.

"Even though she just needs to replenish her mana with spare magic gems."

"She cannot handle that much." (Arnest)

Betty must timely deploy her 『Magic Barriers』.

Because she can't take her eyes off the situation for even a second, she can't grasp a good timing to replenish her mana with the magic gems she possesses as a side effect of her lacking combat experience.

Since it's a common mistake among beginners, it's not really all that unusual.

Burkhart-san previously said that magicians end up dead because of that, although only rarely.

"Arnest, we're heading out."

"As support for the young ladies?"

"Yes, right."

If Agnes' group loses to the dragon golem, I, who have become a childish elementary magician, and Arnest, who can't damage the golem with his magic, are going to die.

I think it'll take a bad end if we don't lend them a hand at this point.

"Betty, excuse us for a bit."

"Sensei?"

Arnest and I aim for a moment when Betty hasn't deployed a barrier, and call out to her from behind.

"Since Arnest is going to cast 『Magic Barriers』 as needed as your replacement, take out a magic gem while you can, and recover your mana with it."

"Got it. Sorry, I got panicked worrying what would happen if I was late on using my 『Magic Barriers』 because I had taken my eyes off to check my magic bag..."

It'd be something else if it was only about her, but it'd also concern the lives of Agnes and Cindy. It's understandable that Betty, who lacks combat experience, has lost her nerves.

"Since you will have enough time to gradually learn those things, it's fine for you to concentrate on what you can do right now. That's why I'm here as your sensei."

"Thank you, sensei."

"Just so you know, it is actually me who is deploying the 『Magic Barriers』. With Earl Baumeister's current 『Magic Barrier』..."

"Shut it, we know without you spelling it out."

This demon really sucks at reading the mood.
At such times you should just cast your 『Magic Barriers』 and keep your trap shut!

"I missed again!"

"Uug——gh, I'm not hitting it..."

If it comes to the amount of mana, the two are still capable of fighting without any problems, but as they're unfamiliar with actual combat, they've lost their composure.
At this rate, they'll gradually run out of mana, and lose.

"Arnest, we're heading out even further to the front."

"Good grief, you sure are working your personnel hard."

"I don't mind if you want to die?"

If he says that demons don't die, I'm definitely going to leave him behind.

"I know, I know, I was just joking."

Betty is already fine after having replenished her mana.
Next I'll calm down Agnes and Cindy, who're fighting in front of her, and give them a chance to replenish their mana.
Taking back control here for a moment should raise our chance of winning.

"Agnes, Cindy, you okay?"

"Yes."

"I'm fine."

"Replenish your mana while you can. Take a deep breath and calm down."

While I have Arnest block the golem's attacks, I tell the two to settle down for a bit.
At such times, things get worse the more you panic.

"Sensei, I have recovered my mana."

"Sensei, me too."

It looks like both have settled down.

"On the other hand, it is terrible for me!" (Arnest)

"Endure your role as a shield!"

After all he got more mana than me.
Seeing how he can't attack, I have Arnest devote his efforts towards serving as a shield for

everyone's survival.

"Agnes, Cindy, do you have an idea about that dragon golem's weakpoint?"

"Does it have something like a weakpoint?"

"Real combat is about fighting while discovering that."

You won't know whether an enemy really has any weakpoints unless you actually challenge them to a fight.

However, I'd like Agnes' group to realize that keeping to think about it while fighting, and flexibly changing the tactics at times is also very important.

"I'm sorry. You did your best to create a blind spot, and yet..."

The previous 『Flash』, eh?

The reason why Agnes has apologized to me is probably because their spells gradually stopped hitting from the left side as time passed on.

However, I had expected as much.

"That's inevitable. The battle situation has already advanced, and the opponents adopted countermeasures against it."

The artificial dragon golem can't recover through healing magic or potions.

It still has a malfunction in its left eye thanks to the previous 『Flash』. That much is true.

However, that rat is sitting on top of the golem's head.

I can't think that both artificial beings are speaking with each other through words, but they are likely dealing with the attacks from the left side, which has become a blind spot, through some kind of method we aren't aware of.

"The other side has been built so that they wouldn't be destroyed. In short, they have countermeasures in place to avoid that fate, I'm sure."

I mean, they are legacies of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era.

It's not just for show that they're still operating up until today.

"Agnes, Cindy, did you think of a weakpoint?"

"Umm..."

It's probably plenty that they can fight up to this point in a battle against a dragon golem they've encountered today for the first time, but if possible, I'd like them to realize the dragon golem's weakpoint.

For the time being, the dragon golem has compensated for its malfunctioning sight by linking with the rat, but that doesn't mean that this weakpoint is gone.

Sure, by sharing information with the rat, it has temporarily alleviated that flaw, but it's not like the damage to its eyes has been fixed with that, neither does it mean that the rat has taken absolutely no damage from the 『Flash』.

"Agnes, that dragon golem does have a weakpoint. You know what it is?"

"Eh? A weakpoint?"

"If you think about it a bit, even a child would understand. You just can't hit upon it because you're agitated by your first real combat. Try considering it calmly."

"Okay..."

Agnes continues to brood over it for a while, but then she finally notices the solution, it seems.

"Sensei! I found its weakpoint! Here I go! Everyone, close your eyes!"

After Agnes tells everyone to close their eyes, she fires a 『Flash』 light sphere towards the golem's right eye...just when everyone thinks that, she lets the sphere explode right in front of the rat's eyes. I closed my eyes as well, but I could sense it through the movements of the mana.

"Chuu——!"

Until now, the artificial rat had only cried in a way that could only be taken as it looking down on humans, but what can be heard now is a voice that completely sounds like a scream. Since it's not alive, it shouldn't feel the dazzle, but it might be the replacement for a warning towards the occurrence of a malfunction in its own visual perception.

"Chuu——!"

"Ah! Wait!"

"No, don't mind it."

Seemingly upon the rat's order, the dragon golem descends towards the pedestal it had sat on in the beginning, in order to replenish its mana.

I say to Agnes, who tries to stop it, "Don't focus too much on damaging the dragon golem's main body. Cindy, you've got it as well?"

"Yes! Here I coooooome!"

It looks like she has understood my aim.

Cindy destroys the clasp-like parts atop the pedestal with pellets that had their speed and accuracy increased.

Right, if you destroy that part, the golem won't be able to replenish its mana, even if it lands there. If you can't bring the dragon golem down with one blow, destroying the pedestal's function to resupply mana is much easier to carry out than breaking the dragon golem's main body.

"Sensei, we did it."

"Don't drop your guard."

We have blocked the mana supply on top of reducing the visual perception of the dragon golem and the rat navigating it, which will make it impossible to repair the broken parts in the end. They have definitely been cornered, but because the golem itself still got its combat abilities left, we can't show any negligence.

However, under these circumstances, that golem should definitely move as I expect it to.

"Everyone, make sure to focus on defense, and gather in one place."

Immediately after all five of us have assembled in one spot upon my signal, the cornered dragon starts to unleash a chain of powerful attacks at us without thinking of the consequences.

It probably wants to kill us before running out of power.

We're intruders in this underground ruin. If it manages to kill us here, it'll be equal to having prevented the ruin from being invaded.

"It has an amazing fire power."

Arnest has a completely astonished look due to the chain of attacks by the dragon golem.

"Sensei, is it fine for us to not make any move?"

"Yeah, but be ready to launch a simultaneous attack at any time."

Arnest can't contribute anything besides 『Magic Barriers』 in this underground ruin anyway. Hence it's the most efficient method to weather through the final stretch of attacks by the golem.

"You handle your personnel roughly." (Arnest)

"This place is an underground ruin, isn't it? Show some motivation, will you?"

"I guess it can not be helped." (Arnest)

Arnest seems calm despite his complaints.

He continues to deploy a 『Magic Barrier』 of suitable power, and moreover, he's told me to not handle my personnel roughly.

That's like saying that my usage of a demon is rough while at the same time making sure that Agnes and the others don't find out about his true identity.

It's probably because he doesn't want to lose the right to excavate the underground ruins found in the Baumeister Earldom by having his identity exposed, though.

"But, Arnest-san has an amazing amount of mana. I've heard about most of the advanced magicians, but I've got to know him today for the first time."

"Y-Yeah...he's the Earl Baumeister House little treasure."

Given that Agnes is great at classroom learning, she has learned the names of all famous advanced magicians.

She tells me that she was surprised to learn of Arnest only today, but I wing it in a hurry by describing him as a hidden gem.

No matter how close I might be with Agnes' group, I cannot afford to let them know about the

existence of demons.

Precisely because of that, I had Arnest masquerade himself, too.

"You know, that is a way of talking that somewhat lacks confidence, Earl Baumister."

"I don't want to be told that by you!"

"Sensei!"

Suddenly Betty yells.

It looks like the dragon golem is about to hit its limit soon.

Because it can't replenish its mana after the destruction of the device on the pedestal, it should run out of mana in a little while.

Even though it's been releasing powerful attacks at us, albeit for a short while, it's now just observing us.

"It's the final attack, but don't forget our first goal."

""""Okay!""""

The dragon golem, which has used up most of its mana, has apparently entered an energy conservation mode.

It has stopped attacking and sat down in front of the pedestal.

It's not like anything will be resolved by that, but I guess the installed artificial intelligence has ordered it to survive as long as possible.

For our side, there's no point in waiting any longer. As long as we get rid of that rat, all will be over. That's the most important goal, or rather, it'd be very bad if we allow that small rat to get away.

"If we don't destroy that rat, I won't be able to return to being an adult."

Even if we leave the dragon golem alone, it should stop working in a little bit anyway.

That means, it's far more important to not let the rat sitting on its head escape.

"Cindy! Betty! Let's go!"

"Yes!"

"Leave it to me!"

Upon Agnes' signal, they begin their final attack.

"Eeey!"

First, Agnes creates a huge 『Wind Cutter』...or so I thought, but it's actually an improved, unique version of a 『Wind Cutter』.

The dragon golem, pinned down by a huge wind cluster from above, can't escape because it's on the verge of running out of mana.

The rat can't free its body from the dragon golem either, and it looks as if it's stuck to the dragon's head.

I doubt that it's only owed to the wind pressure.

"Rat! I won't let you run away!"

Next, Cindy shoots a focused 『Flame Arrow』 at the rat. The rat can't dodge as it can't move. The 『Flame Arrow』 penetrates its body, and on top of that, the fur covering its body catches fire. Its inner structure should have been fried by the 『Flame Arrow』, so the rat will likely stop working with this as well.

"This will finish it!"

In the end, Betty skewers the dragon golem with a long, focused 『Flame Arrow』. At long last Agnes' team has succeeded in destroying the rat and the dragon golem.

"Agnes-chan, Cindy-chan, did we do it?"

"I confirmed that they stopped working."



"Betty, we did it."

The three celebrate by hugging each other as they finally defeated a formidable enemy, but it's still too early to rejoice.

They are still inexperienced and careless since they're newcomers.

"Not yet! All three of you, deploy your 『Magic Barriers』 at full throttle!"

"Eh? That golem has already..."

"Hurry! It's an order!"

""""Okay!""""

Hearing my forceful demand, all three deploy firm 『Magic Barriers』 in a hurry.

At the same time, the dragon golem blows up, scattering its fragments all over the cave.

Like a buckshot, the fragments loudly clash against the barriers due to the force of the explosion.

If we had been directly hit by those, it's a safe bet that we'd suffered serious injuries, or died in the worst case.

"No way, for it to blow itself up..."

Agnes looks mortified as she hadn't expected that.

Forgetting the joy over the dragon golem subjugation, she's chewing on her lips.

"Sensei, how did you know?"

"It was faint, but mana was still squirming around within its body. It looked as though the rat also moved a bit."

It was a possibility that they simply had some mana left, but to me it seemed as though the residue mana stirred, and in the first place, the dragon golem was a machine built to protect this ruin.

I thought that it might very likely try to deliver a final blow against the intruders, who got careless because of their victory, before completely stopping to function.

It's because it probably assumed that it might be good in the cost vs. efficiency ratio if it could cause heavy injuries to the intruders, even if it hadn't gone as far as killing them.

On top, there was another device that could order that, namely, the rat.

And in fact, it was correct to have the three quickly put up their 『Magic Barriers』.

"As expected of you, sensei. I got careless..."

"I'm going to reflect on this."

"The golems in underground ruins sure are scary..."

Having said that, it was the first golem with a self-destruction function among the artifacts in the ruins located in the Kingdom.

If you ask why I realized it, it'd be owed to me having plentifully experienced such golems during the Empire's civil war.

That means I've become that distrustful of such artifacts.

"Even so, putting aside your failure to notice its self-destruction at the end, you managed to put up a good fight against it."

Agnes, Betty, and Cindy are still minors.

It'd be problematic to be too strict with them. If they are able to deal with such an opponent up to this point on their first encounter, I think it'll be alright as long as they hold a proper review meeting later on.

"Uuuuhh! The precious artifacts! I will not be able to gather much data with them self-destroying!"

"That's what you worry about..."

At the same time as the complete destruction of the dragon golem has been confirmed, Arnest, who has served as shield so far as it goes, swiftly approached the wreckage.

He allows his occupational disease to rear its head, and only mourns the fact that precious, historic data has been lost.

"It is really regretful."

"Bear with it."

Since we've confirmed our safety, I quickly look for the rat that had been blown away to some place by the dragon golem's explosion.

I spot it right away, but after it was smashed against the ceiling due to the explosion's energy, it has died.

No, I guess it's weird to call it 'died'...

Its exterior fur has burned to cinders, and it has now turned into simple junk.

But that's the point. I still haven't returned to my original body.

"There's no change to my body. Just what the hell is going on here?"

I grill Arnest about this.

"About that, you will remain like that for two or three days longer."

"Why!?"

Shouldn't I change back since the caster has been fully destroyed?

"That rat has used a spell that will turn you into a child for a fixed period of time, Earl Baumeister. If the rat had survived, it would have continued to supply the spell with mana from somewhere in this ruin, resulting in you remaining a child indefinitely."

That rat would have probably been able to replenish its mana while freely moving within this ruin, using its small body.

Other than riding the dragon golem's head and ordering it around to make it attack us, it'd have replenished its mana with the pedestals function with the goal to keep the spell, which turned me

into a child, going.

"Since the rat has been destroyed, resulting in the spell's mana supply running dry, the possibility of you remaining a child for eternity is gone. The spell will wear off, but that's a matter which will take several days."

"I see."

At the least, two or three more days like this, huh...?

"Sensei, are you going to stay like this for a while?"

"That sure sounds troublesome."

What are Elise and the others going to think if I return home like this?
Even though my children are going to be born very soon, their father is in such a state.

"Still, although you look like a child, we were saved by you, sensei."

That's what you'd call old man's wisdom.
My current mana is at elementary level, so I should be almost at the bottom of my own magician class.
Of course I can't use very powerful spells either.
Accordingly, I supported Agnes' group by scheming in my own way, using 『Flash』 to steal the opponent's sight.

"That was the implementation of coming up with good plans which you're always talking about, right sensei?"

"It's as you say, Betty."

The result will drastically differ depending on the way you use your mana.
It means, one should always fight while considering how to use magic in the most efficient way, and not just waste mana on releasing spells while ambiguously using your mana.

"Even with the same amount of mana, the result will change depending on its use. Right now, I'm deeply impressed as I recall your magic, sensei!"

"We couldn't have won alone. Sensei, you're awesome after all!"

"It's great that I'm your student, sensei."

Currently Agnes' group has ability at a level in the upper ranks of intermediate level.
If they come up with good schemes, it'll be possible for them to give even magicians at the advanced level a good run for their money.
In order to realize that, they have to plan and use their brain.

"That all-important sensei of yours looks like this, though." (Arnest)

"Again with the unnecessary comments..."

That damn Arnest keeps dissing me for having been turned into a child through magic.
But you know, it's definitely impossible for humans to live on while always being cautious of all kinds of possible dangers.
No matter who they might be, people will always be careless in one way or another.

"Can you actually talk about others!?"

"I am a scholar."

He truly got a retort to everything.
I'm 100% sure that you have no friends.

"By the way, there is something I must inform you about, Earl Baumeister."

"What is it that you must tell me?"

"This rat has been too high-spec for a defense device."

"That means..."

It could use magic to turn adults into children, it could eternally move around the ruin while resupplying its mana, and in the end it tried to get rid of us by manipulating a dragon golem. Considering its small body, it seemed to be crammed with many functions...

"What does that mean, Arnest-san?"

"This rat can be called a superior device within the system maintaining this underground ruin, going beyond what I had thought of it at first."

Arnest answers Agnes' question relatively honestly.
I can sense a slight discrimination based on gender here.

"So it was modeled after a rat to put many intruders off guard?"

"That is correct."

Bah, as I thought, he had frankly answered Betty's question as well.
And yet I feel like he only throws sarcastic remarks my way.

"In case the rat as a superior device is destroyed, the system of this ruin will strengthen its vigilance even further. So it's highly likely that it'll try everything to remove us intruders, correct?"

"Indeed. Earl Baumeister, your pupils are excellent."

"Why yes, thank you..."

Arnest politely answers Cindy's question as well, but it's obvious that he's discriminating against

men after all.

Since I've heard that this guy has been a school professor, I think it's also possible that he's just unexpectedly helpful towards students.

Or so I thought...

Beee——p!

Beee——p!

Beee——p!

Beee——p!

"A buzzer?"

"Warning sound?"

"Why all of a sudden?"

Suddenly an annoying warning sound echoes across the entire cave.

We begin to check our vicinity in a hurry, wondering what's going on.

"What does this mean?"

"Going by my estimation, it means that an offensive system to remove the intruders, who destroyed the rat, has activated after having confirmed their presence with the rat's destruction. I must say, this is a system far more sophisticated than I had expected. It is a precious sample and legacy of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era."

"Right now is not the time for that!"

By just hearing this warning sound, we could understand that we've been plunged into a considerably dangerous situation.

It looks there's still more trials ahead of us.

Chapter 3 - Getting out at any cost

"Sensei! Look!"

"Another one!?"

Cindy points at the stone wall behind the pedestal that served as the dragon golem's station to replenish its mana.

Suddenly that wall falls apart with a clattering, and a huge dragon golem, modeled after a Chinese dragon, appears on the other side. Moreover, looking closely, this dragon golem has a construction at his lower body half that seems to move like a caterpillar.

"A dragon tank!"

"Earl Baumeister, that is exactly what it is called."

For there to have existed tanks during the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization. But then again, it's not a gun turret, but the upper body of a dragon that's been installed at the part equal to a tank's upper frame. It seems it's not a tank firing a cannon, but one with a dragon head spitting out a breath.

"(I feel like there was such a kaijuu in Otraman...we gotta escape!)"

When I look behind me at once, I spot the stairs leading to the upper floor. Since there's apparently nothing like stairs or corridors on the other side of the wall from where the dragon tank came, it should be safer, or rather, less of an energy waste to not awkwardly fight here, and instead escape backwards.

"Sensei, we're not going to defeat this?"

"No need!"

I curtly answer Betty's question.

"We're exhausted after being suddenly transferred to this cave, and fighting against the rat and a dragon golem. Given that we don't know the precise location of this place, we can't escape through 『Teleport』 either. In short, it's unclear when we might be able to leave this place."

"While at it, I should add that it is possible that we will not get any chance to take a rest." (Arnest)

As a result of us having destroyed the rat, the underground ruin has become genuinely pissed off, and set us as targets for a thorough removal.

I wonder, is that dragon tank only the beginning?

"We will escape by climbing the stairs behind us!"

Going by how the dragon tank is built, I doubt that it'll be capable of following us upstairs. As it's not like it's necessary to fight the tank and win, escaping and preserving our mana and stamina will raise our chance of survival.

"In the end, we don't know in what way we will be able to return to the surface, with me still being a child for a while. Avoid any unnecessary battles."

""""Yes!""""

"Arnest, we're running. Lend me your back."

"Eh? Me?"

You still haven't realized? And yet you call yourself a scholar...

"I'm in such a state, right!?"

Even if I were to run at full speed, I can't believe that I'd be able to get away from the approaching dragon tank. It's not like I can get Agnes or the other two to carry me either, so the only choice left is Arnest.

"I am someone working by using my head."

"You can also leave me behind and run, but I don't care what happens to you afterwards, okay?"

Arnest being able to carefreely work as archaeologist in the Baumeister Earldom as a demon is based on my patronage and the Kingdom's toleration. If he were to desert me here and run away, the Kingdom wouldn't be lenient with him any longer. I'm pretty sure they'd have him slave away until his death for the sake of the Kingdom's benefit.

"If you're fine with that, go for it."

"You do say something very typical of a high-ranking noble while looking like this. I suppose it can not be helped."

Arnest picks me up, and starts to run towards the stairs. His pace is quite steady. I see, it looks like his legs and loins are quite strong since he's also doing field work, although he calls himself a scholar.

"Earl Baumeister, I think you already know, but..."

"Incoming!"

The dragon tank spit its breath as it chases after us. Upon my signal, Arnest deploys a 『Magic Barrier』 behind him, blocking the breath. He has tried to emphasize that I should be the one to make the call then to deploy the 『Magic Barrier』, since he himself doesn't have the spare time to check his back because he's carrying me, and if he kept up a 『Magic Barrier』, even at times it's not necessary, he'd run out of mana sooner or later, even if he has a big mana pool.

"Sensei, you okay?"

"I'm alright, so go up the stairs as fast as you can!"

""""Okay!""""

Anyway, we've gotta get out of this shitty ruin as quickly as possible. Seeing how we don't know on what floor we're right now, and what kind of traps and mechanisms have been installed on the floor above, we should avoid any unnecessary exhaustion.

"With that structure of the lower body half, that thing should have difficulties to climb the stairs. As long as we manage to get away..."

"Sensei! It's climbing up the stairs!"

Damn! Just as Cindy has pointed out, the dragon tank slowly but steadily begins to climb the stairs.

"Tsk! So it can get up stairs as well, eh!?"

"Sensei, we've got no choice but to destroy it!"

"Wait! Don't waste your mana!"

I don't know how much further we must go. It's possible for us to recover our mana, but we might get successively chased by other traps and machines of this ruin from now on. No matter how well our mana might recover, if we continue in a tired state, we won't be capable of using mana decently, and in the worst case, even moving itself will become difficult.

"To be honest, we're in a fairly terrible situation. That's why, you've got to economize on your mana and stamina."

"Got it. But sensei..."

"A method like this exists as well!"

I get off Arnest's back, take out several sheets from my magic bag, and spread them out as if to cover the stairway.

"Earl Baumeister?"

"There's still more to come."

Next I soak the sheets with plenty of plant-based oil as it's used in cooking. It's still a new, unused bottle, but now's not the time to whine about waste.

"The only one considering such things in a situation like this is you, Earl Baumeister."

"You don't need to comment each and every little thing! It'll be fine with this."

Once I check the situation down the stairs after climbing the stairs to some extent, the dragon tank's caterpillars slip on the oil-soaked sheets, unable to continue climbing, just as I've planned.

"For there to exist such a way...sensei, you're amazing!"

"How did you come up with this?"

"Sensei, aweso——ome!"

Most people living in this world have never seen anything like a tank moving on caterpillars, so it's no wonder that Agnes and the other two highly praise me for being able to deal with the tank on a first sighting.

In reality, it's knowledge from a manga I read in my previous life. But even if that's the truth, it's not a problem as long as it's not exposed. I've got to retain my dignity as a teacher.

"It works surprisingly well. And here I thought about giving you advice after seeing the structure of the dragon tank."

"I'm really sorry about that. I'll leave the next to you then."

That Arnest sure is amazing to spot the dragon tank's weak spot when seeing it for the first time.

"Sensei, what are you going to do next? Set it on fire?"

"No, I think we can simply ignore it."

Agnes suggests to me that it might be safer to destroy the tank by igniting the oil soaking the sheets, but I reject that proposal for several reasons.

"First, I'd like to avoid wasting mana since we don't know where to find the exit of this ruin. Second, the dragon tank might be able to start climbing the stairs again once the oil burns down."

Given that the tank is unmanned, there's no guarantee that setting it on fire will stop its functionality. I think it's safer to leave the tank in its current state where it can't get up the stairs as it keeps slipping downwards.

Besides, a much higher temperature than one would expect is needed to ignite vegetable oil, which is at room temperature.

"Sensei! In front!"

"It looks like we won't really have the leeway to bother with the dragon tank in the back, doesn't it?"

One object after the other heads in our direction from the entrance to the next floor at the top of the stairway. Looking closely, they are small, metallic dragon golems with a length of around 50 centimeters. They are flying through the air while making use of their small wings.

The number...around ten, I'd say?

"That means, the next floor is a nest of those small dragon golems. It seems we will not be allowed to take a rest."

"Seems so..."

Just as expected, the ruin doesn't intend to give us the time to recover our stamina and mana.

"Got it, Agnes? The goal isn't in sight, and we won't be readily given the chance to rest up. Saving on mana plays a crucial role here."

"Okay. So, what are we going to do?"

"Well, we've got no choice but to destroy the small dragons either way. Please do it while keeping your mana usage as low as possible."

""Yes, sensei!""

It might be a result of their education. Agnes' team destroys the small dragons floating in front with concentrated 『Wind Cutters』, and with that we finally succeed in clearing the first floor. The number of floors left...is unknown.



"Now a maze, huh...?"

"It is a setup to prevent intruders from escaping."

Once we reach the next floor, we're greeted by a huge maze. Considering it's an underground labyrinth, the ceiling is rather high. Every now and then, openings similar to hatches are visible on the ceiling, and whenever we get close to one of those hatches, it opens up, and small dragon golems, just like the ones before, rush out in droves.

"It is quite troublesome as it's very narrow here."

The golems are small, but that doesn't change the fact that they're modeled after dragons. Once you get close to them, the dragons will spit their breath at you. Those breaths unexpectedly pack quite the punch, which means a human would suffer terrible injuries or burns if basked by the flames without adopting any countermeasures.

Accordingly, Betty and Arnest timely deploy their 『Magic Barriers』, blocking the flames for us.

"Sensei, Agnes-chan, Cindy-chan, stay together as close as possible."

"Sure."

If we're hit by the flames, we'll bear serious injuries, but on the other hand, it makes it easy to block them. Consequently, they must deploy 『Magic Barriers』 each and every time, and moreover, we won't be able to proceed onward unless we destroy the dragons in our way.

It's a truly nasty setup that continues to gradually whittle down our mana and stamina.

"Sensei, how should we advance?"

"In a maze you always advance while following the left wall!"

It was definitely impossible that we'd be able to clear this underground ruin by just ascending one floor. Not to mention that we don't have any detailed information about this labyrinth-like floor. Always advancing along the left wall, the basics of getting through a labyrinth, is the most efficient method here, I think.

This is knowledge that's also taught at the adventurer's guild, but Agnes, Betty, and Cindy seem to have completely forgotten about it after getting totally panicked.

It was the same for us in the past as well. It's something that's inevitable since they're beginners.

"Eeey! Drop dead! Drop dead!"

"Sensei! It's annoying as they keep appearing one after the other!"

"Agnes! Cindy! Don't think about killing all of them!"

There are hatches installed all over the ceiling on this floor, and small dragon golems keep rushing out of there. Agnes and Cindy attack all the dragons surging out from there with magic, but I have them stop that.

Even if every single dragon is small and weak, it'll take a lot of mana to wipe out all of them.

"We will run while following the left wall and blocking the breath attacks with 『Magic Barriers』! Stay together as much as possible, and control the mana used on the 『Magic Barriers』!"

"Sensei, we can recover our mana with magic gems."

"No, doing it too frequently is a bad idea."

I shoot down Cindy's objection.

If you consider that the dragon tank tried to chase after us, even going as far as climbing the stairs, the small dragons of this floor might pursue us as well. In other words, it's obvious that we won't be allowed any decent break until we get out of this ruin.

"Even if you can recover your mana, the same can't be said for your stamina and mental fatigue. It would be nice if we could take a break somewhere, but going by the events so far, we likely won't be able to take much of a break."

Even if we were to try to rest between the floors, a golem group from the lower floor would immediately come after us. We've blocked the dragon tank, but the small dragon golems can fly and have big numbers. If we were to take it easy by sitting around, we'd be likely surrounded by many small dragons in no time.

"Moreover, we've also got the problem of healing magic."

I'm the only one who can use healing magic within this party, and on top of that, I've got only mana at an elementary level as a child right now. I can only heal small injuries. Hence, if someone gets heavily injured, the party will wipe, or we won't have any other choice but leaving that person behind.

"Let's hide somewhere until you return to normal, sensei."

"I think that will be difficult."

I reject Betty's suggestion as well. It's because none of us knows precisely when I will return to normal.

Arnest's guess is ultimately just that, a guess. If I'm unlucky, it's possible that I'll stay like this for another week. And I can't imagine at all that we'll find a place to hide where we won't be attacked by golems during that time.

"As such, we've got no choice but to keep escaping upwards. Save your mana, and crush the minimum necessary amount of golems and traps standing in our way."

The replenishment of mana itself will work out sufficiently with magic gems, but if you use that method several times a day, the mental exhaustion becomes terrible.

"Not only crushing invaders through sturdy combat units, but turning the invaders into children with magic, sending them to the lowest floor with the 『Deadly Inversion Regulation』, which was fairly popular during the Ancient Magic Civilization's era, and killing the enemies by making the gradually tire out. This underground ruin must be an army facility from the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization."

I see. I had wondered why the first dragon tank used a caterpillar at its lower frame, but I guess it's because of the risk of it being easily destroyed due to its weight if it had used four legs to walk while tracking the enemy. It wouldn't be necessary to worry about something like that if you could place it on top of a pedestal as gun battery replacement, but it'd be meaningless if that dragon tank couldn't move.

Caterpillars to lower the maintenance burden, and a stressing of a mass production nature for the small dragon golems so that they could keep overwhelming the enemies with numbers. Arnest notices that those characteristics are biased towards weapons.

"Thus, I also agree with the plan to destroy the least necessary amount as proposed by Earl Baumeister."

Seeing that we don't know how many golems dwell in this ruin, we have no option but to advance while making sure to not get exhausted as much as possible.

"Well, we also have a burden with us, to put it diplomatically."

"I'm sorry, okay!?"

At first I believed that turning the invaders into children was for the sake of lowering the mana pool, but for there to actually have been another aim...

With me having become a child, I have low stamina, and my running speed is slow as well. I had planned for us to run through this floor without defeating the small dragons as much as possible, but to be frank, I've become the biggest hindrance to that plan. In short, an underground ruin exploration is too much of a strain for a child.

"Sensei has sacrificed for me, so even if I have to carry him on my back..."

"That's a big no."

Given that Cindy is the youngest one among the three, it'll be hard on her to run while carrying me, even if I might be a child. Since she also must use magic depending on the situation, that would be extremely harsh.

"We have Arnest with us for such times."

I tell Arnest to lend me his back once more. This guy is often doing excavation work outside, so he got strong legs, and quite a bit of stamina.

"I know." (Arnest)

"You will be able to explore this place as much as you like once we get out of here, okay?"

Though, that deal's off if I die.

"Excavating such a huge ruin with many golems has a charm I cannot resist."

Once Arnest carries me on his back, the party's travel speed goes up right away.

While we follow the left walls of the labyrinth, Betty blocks the breath attacks with her 『Magic Barriers』, and Agnes as well as Cindy mow down the individuals and groups that would hinder our advance with offensive magic. At the end of the line, Arnest blocks the breaths spit by the big amount of dragons chasing after us with timely 『Magic Barriers』.

"Earl Baumeister, the swarm in the back is starting to become a problem!"

The dragons we left untouched behind and new dragons from the hatches in the ceiling have turned into a large flock. This means, we have to find the stairs to the upper floor quickly.

"Sensei!"

"Since we have no map for this maze, it will take time, but we got no choice but to follow the left wall."

There wouldn't be anything worse than us returning to where we came from after unwisely trying to take a shortcut. In the end, it's 『Slow and steady wins the race』.

"Sensei, wouldn't it be better if we wiped out the flock of dragons with magic once?"

"I'm pretty sure that this is the aim of the one who designed this ruin."

Sweeping the entire flock will consume a lot of mana, and it wouldn't hold back further dragons from coming out. Having said that, our front and rear is packed with masses of small dragons. Now then, what should we do about this...?

"Everyone, immediately squat down upon my mark!"

"Sensei?"

"Agnes! Where's your answer?"

"Okay!"

"You others, too!"

""""Yes!""""

It's fine if they got it.

Several seconds after that, I order everyone to squat on the spot, "Now! Crouch down!"

Immediately after everyone does as told, the breath attacks of the group in front passes above our heads, directly hitting the group in our rear. The small dragon golems can spit fire and are great for mass production, but it looks like their defensive capabilities are rather limited, as I thought.

The flock of dragons hit by their allies' breaths didn't break apart flashily or melted into goo, but they crashed to the floor in succession after being damaged. It looks no device to skilfully command and coordinate the attacks efficiently has been installed in the small dragon golems. It's probably because it'd have made them unsuited for mass production and prevented keeping them small-sized if something like that had been added as well.

"That's all for the example. For now, we gotta advance at full speed!"

""""Okay!""""

We gather up once more, and keep advancing with Betty and Arnest blocking the breath attacks of the dragons that continued to increase in numbers. While maintaining a path by exterminating the small dragons through friendly fire with the method I had shown earlier, once their numbers increased too much, we finally arrived at the stairs leading to the third floor.



"I surely hadn't expected for a child's body to become such a burden...I think I'm getting sleepy."

"A child needs its sleeping time." (Arnest)

"Since it's truly a child's body, it also tires quickly."

"Children also require naps."

"Still, this isn't a situation allowing me to sleep around!"

Having broken through the labyrinth's first floor with the dragon tank and the second floor with the flock of small dragon golems, we climb the stairs to the third floor. Because the golems of this underground labyrinth are going to pursue us as soon as we stop our feet, any hope for a rest on the stairway ends up in vain all too easily.

"After wearing down the invaders by not giving them the time to rest, they surround them with numbers to go for the kill. It is a labyrinth full of traps that seem to have been thought up by a truly malicious soldier."

Does Arnest bear some grudges against soldiers? Military is a necessary evil in any world. It's not strange for an army to have some bad apples in its ranks, is it?

"Sensei, there's a big group incoming from behind!" Cindy reports to me.

Unlike the dragon tank which ran on caterpillars, the small dragons can fly, and thus have continued following us while growing in number. To me it seems like their numbers keep increasing the more time passes.

"Don't mind them! We're going to rush onto the third floor just like that!"

"I think it'd be better to have the enemies fall back a bit by landing at least one blow on them."
Cindy says while looking at the huge amount of dragons closing in on us from behind.

Hmm, she's not wrong. Maybe we should lower their numbers a bit since their numbers have grown way big. But, it'd be a bad idea to make Cindy and the other two exhausted here.

Accordingly...

"Arnest, around one blow should be alright, no?"

"My...offensive magic is..."

"No, not that! I mean this."

I retrieve a throwing spear out of my magic bag. If he throws it after casting 『Body Strengthening』 on himself, he should be able to kill something at the level of small dragon golems.

"I have no confidence in my aim with this."

"Just throw it."

"Understood."

Reluctantly, Arnest increases his body's strength with magic, and throws the spear at the dragons in the rear. It's immediately obvious that it's a really poor throw, but without a moment's delay, I tune the spear's trajectory with my magic.

Arnest's spear causes quite a few dragons to be unable to continue pursuing us.

"What an admirable, direct hit."

"Well, I did adjust its flight path after all."

Even I'm capable of at least this much.

"Sensei, you're really amazing."

"Wow, to tune the spear's trajectory with a tiny bit of mana..."

"A skilled technique as expected of you."

"No, look, it was me who threw the spear here."

"Let's go on to the next floor."

We invade the third floor while ignoring Arnest's objection.



"Sensei! Is this a trap?"

"How should we interpret this?"

The third floor has a slightly weird atmosphere. The instant we entered it, the entrance door suddenly vanished. Moreover, the third floor also has a layout that looks like a simply, wide space.

It's clear that the room is gradually getting smaller, albeit slowly. The walls on all four sides are steadily approaching us. At this rate we might get crushed flat.

"Oohh! The door has vanished all of a sudden, locking us up. The seamless walls are moving, narrowing the room! This is a precious relic!"

"Now's not the time to admire the setup!"

Especially when we might end up getting crushed because of that precious relic! This is the reason why scholars are so...!

Still, he's right about it being mysterious for the door to suddenly vanish and the smooth walls to approach from all sides.

"It is nothing you have to worry about so much. It is relatively easy to get out of this trap."

"Really?"

"This floor is a trap to lure the invaders into a dilemma."

According to Arnest, the walls here should be destroyable with fairly powerful magic.

"A trap with such mysterious structure is actually surprisingly brittle. Having said that, since you must destroy it with a considerably powerful spell, it will deplete our mana."

Oh, I get it. The objective of the approaching walls isn't to crush the intruders, but to tire them out by forcing them to destroy the wall, huh?

In short, it's evident that this isn't the last floor of this ruin. It's because there's no change in the ruin's basic policy of gradually exhausting the intruders.

"Earl Baumeister, did you notice the other dilemma we are facing?"

"...It's about when we should make our escape, right?"

"That is correct."

"Sensei, what do you mean by that?"

Not only Agnes, but the other two also tilt their heads in confusion.

"Surely, the walls of this room are steadily closing in on us, and it's set in stone that we'll be crushed at this rate. But, that's still a long way off."

At the walls' current pace, we should be safe for at least one hour. Arnest should be assessing it in the same way.

"One hour, you say?"

"Yes. So here's a question to you, Betty: Should we rest for an hour and then advance after destroying the wall with magic? Or, should we immediately destroy and advance? Those are the two choices."

"I think we can rest for an hour..."

Thanks to the golems chasing after us up until now, we haven't had an opportunity to take a break. Being able to rest up here for an hour is valuable. But, of course resting has its demerits, too. Either choice is right as neither is more advantageous.

"Both choices have merits and demerits."

"Try to first think about it by yourselves, and then choose either option."

At times it's necessary for adventurers to make such decisions. This is yet another troublesome matter as it's not said that there's necessarily always an obviously correct choice. There are times where the outcome won't change much, no matter which you choose, because of the merits and demerits offsetting each other for all alternatives.

However, if you make a fatal mistake in your choice and die because of that, you'll be blamed for having been a fool.

"Even so, you girls must make a decision. It's also possible to leave it to me, but it's not like I'll be always around to make the choices for you. Not to mention that I'm currently a burden as a child."

"Sensei, you're no burden!"

"Cindy, I'm capable of giving you some advice, but at present I have Arnest carry me. Please acknowledge the reality that I'm a burden. After all, you should factor my current usefulness based on that fact into your calculations. Oh, if you don't choose quickly, it'll naturally develop into us taking a break for an hour, but is that fine with you?"

I urge the girls to make their decision quickly. That's because not being able to choose one option as a result of merely having wasted the time on hesitating to choose while carefully scrutinizing the two alternatives is going to very likely have a completely different effect, even if they had chosen that option in the end.

"The merits of heading to the next floor right away...a decrease in the danger that the small dragons will chase after us from the second floor. Betty, what are the demerits?" Agnes asks Betty.

"Since we've got to destroy this place with magic either way, we'll expend a large amount of mana in any case. We've reached this place without any breaks, so I think it's a demerit to pile up mental fatigue. We can recover our mana with magic gems, but the same can't be said about fatigue."

"As there's no guarantee that we'll be able to take a break from here on out, I believe that it'd be advantageous to take a rest, even if it's just an hour. It's going to have an effect on alleviating the mental fatigue, and we'll recover a bit mana, too."

"Cindy, the small dragons of the second floor will gather up if we take a rest for an hour. If their numbers grow too big, we'll be forced to kill a part of them with magic, and thus might instead deplete our mana even more." Agnes objects Cindy's opinion.

This is how it should be. They'll be fine if they get close to a conclusion by having their opinions clash.

"Going by the structure of this room, I don't think that the small dragons can get close to us."

"Cindy-chan, it's better to go with the worst-case scenario. If we destroy the wall to get out of here, the device that made the entrance door disappear and locked us in might stop working. In such a case, the small dragons, which might have gathered in huge numbers on the stairway connecting the second with the third floor, are going to flood this place." Betty argues towards Cindy, basically saying that there'd be no meaning to have taken a break since it'll be necessary to deal with the swarm of golems.

"But, sensei is with us. Currently sensei has the stamina of an average child."

"The issue of sensei's stamina..."

Once Cindy brings up that my stamina won't last if I don't rest up for a bit, Betty starts brooding.

I guess I'll cut in here with a short comment.

"You don't need to consider me."

After all, I'll have Arnest carry me in the worst case.

"No, I actually think it's better to allow you to get some rest, sensei."

"...Why, Cindy?" Agnes, who has been silent for a bit, asks Cindy for her reasoning.

"I mean, making it impossible for that weird dragon golem to climb the stairs, and having the small dragons kill each other, both were sensei's plans. Even if sensei's stamina is that of an average child, his experience and thinking remains as it was, so having him rest up properly will become a trump card for us."

Right now, I don't have stamina either way. At this rate, I might unintentionally fall asleep if we don't take any rest. If that happens, they won't be able to rely on my decisions when it counts. I guess they want me to relieve my mental fatigue by getting a nap here, as short as it might be.

"Sensei's advice has been effective enough to get us all the way here."

"Certainly, it's just as you say, Cindy. Let's take a rest then. Sensei, is that alright with you?"

Agnes' group decides to advance after resting for an hour, and requests my approval.

"I'll follow your decision."

""Sensei..."

I've announced that I'd do that in the beginning. Also, we won't know which choice was actually correct until later.

"Pheew, I can finally take a break." Arnest, who can't read the mood as always, sits down on the

spot while still carrying me.

"Hey! Put me down first!"

"I forgot."

This asshole, is this his revenge for having to continue carrying me? Well, whatever...

I get off Arnest's back, and sit down as well. A child's body really tires easily. By just sitting, I can feel how my exhaustion melts away. I think it's also the same for Agnes' group who has been plunged into such a situation all of a sudden today.

"We should sate our thirst in preparation. On the other hand, it might be better to desist from eating."

Given that digestion might use up stamina, it's better to avoid taking in anything solid, if possible. I take a flask out of my magic bag, and start drinking. The flask is filled with a juice using the Demon Forest's fruit.

"Arnest, you want to drink as well?"

"Yes. Since food will only obstruct my body's movements, I will just drink for now."

Arnest accepts the flask from me, and drinks up the juice within. In reality, it'd be fine to go with normal water blended with a small dose of sugar and salt, but it's fine like this since it'll dampen our spirits if we stick to the common rules too much.

Agnes' group also retrieved their canteens from their magic bags, and drank some.

"Earl Baumeister, I am going to take a little nap."

"Me too."

This child body truly tires too quickly. Though I somehow feel like I had a little bit more stamina during my time in the Baumeister Knightdom.

"This place is completely different from hills and plains where you can move around freely."

"I guess that makes sense in a way."

This situation, where we can't see the exit with enemies continuously popping out on us, probably places a heavy burden on a child's body.

"I think it'll make a difference if you can sleep, even if only for ten minutes..."

Since I've been stuck in this body now, my most important duty is to not get in the way of Agnes' team. Even if it's just a bit, I should get in some sleep for that sake.

"Sensei, here you go."

At this moment, Agnes offers me her lap. Is she telling me to sleep there since she's going to give me a lap pillow?

"No, it's okay..."

"Sensei, exactly because it's a nap, it's not good for a child's body to sleep on the hard stone floor. You don't need to hold back. Rather, I'll be happy..."

"Eh? What was that just now?"

"Nothing! Now, come on."

"If you're going to insist on it so much..."

As it's an emergency measure, it's not like it'd count as an affair, so... I try to borrow Agnes' lap while making up the excuse in my mind that there's nothing like that between teacher and student.

Thereupon, Cindy calls out to me, offering me her lap as well, "Sensei, Agnes should be tired from her leader duty. Please use my lap to nap instead."

"Eh? It's not like I'm actually tired or anything..."

"It's going to be fairly difficult from now on, so you have to rest up as much as possible as well, Agnes. Right now you're just not feeling any fatigue since your nerves are still high-strung. You must take a rest now." Cindy returns a sound argument at Agnes who's tried to retort that she's not tired.

Certainly, it's Agnes who's pulling our party right now while standing at the front line. Given that she's essentially the leader, it's probably better for her to rest up as much as she can now. It's not a situation where she can give me a lap pillow.

"Umm, then I'm going to borrow Cindy's lap..."

"E——eh!"

"Agnes, is it something justifying for you to cry out so loudly?"

Our most important objective right now is to escape this ruin. It's obviously smarter to go with the most efficient methods.

"Therefore, I think I'm going to borrow Cindy's lap."

"Sensei, please nap while using my lap."

"Betty?"

At this moment, Betty also offers her lap to me.

"Cindy-chan is the youngest amongst us three. I believe her body and mind should be quite strained as well, and Agnes-chan has a heavy responsibility as our leader. Thus, please take a nap on my lap, seeing how I've trained my body by hunting frequently."

"Hmm, now that you mention it..."

Betty's opinion makes sense. Seeing that Agnes' team is going to take a nap as well, it's imperative to allow them to recover as much mana and stamina as possible. Since Agnes acts as the leader of the three, she bears a heavy toll, and Cindy is the youngest.

It might be best for me to borrow the lap of Betty, who's trained as a hunter. There's absolutely no way that I'm thinking any such perverted stuff like her legs having been the smoothest with the nicest comfort a while back or anything like that.

Anyway, now that we've decided to rest, I gotta use every second of it to do just that.

As I try to borrow Betty's lap after deciding so, another person joins in, "Earl Baumeister, I am waiting."

"Eh? I wouldn't borrow your lap even if it were to kill me."

What's with that sad idea that I ought to nap on the lap of some old dude. His legs are hard anyway, so I might as well sleep on the floor then.

"I can not recommend you laying down for a short-time nap."

"Oohh! That's what you mean!"

Nothing less of a scholar. He's saying something sounding quite expert, even though he belongs to another field of science.

"This is something I have heard from a specialist in this field, but if you are going to nap for a short time, it is best to sleep while falling prostrate on something like a desk. I am going to do the same as well."

"I suppose you're right..."

Looking at the state of the approaching walls, it seems that I can sleep for around 30 minutes. If the speed of the walls increases after I've laid down, there's the worry that I might be late in my response. Precisely because it's a nap, it's necessary to use logic here.

Even in my previous life I pulled through by napping for ten to twenty minutes on my table after finishing lunch.

"It's just like Arnest says. If I remember correctly..."

I retrieve small desks, including Agnes' team's shares, from my magic bag. You might wonder why I'm carrying even something like this with me, but the capacity of my magic bag is big, so there's actually many items I've stored away in there.

"You girls, feel free to sleep while using these. I'm sleepy..."

This child body...

I immediately fall prostrate on my desk as I'm assailed by drowsiness at a rate that would be usually impossible. Anyway, let's sleep for now...in order to safely escape this ridiculous underground ruin with everyone.

* * *

"He fell asleep. Now, young ladies, you too..."

"Arnest-san!"

I reflexively shout my protest out at Arnest-san.

"Keep it down, Agnes-chan."

"Sensei is sleeping. He's in the body of a child, so the burden is high on him."

As Betty and Cindy caution me about my loud voice, I cover my mouth in a hurry. Sensei has finally fallen asleep, so I mustn't do something as silly as waking him up in the middle of it.

"But, I can understand Agnes-chan's anger."

"Me too."

Us three begin to press on Arnest-san. Certainly, there's some truth to what he's saying, but he doesn't understand one very important fact, namely, our feelings as girls.

"How mean of you, Arnest-san! And here I had thought that I could give sensei a lap pillow at long last!"

I start the attacks against Arnest-san at a volume low enough that sensei won't wake up from it.

I wanted sensei to think 『Agnes' lap is really soft』 while getting him to rest on it with a peace of mind. All for the sake of having him become aware of me as a woman after we escape this place. That was the major point.

"Indeed! You went too far!"

"No matter how much of an old man you might be, your lacking understanding of a maiden's heart is way too extreme!"

Even Betty and Cindy, who follow up next, should have felt the same. Both of them are my rivals so far as it goes, but rather than that, they feel like they need to whip Arnest-san who busted the

contest between us.

"That is not the point here. To begin with, it is imperative to make sure that Earl Baumeister does not collapse from overwork."

Uugh! Arnest-san's argument is too sound! He's definitely right here, but us offering sensei a lap pillow at this point shouldn't have posed much of a problem.

"Even though I had planned to gently wake up sensei once it was time..."

For Betty to have come up with something so enviable... I should have realized this as well, and yet I allowed for such a terrible blind spot to exist. After all, his wives and the people in his mansion totally monopolize the enviable option of waking up the sleeping sensei.

What a blunder for me of all people.

Just when I considered Arnest-san to be unforgivable all the more because of this, Betty and Cindy had moved to sensei's side without me noticing. Don't tell me! They plan to appeal to sensei as future wife candidates by instilling in him the image of capable women who'd gently and timely wake him up...

Damn! I was totally beaten to the punch by these two!

"Uuhhh...."

This is also Arnest-san's fault for having destroyed the foundation of my initial plan.

I end up staring at him with reproachful eyes.

"Hmm, little ladies, you need to quickly take a rest as well. I am still not all that exhausted, so it will not be a problem for me. Do not worry and take a nap, I will keep watch."

That's not the issue here, but...still, what Arnest-san is saying isn't wrong.

I decide to take a nap as well, falling prostrate on the small desk. Somehow it's like nodding off during class.

* * *

"It is time, Earl Baumeister."

"U——ugh. I wonder, did my stamina recover a bit?"

"It is just a light reprieve, but it is better than nothing. Around thirty minutes have passed since you fell asleep."

"I see..."

When I open my eyes, the room's walls have approached quite closely. It looks like the walls had no nasty contrivance of teasing us by suddenly increasing their speed. Since we've had a little rest, all that's left is to destroy the exit with magic and head to the upper floor.

"Agnes, Betty, Cindy, it's time."

I wake up the three girls who've been diligent about recovering their stamina and mana by taking a nap.

"Fuueh...huh? Sensei, you're up already?"

"Arnest woke me up."

"Is that so...?"

"" ... ""

Are they people with a foul mood after waking up? The three narrow their eyes as they stare at Arnest with expressions that are hard to read.

"Now then, I wonder whether this break will prove to have been good or bad luck."

"We will find out after proceeding. You three, we're off."

""""Yes!""""

It'll be easily possible to blow open the exit door when using a certain level of offensive magic. Receiving my order, Cindy faultlessly smashes down the thick door with her magic, allowing us to successfully escape this floor.



"The next area is...water?"

"A pond, swamp."

"A big puddle of water?"

The next floor is mostly filled with water. It's a huge, man-made lake, but as some kind of magic has been cast across almost all of this floor, 『Detect』 doesn't work.

"Hmmm." Arnest seems to have noticed the oddity of this place.

"Is there some kind of trick set up in the water? ...Agnes."

"Okay."

Agnes also tries to probe the water with the 『Detect』 I taught her, but there's absolutely no contrivance in the water itself. It's really nothing but simple water, so our bodies won't start melting or anything if we go in.

"Earl Baumeister, it is very cold water. In other words, it is the ancient strategy of 『Defeat half a force by having them cross a river』."

"I see."

I touch the water as well, but it's numbingly cold. This underground ruin has stuck to military methods to destroy its invaders so far. The water level reaches up to Agnes' waist, whereas I sink in up to my chest.

That means, it's a trap to unnecessarily make us accumulate fatigue by crossing through cold water.

"Magic is being used to maintain the water's low temperature."

"There's another spell, right?"

The strategy of exhausting the invaders by forcing them to proceed through cold water won't work on magicians. I mean, magicians can cross the water without getting wet by using 『Flight』.

Because the other side likely knows about that as well, another spell should be active on this lake floor.

"Cindy, try floating up with 『Flight』."

"Okay...huh?"

Cindy tries to invoke 『Flight』 at the water's edge several times, but she can't float as the spell is being canceled out. It looks like my prediction has been right.

"In other words, we have to head to the exit while passing through this cold water."

"It can't be helped. It's freezing, though."

"It's kinda like swimming, isn't it?"

"Well, you got to cross rivers during hunts as well."

As expected, that's their level of perception, huh...? Still, the designer of this ruin has been quite evil, and his thought process is clearly that of a soldier. After all he has adopted the steady method of gradually weakening the invaders to kill them in the upper floors instead of the often used method of defeating invaders with powerful golems on each floor.

"It is definitely a nuisance, but it is inevitable."

"Sorry."

"If you were to die, Earl Baumeister, I would not be able to investigate the ruin here. And even before that, we would die together anyway." With those words, Arnest bends down to carry me on his back.

If I entered this water with my current body, I'd become unable to move by the time we reached the exit.

"How about warming up the water with magic just around ourselves?"

"You'd use up quite a lot of mana until we reach the exit. It's truly a nuisance."

You could probably call it a fortune that no golems have been deployed on this floor. It'll be fine as long as we just get through the cold water.

It'll cost quite a bit of stamina, but we've got no choice but to let it recover by warming ourselves up at the exit.

"Hyaaa! It is cold!"

"It's not cold...it's freezing."

"Cold."

"This coldness all the way to the exit..."

Arnest, who carries me, and Agnes' team who are submerged into the water up to their waists, trudge towards the exit with their expressions twisted due to the water's coldness.

And then the demerit of having chosen to take a break on the previous floor catches up with us. The trap on the previous floor has probably been reset. Accordingly, the great number of small dragon golems from the second floor have followed us up to this floor.

"We shouldn't have taken a break..." Agnes has apparently started to regret her previous choice.

"No, if we had continued without resting, we might have used up all our strength on the way through this water. Agnes, your choice hasn't been wrong."

"You're exaggerating. No matter how cold it might be, it's just water."

"It's just cold water, but since it reaches up to your waist, you expend stamina by just walking through it. Moreover, since the water is freezing cold, it robs you of even more stamina."

"This means, either choice would lead to hell."

The creator of this ruin was fully aware just how much stamina would be lost if you walk several hundred meters through numbingly cold water.

"Sensei! Behind us!"

"So they're here."

The dragons have become able to freely move around after the trap on the previous floor was released. Now they have gathered up into a huge swarm. One after the other starts to shoot their breath at us from the opposite shore.

"Arnest."

"I am on it."

A single breath doesn't have much firepower. But, that doesn't mean that you come out unscathed when hit. We have to block them with 『Magic Barriers』 at any cost.

Not getting as exhausted in comparison to Agnes' team since the water is only reaching half way up his thighs, Arnest begins to quickly block the attacks by deploying his 『Magic Barrier』.

"It is an ill-minded trap."

We can only proceed slowly thanks to the water's resistance. Given that we must keep up the 『Magic Barrier』 for an extended period of time, it'll also exhaust our mana in the end.

"Agnes, Betty, Cindy! Leave the 『Magic Barrier』 to Arnest!"

"But..."

"Don't worry! It's a division of roles!"

We cannot afford to have Agnes' team, who can use offensive magic, to waste their mana in this place. I'll have Arnest actively devote himself to defense, seeing how he can't attack golems despite having lots of mana.

"They don't advance above the water, huh?"

"Just like 『Flight』 has become unavailable for us, those dragons can not maintain their floating power above the lake."

Having said that, the water resistance is stronger than expected. We haven't distanced ourselves more than 50 meters from the shore. I didn't notice it since the labyrinth-like structure of the lower floor had many walls, but if the small dragons concentrate on just the distance of their breaths, they seem to achieve quite the range.

They have assembled at the shore, and keep releasing their breaths at us. Arnest has been blocking those, but since the breaths exploded very close to me, who's riding on his back - albeit with the 『Magic Barrier』 in-between - you can't really describe it as a situation that's overly desirable for my mental sanity.

On the other hand, if I were to try walking through the water, my exhaustion would be extreme because of this child body, and I'd immediately become a burden after becoming immobile. It's a

setup that drains the invaders to a truly detestable extent.

"Earl Baumeister, it looks like we also have to deploy a 『Magic Barrier』 to the front."

"Yeah..."

I guess there's no way for the creator of this ruin to be so half-hearted. At the shore near the exit, which gradually came into sight, a great number of small dragon golems is awaiting us. Once they caught sight of us, they began hurling breath attacks at us.

"That is what I had thought would happen."

"Betty, please handle that side."

"Okay."

In the end, it's resulted in us continuing to advance with Arnest deploying his 『Magic Barrier』 to the back, and Betty hers to the front.

"It kinda feels like disembarking amongst enemy fire. Just like a military history story I've read in the past."

I think the big difference with the story mentioned by Agnes is us also being attacked from behind. Moreover, embarking amongst enemy fire is something you'd usually do when the landing side has the bigger military forces. You wouldn't start any landing operations with a small party like ours against an enemy with overwhelming numbers. After all, it's ill-advised and very likely that you'd fail. We simply don't have any other choice as we'll die if we don't continue onwards.

"Sensei, aren't we going to raise the walking speed?"

"Cindy, that's unreasonable. You're spending more stamina than expected despite having thought that it's just normal water, right? If we make the mistake of hurrying, we'll be worn out before reaching the shore at the exit. The guy, who came up with this trap, was quite cunning."

If the invaders grow impatient after receiving attacks from the back and front, and try to hurry up, they'll lose too much stamina, and use up all their strength then and there in the worst case.

"I think the next floor will be the most dangerous one so far, if the ruin does not manage to bring down the invaders on this floor."

"Most likely."

It's because the invaders would have used up lots of mana and stamina on this floor.

"The ruin just has to kill us, the invaders, in the end. That's the kind of design it is."

If it was a normal underground ruin with traps and challenges, they'd have placed trump cards on every floor, but this place has many traps with the sole objective to tire us out mentally, and steal our mana and stamina. The traps have been set up with the idea that we simply need to croak in the

end.

"That's why it's the design of a soldier."

"Did someone like a strategist, appearing in military history documents, come up with this?"

"Considering the scale of this place, it might be a military installation of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era, so it might have been created by someone well-acquainted with military affairs. Or maybe a genius who had such knowledge." I replied to Agnes.

"With that said, don't mess up your pace. Panicking will just play into the cards of our opponent."

We keep proceeding forward while being showered by breath attacks from the front and back. The breaths can be blocked with 『Magic Barriers』, but accordingly, Arnest and Betty keep using up their mana.

"No matter what you choose here, it's full of demerits! The person, who thought up this ruin, was truly malicious!"

"I'm pretty sure he was someone with a very sinister look!"

"His personality was the worst!"

It's just as the girls say. If it comes to such an ill-spirited ruin of the Ancient Magic Civilization's era...Count Ishrubak again? It's very likely, I think.

As we advanced while enduring, we could confirm that several dozens of small dragons were regularly firing breath attacks at us from the shore near the exit. They're acting just like an artillery battery.

"Sensei, the attacks from the rear have stopped."

Did we leave their range? No, the small dragons of this ruin move just like military forces. They're probably making sure that the shots missing us don't hit their allies in front by mistake.

"Arnest, the 『Magic Barrier』 in the back is no longer needed."

"Yes. The yellow girly is going to have it tough from now on."

Arnest, at least remember Betty's name after you've gone through all this together with her! Calling her yellow girly because of her hair color...this is why scholars are such a pain.

It's great that the breath attacks only come from the front now, but the dragons have accordingly raised the attack speed.

"Jeez, they're so weirdly smart!"

I guess that's the final, fierce attack against us who intend to land on-shore.

"Sensei, should I attack them?"

"Betty...you can't pull that off right now, can you?"

The feat of opening a hole in a part of a 『Magic Barrier』 and attacking through that opening can only be done by veterans at Burkhart-san's level.

"Now that you mention it, you're right."

"Hence, push your way through all the way to the exit just like that, Betty."

As long as she keeps up a 『Magic Barrier』 of a certain thickness, we'll be able to reach the exit even without attacking the dragons.

"It's better to not waste mana than imprudently attacking."

I guess you could call it lucky, but as we get closer, we can identify the details of this floor's exit. It seems to be a huge iron door with a height of around five meters. If we succeed in reaching the other side of that door, we should be able to cut off the dragons' attacks.

"Push!"

Having safely reached land at the exit, we continue walking towards the exit straight away.

"Huh? I can't run."

"My legs..."

"I can't move..."

Figures. They've been soaked in water that has been cooled down to almost freezing point.

I can understand the theory behind it, but actually experiencing it myself is really harsh." Even Arnest, who has offered less surface area for the cold water in proportion to his tall height, has apparently suffered quite a bit from this cold water hell.

His walking pace is slow as well.

I think it'll be quite bad if we don't take a break after passing through the exit...

"We're going to rest once we pass through that door!"

""""Okay!""""

"I really want to take a break. Also, is that door one you open by pushing or pulling?"

The chance is 50-50.

If it's a door that has to be pulled, it should pose quite the trouble for us - with me being a child,

Agnes' group young girls, and Arnest being a scholar type. Pushing aside the fire-breathing dragons with a 『Magic Barrier』, we finally arrive at the exit door.

"Arnest, check it."

"Very well."

I have Arnest examine the door. Meanwhile Betty redploys her 『Magic Barrier』, dealing with the dragons' breaths.

"So?"

"It is a push door."

"Huh? That's unexpectedly kind of the designer."

"That is no more than a pipe dream."

The four of us, except for Betty, try pushing the door at once, but it doesn't budge in the slightest due to its excessive weight.

"In short, we have no choice but to increase our strength through magic, deadhead Earl Baumeister."

"Shut it."

Indeed, as a child with an elementary level of mana I'm completely useless here.

"Can't-use-offensive-magic Arnest, reinforce your strength to the limit with mana and push."

"I have told you many times over, I am a brainworker."

"So you're going to die as one?"

"Okay, okay, I will push."

"I will help out as well."

"Me too...arg——h, I should have invested more time into practicing 『Body Strengthening』."

Arnest, Agnes and Cindy continue pushing for dear life while boosting their strength through mana in order to open the iron door blocking the exit. However, because their base strength is rather low to begin with, the door doesn't move at all.

Having said that, it's not like I've currently got much more strength than them either. Even if I were to help, the effect would be negligible, and my mana would likely run out quickly since I don't have much of it. Replenishing mana with spare magic gems is simple, but sadly I would probably collapse right away, unable to bear the mental strain with this child body.

I can't do much more than cheering the three on.

"Sensei, how much longer?" Betty, who has spread her 『Magic Barrier』 in a semicircle with the door as focal point, is showered by the concentrated fire of the dragons who have assembled.

As her mana consumption ought to be quite intense, I'm sure she wants us to open the door as quickly as possible.

"Let us push with all power!"

"Now's not the time to talk about saving mana!"

"Here I go!"

The three drastically increase the mana they're using, causing the door to finally start moving bit-by-bit.

"We just got to open it wide enough so that we can get out of here!"

"I know!"

The three are probably expending quite a bit of mana there.

Once they somehow manage to open a gap allowing one person a time to pass through, we jump through it one after the other.

"Naturally, we have to close it again, don't we?"

"Otherwise they're going to follow us."

Hearing my reply, Cindy reveals an openly dejected expression.

Next, the work to push the door shut so that the small dragons don't come after us begins. Betty blocks the door with her 『Magic Barrier』, preventing the dragons to slip in through the gap.

"Ack! Stay outsideee——!"

Deploying a 『Magic Barrier』 in an unfamiliar shape is a heavier toll on mana and mental force than one would expect.

"We are almost there!"

"Heavy!"

"Ugh!"

The three look pained as they push the heavy iron door. Just like during the opening, it consumes a lot of mana before they finally manage to close it.

"Phew..." Having no need to keep up the barrier any longer, Betty flops down on the spot while sighing.

It's the same for the other three. However, at the same time we can continuously hear loud banging from the door's other side.

"Everyone, please get away from the door."

"Sensei?"

"What, I'm just going to plug it up."

Indeed, I've now understood why the door has to be pushed to open up. Even if the intruders succeed in running away, the small dragon golems can still pursue them by pushing the door.

In that case, I've got an idea of my own as well.

I take out heavy rubbish from my magic bag, piling it up high in front of the door.

"This should keep them away for a while."

"Eh? This much is only going to last a while?"

"Agnes, you think the designer of this ruin hasn't estimated that we might do this?"

My prediction might be correct. The loud banging sounds at the door have increased in number. Moreover, the door has started to move, albeit very slowly, in spite of me having blocked it with this many heavy items. The only explanation would be an increase of the dragons on the other side.

"It is the same as with the previous wall trap. Once we broke through it, the trap not allowing 『Flight』 above the pond has disappeared."

In other words, right now a huge mass of the dragon golems, which keep spawning endlessly, has gathered in front of the door, pushing against it all at once.

"That's why I said that we'll be alright for a while. Rest up while we still can."

"But, we have to go on as soon as possible."

"That's impossible with these legs, isn't it?"

They've been walking in numbingly cold water while soaked up to the waist. Moreover, they've pushed the door with all their power. Thus it's impossible for them to walk normally with their trembling legs and loins.

"All of you, take off your boots and socks."

"Eh? Expose my feet? If possible, I'd like to do that when we're alone..."

"Come on! I'm serious here! Cindy, Betty, Arnest, you too."

Agnes might actually be a girl with lots of superficial knowledge about sex. Isn't she resembling Ina a bit in this?

I start warming up their feet with a spell similar to a 『Heater』, applying fire magic. I have to at least remove the freezing cold from their legs. Otherwise they won't be able to walk, let alone run.

"It's warm. Sensei, is this fire magic?"

"Yep."

"This is a difficult spell, isn't it?"

"It is."

At the very least I doubt that the girls will be able to use it at this point in time. To lower fire magic to the limit so as to reproduce 『Warm』 and not 『Hot』 requires magic precision beyond a certain level. If someone unskilled at magic precision tries this, they'll definitely cause scalds.

I've become capable of doing this after practicing it. With the stress of this spell being on magic precision, it doesn't need much mana, which is great for me in this situation. Seeing how I've become a burden with my child body, we won't be able to survive unless I provide at least such support.

"How nice." Cindy looks rather comfortable as I'm heating her feet in the same way.

"Sensei, could you please direct it higher up?"

"For me as well."

"Please do the same for me. My waist is cold as well."

Either way, I guess it'll be difficult to continue to the upper floors if I don't get rid of their lower body's undercooling.

"Arnest too. Your legs are cold, aren't they?"

"Magic precision, huh? I am getting my just desserts for having skipped on this so far."

Generally demons have vast amounts of mana at their disposal and thus have no need to use magic precision. It looks like the majority of them don't train their magic at all. That's why it's not strange that Arnest, who's lived for a good while now, can't warm up his own legs either.

Since it'd be a problem if he burned himself by unskillfully trying to handle it himself, it's probably better if I do it for him. To be honest, it's a no-brainer that I'd rather warm up the legs of three young and beautiful girls than those of some old dude, but right now it's for the sake of survival.

"It feels nicely warm. I will leave the question why you do not start a campfire aside, though."

"In an airtight space? The stairways connecting the floors are narrow, as you can see yourself."

"I just asked to make sure. Either way, it is warm."

While at it, I also cast a simple healing spell. After all it'd be a disaster if they got a frostbite. And then I ran out of mana.

"Not having any mana is really harsh."

Since the amount of my mana has only been climbing so far, I didn't care about it much, but now I easily run out of mana if I don't pay attention to how I use it. I quickly replenish it with a magic gem, but a child's body is susceptible to fatigue either way.

I feel that it's questionable whether I'll be able to replenish my mana once more. Even though the gems contain enough mana to refill mine as many times as I want, I can't do that because of the mental fatigue.

The designer of this ruin has a truly nasty character for having anticipated that, and set up his traps so that the intruders can't catch a breath.

"You girls, replenish your mana now. I think it'll get rough from her on."

""""Okay!""""

The three girls and Arnest refill the large amount of mana they spent earlier with the magic gems that have been filled up with mana for times like these.

"This is a lot harsher than I had expected."

As long as you previously poured your own mana into a magic gem, you can recover your mana with it. If you can use healing magic, you can also heal injuries and such with it. However, mental fatigue is the only thing that can't be avoided.

It might be even better if we could take a nap as well, but hearing the frequency of banging sounds on the iron door going up, and seeing how the door itself moves each time, it seems difficult to take more than a short rest. In the first place, it'd be tough to carefreely sleep around in a situation where you don't know when the door might give way.

"Arnest, what do you think? How many more floors are waiting for us?"

"I think the next will be the last one."

"Hoh, I also feel that, but why do you think so?"

"This place is a military installation. I believe it is correct to assess this ruin as place to run experiments with the small dragon golems and various magic technologies, but going by my experience so far, the next floor should be the limit."

"Limit, eh...? You mean because of the budget?"

"No matter the era, money spins the human world after all."

"That's my opinion as well."

Moreover, I've been feeling like we're getting closer to the surface, albeit only vaguely by intuition. It's something like a sixth sense, lacking any grounded basis.

However...

"Because it will be the last floor, it should become a lot harsher than the ones so far."

"We're prepared for that."

Even if the next floor isn't the last, we must proceed onwards until we run out of strength. Once I look at Agnes, Betty, and Cindy, I can see resolve dwelling in their eyes. It looks like today's actual experiences have allowed the girls to grow a lot more than any of the lessons and training sessions so far.

I'd like to allow them to return alive from this, and display today's results after they graduate. After all, I'm their teacher.

"We should go soon."

"Yep."

Having taken a break of around ten minutes, we climb the stairs towards the next floor after seeing how the iron door has been getting warped due to small dragons. If this isn't the last floor, we might possibly get overrun by all of them after reaching our limit, but I keep going upwards while making sure to not think about that as much as possible.



"What do you think?"

"It looks kinda like the last floor."

"Whoaaa, what a big floor."

"Something like a maneuvering ground?"

"The exit of this floor is so far away that you can't see it from here."

We've reached the next floor. I quickly retrieve a telescope from my magic bag, and look for a door that might be the exit.

Oh, I think I've spotted something around 500 meters ahead of us? It looks like a gaudily decorated door. A dragon head has been set up on the wall right above the door, and on top of that, there are many holes at the wall. After coming all the way here, these holes only give me a bad vibe.

Quietly I hand the telescope to Arnest.

"The dragon head hanging over the exit door hands out the orders and repels the invaders."

"That dragon head does? But I don't think that its breath will reach all the way here." Agnes states her own opinion after looking at the exit through the telescope next.

"Those holes are fishy...aren't they?" Cindy looks at me with an expression that can't be described as anything but having a bad feeling after looking at the exit through a spare telescope I handed to her.

I share her view that those holes certainly don't look like normal ventilation holes. Artificial golems don't need any air in the first place, and even if, there wouldn't be any need to open up a dozen ventilation holes on one wall.

"I'd be happier if you weren't right about this."

"That's an unreasonable wish."

Betty puts on the same expression as Cindy after checking the exit area after borrowing a telescope from me.

Going by the events up until now, I can't believe that the designer of this ruin would make such a blunder.

"It might turn into a battle against time."

"Isn't the idea here that we'll be alright as long as we manage to reach the exit?"

"You should abandon such naive thinking."

"Figures..."

Checking through the telescope once again, I see how small dragon golems pour out of the holes in the wall, heading this way. Given that the eyes of the dragon head are shining crimson, it has very likely handed out an order along the lines of 『Eliminate the invaders!』

""Sensei, give us a strategy!""

"If possible, I'd like you to come up with your own, though..."

Agnes and the other two might soon hit their limit as well. Having said that, now that it has come to this, the usable strategies are limited.

"Arnest will keep up his 『Magic Barrier』 for as long as possible while regularly replenishing his

mana."

"I suppose."

We're in a situation where we don't know when the iron door at the lower floor will break down. So we've got no choice but to defeat that dragon head before we get stuck in a pincer attack.

If we defeat that dragon head, the dragon golems should stop coming out of the ejection holes at the exit's wall in front...theoretically. I feel like we'd have big luck if it went as far as them stopping to work altogether.

Relying on Arnest's mana, we will put all our effort in getting close to that dragon head first. Then I'll have Agnes' group destroy the head once we're close enough. That also needs to be done as quickly as possible.

"We'll be finished if the small dragons manage to reach us and start attacking us from behind. We'll use our full power to speedily destroy that dragon head over there. If we manage that, we won't die in this place at least."

Considering our current grade of exhaustion, we'll be in a bind if there's another floor, but we don't have the leeway to preserve our strength in preparation for that either. We can replenish our mana, but being unable to get rid of our fatigue is a fairly heavy burden. And if we were to choose the stupid move of resting now, we'd get tormented to death while getting attacked by golems from the front and back.

Right now we don't have any other choice but to quickly break through this floor at full power, and pray to the gods for what might come next.

"Are there any objections to this plan?" I ask while looking at Arnest, the one most likely to have a different opinion among those present.

"None. Given all these contrivances we have encountered so far, that dragon head must be the last boss, and can also be regarded as the one manipulating the traps and golems on the lower floors. I do not believe that it is such a bad gamble to crush it with all our remaining strength."

"That's how it is. Let's go!"

""""Okay!""""

We begin to charge towards the dragon head in a straight line, adopting a rhombic formation with Agnes in the lead, Cindy, Betty and me, and then Arnest at the end.

"Sensei, are you alright?"

"I'm well aware that it's unreasonable, but since it's for a short period of time, I'm boosting my running speed with 『Body Strengthening』."

Since I'd become a big burden to Arnest if I had him carry me on his back as he did until now, I've got no choice but to run as well. Because I'm sprinting at the average speed of an adult by using

『Body Strengthening』 on my child body, it puts a heavy strain on it. Given that I have a low amount of mana as well, I'm forced to frequently replenish my mana through magic gems. This makes it inevitable for my body to become sluggish while accompanied by headaches, but I keep enduring all of this since it's still better than dying here.

"Gueeh——!"

"Sshhaaa——!"

Having noticed our approach, the small dragons fire their breaths at us, but all of them are blocked by Arnest's 『Magic Barrier』.

It'll never end, no matter how many of these small fry we kill, so we've got no choice but to get close to the dragon head.

"Sensei, the golems' behavior is..."

Betty is the first to notice that the dragon golems floating in some areas are taking refuge.

"It's the ones blocking the straight line between us and the dragon head. Maybe..."

"I'm pretty sure you're correct, Agnes. All of you, deploy your 『Magic Barriers』 and reinforce them!"

Immediately following, the dragon head releases a torrent of bluish-white light in our direction.

"A non-attribute breath!?"

Even if it's just a head, it's still a dragon, so spitting breath is a matter of course. Its firepower is nothing to scoff at either.

With me also deploying my 『Magic Barrier』 alongside the others, it feels like we're barely managing to prevent the breath to break through. Of course it's costing us all an extreme amount of mana. We keep blocking the breath with our barriers while replenishing our mana with the magic gems at hand.

"It gives me a headache!"

"Me too!"

Given that even Arnest feels it, it's only logical for me to suffer from the burden with my child body.

The girls don't say anything, but since they have been replenishing their mana with magic gems several times in a short span of time, they ought to have headaches and sluggish bodies as well.

"Nevertheless, we've got no other way but to proceed onwards!"

Even if it might be an artificial object, it's still not capable of shooting its breath indefinitely. After

around a minute, the dragon head's breath ceases for the moment.

We keep advancing during that time, but one minute later, the small dragon golems retreat out of the firing range again. At once the second breath attack begins, forcing us to stop on the spot.

We continue exhausting our mana, stamina and mental strength as we deploy our 『Magic Barriers』 to not get hit by the breath attacks. After several repetitions of this we've become quite worn-out, but in exchange we've managed to approach the dragon head up to a distance of several dozen meters.

"Offensive magic is impossible for me."

"We know that. Arnest, you put maximum priority on protecting yourself!"

Upon my signal, Arnest shrinks his 『Magic Barrier』 so that it only covers himself. At the same time, I take a huge amount of stones out of my magic bag and pile them up in front of Agnes' group.

"Everyone get down, and then you girls simultaneously use wind magic!"

"Oh! Understood! Cindy! Betty!"

Agnes seems to have immediately grasped my intention. All three of them create a powerful magic gale. Although it's a spacious room, it's still airtight.

The stones whirled up by their wind magic fly about like bullets, rapidly shooting down the small dragons around us. Of course stones also head out way, but I deal with those with a small 『Magic Barrier』. Given that I just have to protect the area right above us since we're lying on the ground, it's something I can handle even with my currently low mana.

"Their numbers have decreased nicely...Arnest!"

"I got it."

Arnest stands up right in front of the dragon head, acting as decoy. Although the dragon head tries to fire its breath at him, Arnest keeps trifling with it by quickly moving left and right.

"Girls, disperse to the sides, and target the dragon head!"

""""Okay!""""

I order Agnes' team to destroy the dragon head. Since it's nothing I can handle myself, I've got no choice but to entrust it to them.

I suppose you could call it fortunate, but it looks like the dragon head can't move its head all the way since it's a decoration on the wall. As long as we stay on the sides close to the wall, no breaths from the dragon head will reach us.

"It looks like the small dragons are compensating for the breaths' blind spots."

While we move to places safe from breath attacks, another batch of several dozen small dragons flies out of the ejection holes, so Agnes' team keeps shooting them down with magic in succession. They can easily kill them off since they aren't all that sturdy, but their numbers are still an issue.

I block the ejection holes with rocks I took out of my magic bag, but my hands don't reach the holes high up on the wall. As the dragons try to get out of the ejection holes I managed to block, I can hear repeated clattering as metal clashes against rock.

"Agnes! Can you attack the head?"

"I have my hands full!"

"Cindy, you?"

"Me too!"

"Betty!"

"I can't either!"

At the end I look at Arnest, but he's fully preoccupied with protecting himself. Because Arnest can't use any offensive magic that would work against the small dragons anyway, he's instead attracting the attention of the small dragons coming out of the holes that are still open, drawing their breath attacks on himself.

I can't ask anything unreasonable from him.

"This is problematic..."

We've managed to somehow struggle through this so far, but this party is severely lacking firepower after all. If they get a bit older, Agnes and the other two should be able to become excellent magicians, but at present they lack experience and have their hands full with taking on the small dragons that keep rushing out of the open holes.

Because the small dragons shoot breaths, their attack frequency will inevitably drop if they also have to block and dodge.

"(If only Katharina was here...)"

She would have been able to shift to the next offensive spell after annihilating the small dragons in one go... Well, I guess it's pointless to lament over a combat asset that's not here.

"Earl Baumeister! I feel that things are getting dangerous!" Arnest yells something like a warning while devoting himself to defense.

Once I use 『Detect』 in a hurry, I perceive that the iron door sealing off the lower floor has apparently been wrenched open. A great number of small dragon golems are in the process of approaching us from behind.

"We're running out of time, I guess..."

"New ones have come out!"

"There's no end to it!"

"We have to quickly destroy the dragon head!"

It looks like the dragon head is smarter than expected. Its crimson, shining eyes have read that Agnes' team has the biggest firepower in our party. Thus it has the small dragons focus their attacks on the girls. Having said that, it's not like it's ignoring Arnest or me either.

For the sake of drawing the dragon head's attention, Arnest is busy moving to the sides, back, and forth. I'm busy with dodging or blocking the small dragon's attacks.

As a result of that, my exhaustion gradually accumulates, and I'm getting sleepy despite moving around a lot. My body feels heavy, too.

At this rate we will fully run out of power, and get killed by the small dragons.

"Now that it's come to this, it's sink or swim! Agnes, Betty, Cindy! Please cover me!"

Rather than getting slowly killed off like this...if it's the end with this, I'll replenish my mana with the magic gems, despite getting attacked by even more sleepiness and lethargy. This child body has long passed its limit. Still, I cannot afford to fall asleep right now.

I take an arrow out of my magic bag, and stab it into my thigh.

"Sensei?"

"This fully woke me up! Here I come!"

Next I float up, approaching the height of the dragon head with 『Flight』. Of course the small dragons hurl their breaths at me, but those are shot down with non-attribute magic by Agnes' team.

"All three of you have definitely grown!"

I guess one real battle is a lot more worth than a hundred lessons, as expected... All three have become much faster at switching their spells.

While being covered by the girls, I float up to a height allowing me to target the dragon head's right eye.

"It'll be over if this doesn't work, but it doesn't mean that it has no chance of success."

I take out the bow, which I used during my childhood, and a special arrow, which I had created in preparation for a possible time of need, out of my magic bag, and nock the arrow onto my bow.

"Sensei! It'll be impossible with such a short arrow!"

"Maybe, maybe not."

After all, this arrow doesn't use a regular arrowhead, but a magic gem with lots of mana stored into it. I form a thread with my remaining mana, and connect my head and the magic gem at the tip of this arrow with that thread. It's something similar to a fuse created out of mana.

Connecting it to my head is for the sake of making the huge amount of mana in the gem explode at the ideal moment. It's something I noticed after doing lots of various magic research: it's difficult to make mana explode even if there is a lot of mana in the air, but it's possible to make mana explode inside magic stones or magic crystals, depending on how you do it.

However, the difference in mana quality would be a bottleneck with the mana in magic stones, resulting in a decreased firepower. But, exactly because it's a magic gem containing my own mana, it's a feasible method.

"On the other hand, it's going to break an expensive, rare high-capacity magic gem! I can't even imagine what's going to happen if I make this much mana explode."

Right now I might get dragged into a big explosion and die in the worst case. But, I think that's still preferable over getting tormented to death by small dragon golems.

"I can't tell you how strong the explosion is going to be! Protect yourself!"

"But, what about you, sensei!?"

""Sensei!!""

No choice but to go for it! Even if I die after getting swallowed up by the explosion, I'll have at least carried out the good deed of protecting my students as a teacher. Even if I were to be sent to another world again, I shouldn't be punished with an overly harsh life. That's just a guess lacking any foundation, though.

"Here we go!"

I release my special arrow towards the dragon head. At this angle, it shouldn't be capable of shooting it down with a breath. It wouldn't be an issue even if I hadn't directly hit its eye, but that worry proved to be unnecessary.

Using the mana thread connected to my head, I swiftly cause the mana in the magic gem at the arrow's tip to explode.

"This...might end really badly..."

Because I made the mana explode inside the magic gem while maintaining 『Flight』 at the same time, I exceed my fatigue limit, and start falling to the ground with my consciousness fading away. Meanwhile the mana inside the magic gem explodes, shining brightly in a radius, obviously possessing a ridiculous firepower.

I heard that the world around you will proceed in slow-motion on the verge of death, but right now I'm truly experiencing it as I'm slowly getting swallowed by the light.

I doubt that Agnes' team would be in time with any rescue attempts. Unfortunately, it's game over for me at this point.

"If possible, I wanted to see the faces of my children though..."

That's how far my thoughts went on the verge of the explosion drawing close to my body, and then I blacked out.



Just before losing consciousness, my final thoughts are about my children who are going to be born, and I keep apologizing to my yet-unborn children, only hoping that they'll forgive their worthless father.



"Huh? Is this the netherworld?"

""Sensei!""

"Earl Baumeister, nothing less of you, you are quite tenacious."

"I'm going to return those words right back at you."

This time I was quite certain of my death, but it seems that I narrowly escaped such a fate. When I open my eyes, I'm met with Agnes' team and Arnest's faces as they look down at me. If I had really died, it would have been Master's face greeting me now.

In other words, I'm still alive.

"You did well to not have died after having gotten dragged into such an explosion."

Judging that I'd get my priorities backwards if I didn't manage to destroy the dragon head because I had lowered the explosion's output, I used a magic gem for the arrow's tip containing a considerable amount of mana. Given that it was a peculiar method of making it explode, it was inefficient with a rather small firepower when compared to the invested amount of mana, but even so, there was no way that I could have survived after getting dragged into that kind of blast.

And yet, I'm still alive. Strange things do happen every now and then.

"Sensei, you were saved by Arnest-san."

According to Agnes, Arnest flew over with 『Flight』 on the spur of the moment, picked me up, and protected us both by immediately redeploying his 『Magic Barrier』. Still, for Arnest, who shirked his magic training despite having lots of mana, to have been in time for my rescue, even though Agnes' team, who usually never fails to do their magic training, couldn't react at all...

"I think it is proper human etiquette to honestly express a thanks at such times."

"Thanks, you saved me there, Arnest."

"It is nice to see you so upfront about it. I would have been troubled if my sponsor died on me. Moreover, I am very interested in this underground ruin."

I guess he's saying that he might not have been able to investigate this ruin if I had died. Very typical of Arnest, I'd say...

Come to think of it, where are we right now?

When I survey my vicinity, I spot temple-like structures, a stone floor, and stone pillars with dragon carvings. At the least it shouldn't be the floor where we encountered the dragon head.

"That dragon head was completely destroyed. Immediately afterwards, the small dragons stopped working altogether, and the exit door opened up. Right now we're one floor above." Going by Cindy's explanation, this seems to be the highest floor of the ruin we had been transferred to.

That means, just as Arnest and I had predicted, the dragon head was the last boss.

"I see. I wonder, where's the exit?"

"Sensei, it's better if you don't move yet. You're still a child, so you have to take a proper rest." Betty stopped me from getting up while giving me a lap pillow.

However, it's also a fact that I'm filled with the wish to check whether we can get out to the surface as soon as possible.

"While you were sleeping, Cindy and I removed the rubble blocking the exit with magic."

"We're on the first floor right beneath the surface, so we'll be fine."

When the two had checked outside, they found out that we're in a hilly area around ten kilometers to the south of Baulburg. This part of the ruin had been buried in a hill, so it apparently remained undiscovered.

"It is a wonderfully auspicious matter that we have been able to survive, but right now the people of the Earl Baumeister House should be in a frantic uproar. Especially Erwin."

Once he came back after going out for a bit to take a piss, believing that it was a safe ruin, we had suddenly vanished. For Erwin, a retainer of the Baumeister House, this would be a story going far beyond a question of responsibility. About now he might be searching for us while panicking.

"I should contact...ah!"

Only now I remember that I had a MHCD with me in my magic bag. If I had contacted the outside with this, things might not have developed in the direction of us almost dying? Considering it like that, I feel how cold sweat starts to gush out a bit.

"Hmm? Communications? Those should be impossible here, seeing how it is a military installation."

Well, this guy had repaired and used a Communication Jamming Device during the Empire's Civil War, so I guess those things were relatively popular as military technology in the era of the Ancient Magic Civilization.

"Therefore I had not immediately told you to contact the outside either. Earl Baumeister, you thought so as well, no? Or did you possibly not...?"

"O-Of course I noticed it right away!"

I try using the MHCD - ultimately just for caution's sake, of course - but since it really doesn't connect to anyone, I feel relieved from the bottom of my heart.

"It looks like the golems are using another type of Communication Jamming Device."

"So that's why we can't connect to the outside even after the destruction of the dragon head, huh?"
Agnes realizes that his ruin still hasn't completely stopped operating.

I suppose it means there's still a jamming device running in this ruin. We should quickly leave this place since it's dangerous.

I get up from Betty's lap pillow.

"Ah...no..."

"Since we'll be able to use the communication device as soon as we leave this ruin, rescue will immediately arrive, I expect. Let's get out of here as soon as possible."

Deciding to leave any further investigation of the ruin for another day, we crawl out of the ruin. A rescue force immediately comes running as soon as I use the MHCD, thus spelling the safe conclusion of our unexpected life and death struggle.

* * *

"Wend, you survived...but, you're small."

"That Erw sure is oddly whiny."

"Now listen, Wend, if something had happened to you, it wouldn't have ended with only Erw's responsibility being called into question."

"Indeed."

"Milord, I'd like you to be a little more aware of your own importance."

"It can't be helped, can it? It'll be better for your peace of mind to accept that there'll be unforeseen accidents."

"That's what you say, Wend, but it doesn't seem like Erw and Roderich think so as well."

Right now I'm still a child, so I had planned to eat something and go to sleep early tonight since I'm tired, but...

Erw tilted his head in confusion for a moment after seeing me, but then started to bawl as soon as he

grasped that my child state was a temporary state caused by magic. Roderich's preaching was as severe as ever, resulting in me having a hard time.

Going by Ina, around this much should be natural, seeing the magnitude of the incident.

"We're terribly sorry as the ones having caused all of this."

"It's because we carelessly approached that small rat."

"Sorry for having almost caused sensei's death."

Given the situation, Agnes' team is staying the night in my mansion, but it appears that they feel responsible for today's events. The three keep apologizing to Erw, Roderich, and my wives. They probably believe that things would have become really bad if I had died.

"Don't mind it. You approaching the rat unprepared was a bad move, but now you know to be more careful next time, right?"

It's over now, and today's precarious situation allowed the three to grow drastically. As their teacher, I can only say all's well that ends well.

"Beating yourself up over something that's already done doesn't lead anywhere. God is teaching us that 『Failures are the source of future success』. Please do not worry about it."

Nothing less of Elise. She soothes the three to not worry any further. Given that my first wife has said that the three bear no responsibility, everyone besides me isn't able to condemn the three over this case any further. Roderich and Erw also cease speaking of this.

"(Sorry, Elise)"

"(It's because calling their responsibility into question isn't what you wish, dear)"

As expected of her, Elise displays her capability as my first wife, immediately grasping my intent, and dealing with things in accordance to it.

"Still, I must say you've become rather cute, Wend." On top of that, Luise skilfully shifts the topic into another direction.

For some reason she looks very happy as she compares her height with mine.

"Luise is slightly taller?"

"Indeed, Wilma! Right now I'm taller than Wend!"

"It looks like he'll return to normal after one night, though."

Katharina looks like she doesn't get the point behind Luise's cheerfulness, but I think that's likely owed to her being fairly tall herself. In Luise's eyes the fact of winning in height against me, even if it might be for just one night, seems to have value.

"Somehow it reminds me of the past. Back when I had just married into the Knight Baumeister House, Wend-kun was also this small and cute."

"Every once in a while it'd be adorable to have such a tiny Wendelin around, wouldn't it?"

"Definitely."

Because the magic will wear off by tomorrow, and probably out of a happy-go-lucky feeling, I'm treated like a child even by Amalie-san, Therese, and Lisa. They take turns gently caressing my head.

"My personality is still that of a fully-grown adult, though."

"I'm well aware, but thine appearance wakes the urge in me to brush thine head."

"I know, I know."

"It reminds me of my little brother's childhood."

It's inevitable for an adult man to get embarrassed from having his head stroked or being carried around.

"Wendelin-kun, you're happy about getting patted by older ladies, aren't you?"

Damn you, Erw, don't get your revenge on me now, just because you went through a tough time because of me having gone missing. I don't need any of your friggin' teasing while watching me being treated like a child.

"Arnest-san, is His Lordship really going to return to normal?"

"No doubt about it. I have become tired from having used a lot of spells I am not familiar with, so I am going to sleep now."

Arnest has been quietly taking dinner together with us, but with those words, he takes his leave to go to sleep. There were many situations where we narrowly escaped death thanks to him, so he's earned the right to take it easy for today.

"I think I'll go to sleep as well."

A childish body is really troublesome as it easily gets tired. I'll also get some sleep now. Tomorrow I'll be rid of this childish body, too.

"Let's sleep together then, dear."

However, because Elise immediately declares her intent here, the situation plunges into chaos. Elise is pregnant, and I have this kind of body. Of course we won't have sex, but somehow it looks like she wants to sleep together with me.

"E——eh! That's unfair, Elise!"

"But, Ina-san, someone needs to confirm whether Wendelin-sama is truly going to return to normal tomorrow morning."

I should revert back tomorrow morning, but there's still the unlikely event that it might not be so. Elise makes her standpoint clear, saying that she's going to sleep with me for the sake of watching over me.

"I could do the same as well, no?"

"Ina-chan, I don't have any problem doing it either."

"Me neither."

"We should all have an equal opportunity, right?"

"Then I'll join in as well." Katia said.

"All of you are pregnant, so I, as the Head Maid, should officially take care of this."

"Amalie-san, that's a sly move."

"Indeed. Everyone, be honest. Thou just want to sleep with Wendelin now that he's become a cute child, or am I wrong?" Therese drops a bombshell announcement, pointing out the true intention behind the quarrel of my wives.



"You're right. Given that Wendelin-sama's child state is a special occurrence lasting only tonight, I shall watch over him as the first wife."

"That's what you bring up at this point?"

"You're sneaky, Elise. I mean, even I want to sleep together with a Wend, who's smaller than me, while lovingly watching over him."

"I doubt that counts as a reason. Wendelin-sama should sleep with me. Luise, you toss and turn around while sleeping."

"That makes sense. But, that part will be totally okay if it comes to someone as elegant as me."

"Elegance or stuff like that doesn't matter here at all. I sleep peacefully as well, just so you know."

"You shouldn't lie. Katia, you're a bad sleep-talker. I'll take care of this."

"Aren't you all forgetting that you're pregnant? That's why I'll sleep with Wend-kun."

"Amalie, since it's only about sleeping together, I doubt it's an issue. I will handle it in preparation for the time when mine child will be born."

My wives continue to argue while speaking all at once. Or rather, when will I be able to go to sleep? And with whom?

"Wendelin-sama is tired, so I as the first wife will take over this duty so as to avoid an endless quarrel."

"I told you, that's unfair!"

"I'll do it!" Luise exclaims.

"I've got a peaceful sleeping posture."

"As expected, this is the time for the elegant me to take the stage."

"Didn't I say seconds ago that your elegance doesn't matter!? And stop saying that I'm sleep-talking."

"I had few opportunities as a newcomer."

"That's a very convenient excuse! If thou use that as an argument, it applies to me as well!"

"All of you, please go to sleep since it's a bad influence on the children in your bellies. I know the child Wend-kun the best after all."



"Sensei?"

"All of you, you can go to your guest room and sleep now. Good work today."

"Are you going to be okay, sensei?"

"Even though you're worn-out..."

"You three might understand once you become a bit older, but it'd turn into a disaster if I went off on my own to sleep at this point. Please don't mind me, and go sleep."

In the end there was no hint that the dispute of my wives would end anytime soon, resulting in my bedtime being pointlessly delayed. On the next day I got stuck taking a nap because of lacking sleep.



Moreover, I should note that my body had returned to normal when I got up in the morning.

Chapter 4 - Hair, an Old Friend

"Earl Baumeister, I hear the 『Hair God (Kamikami)』 has come to your territory."

"Eh? Kamikami, you say?"

"Yes, Hair God."²

Since today I've got no work at the prep school, I've been reading the reports I received from Roderich in my mansion. It's impossible for me to oversee all of the governmental affairs of the huge Baumeister Earldom, but as its lord, I must gradually grasp the whole. Given that Elise and my other wives are on maternity leave, it's just the perfect time to get accustomed to this job.

It looks like my experience from my time as salaryman wasn't all pointless either. As I read the documents, I can understand the rough outline.

The development in my territory has been proceeding at a higher pace than scheduled. Just as I'm reviewing the progress, an unexpected visitor shows up in front of me. That visitor introduces himself as Earl Ehrenfried, clad in an attire and behaving himself in a way suitable to his rank. I think he's approximately forty years old. He seems to be a high-ranking appointed noble, belonging to the circle of nobles affiliated with agricultural affairs.

As usual, I can't remember the names of nobles, but Elise and Roderich cover that part for me.

Just when I'm wondering what kind of business he might have with me — though it's gotta be related to agriculture, seeing his affiliation — he suddenly confronts me with a word I've never heard before.

"Sorry, I'm still not quite up to par since I'm a greenhorn, but what's this 『Hair God (Kamikami)』?"

"It's being referred to as a legendary life-form. I guess it's only understandable for you to not know of it..."

According to Earl Ehrenfried, the Hair God is a creature where it isn't even clear whether it counts as a monster or animal.

"You don't know?"

"I hear its movements are very quick. It got a speed the eyes can't keep up with, or something like that..."

No one knows how it looks like since it's too fast for human eyes, and its usual habitat is unknown as well since it's been sighted in monster domains as well as regular forests and plains.

² Stupid pun on Kami = hair and Kami = god

"I've got a question then. How do you know that it's the Hair God despite not knowing its true appearance? Couldn't it be some other quick creature?"

"About that..."

He explains that the Hair God got a very specific trait. It looks like it scatters some weird liquid when running away from people trying to catch it.

"Liquid? Does your body melt when showered by it or something?"

"No. If you're hit by that liquid, your hair will grow out."

"Hair, huh...?"

Come to think of it, Earl Ehrenfried is bald. He really can't hide a look telling me that it's inevitable for him to be interested in a liquid that regrows hair.

"In short, it scatters a liquid when escaping, and your hair grows back when hit by that liquid, correct?"

"Yes, I hear an adventurer with thin hair got accidentally showered by it, resulting in his hair remaining bushy all the way until his death."

"It sounds like it's very effective..."

I knew many people worried about their thin hair in my previous life. I'd also noticed that one of my superiors wore a wig. It was really hard for my eyes to not be drawn to his hairline when I was talking with him. There also existed many people buying expensive hair growth agents as soon as they heard that they were effective against thin hair. Even on Earth with its almighty science, a perfectly working hair restorer didn't exist.

At least until I was transferred to this world, that is.

This world has its own shady hair restorers as well. It's questionable whether those things have any effect...

Many among the nobles and merchants buy somewhat fishy magic potions for hefty sums of money. They get cheated, get involved with fishy potions again, and get cheated again. There's quite a few such people. No matter how often they get tricked, they don't give up hope that they'll find an effective medicine one day.

Even if the world is a different one, hair remains an eternal topic for men.

"Fortunately, the sighting hasn't been in the Demon Forest. Accordingly, I have some requests for you, Sir Baumeister." Earl Ehrenfried presents me with a bundle of documents.

All the documents are filled with requests addressed towards me.

"You're certainly not going to turn them down, are you?"

What blunt pressure. The requests ask me to somehow catch the Hair God using my magic, or to secure the liquid secreted at the time of its escape. All of the letters insist on preferentially selling the liquid to them. It's a foregone conclusion that all the requesters are people with thin hair.

Moreover, if I turn down their requests, they intend to have me branded as intolerant by all people lacking hair. That attitude of fussing over hair is intolerant as well...but I guess I'm not in a position to make such a statement as I don't understand the feelings of people with no hair.

What's far more frightening is the tenacious attachment towards hair.

"I'm not sure whether I will be successful..."

"We know that. But, even if it's just clinging to a faint possibility, we want to get our hair back!"

Overwhelmed by Earl Ehrenfried's intense appeal, I lose the chance to turn him down.



"Hair God, huh? It's a legendary creature as far as I know. Because of its effectiveness, many influential people desire its body fluids, I hear."

Since I had no choice but to accept the requests, I tried asking Elise about the Hair God in an attempt to gather some information. In response, she gives me a full rundown. Nothing less of Elise-sensei.

"It's an unwritten law that information about the Hair God mustn't be passed down to the commoners..."

Apparently it's a measure to avoid an increase of people trying to get their lost hair back after letting the commoners know.

Their lost hair will return back to its former state; if they knew that such a dream-like effect really existed, the competition to obtain that fluid would very likely become fierce. It's a safe bet that wealthy merchants would pay any amount of money for it.

"There are no records of the Hair God having been caught in the past. Only the people, who obtained its body fluids after being showered by it, were able to recover their lost hair."

In other words, it'd turn into an extreme competition in order to obtain the rare fluid secreted during its escape.

"Because it's moving so fast that you can't follow it with your eyes, no one has been able to confirm what it looks like as of yet. It looks like some people were able to obtain the liquid by chance, but only very small amounts of it. In addition, being able to obtain it once in ten sightings is already a great achievement..."

Given its rare acquisition rate and the small amount, I suppose there's very few people who have been able to enjoy its blessing.

"Simply put, I should give it a try since I've got nothing to lose anyway?"

"Yes. Of course magicians in ancient times have also challenged a capture of the Hair God, but not one of them has succeeded. The liquid being acquired by normal people appears to be the common case..."

In short, doesn't that mean that I won't draw any hate towards me even if I fail?

The high-ranking nobles are kicking up a fuss that it might be possible for them to get their hair back, but the probability of actually being able to obtain the liquid is low. I guess they still came to rely on me, who has a faintly higher chance for success, while clinging to that exceedingly low possibility.

"I'll do my best. But, I can't guarantee anything about the result..."

"That makes sense. Still, I think it'll be fine if you do just that." Since Elise-sensei is the one saying so, it must be true.

"So, where has that Hair God or whatever been sighted in the Baumeister Earldom?"

"Well, you see..." When I hear about the location from Ina, it's a truly unexpected place.



"Such a creature might be in our territory?"

"It's too fast, making a clear location of its whereabouts difficult, it seems, but..."

The Hair God has been seen in a forest adjoining to Paul's territory. A small stream is flowing through the middle of the forest, and this creek serves as the border between Paul's and my territories.

The sighting took place on the Earldom's side of the forest, but it might also have moved on to Paul's side. Accordingly I'm now visiting Paul to get permission to search the forest.

Considering my relationship with Paul, it wouldn't be a particular problem for me to search without asking for permission first, but you should still keep good manners, even between family.

"What to say...it really sounds like trying to catch clouds..."

"If I hadn't accepted the request, even if I did so just because I've got nothing to lose anyway, the pressure would have become too intense..."

This country is ruled by a king, royalty, and nobles. A lot of those in power are elderly men, and many of those suffer from hair loss. That's why I must devote all my power into searching for the Hair God. After all, it might have developed into a hindrance of my territory's growth if I had refused to help.

Given that Roderich has seen me off with a smile, I think I'm not all that wrong about this assumption either. The truly terrifying part is the tenacity towards hair.

"It's just a question I've come up with on the spot, but how is it possible that a creature, which is so fast that you can't follow its movement with your eyes, has been reported to have been spotted?"

"It looks like it runs away while scattering a liquid, if it senses danger."

"But, the Hair God is abnormally fast, right? Wouldn't it be rare for its fluid to scatter when it runs away?"

"Now that you mention it...maybe it's the wind pressure or something?"

I don't understand the details about this part either. If it moves quickly, it might create an intense whirlwind or something, like a kamaitachi.

"Brother, is the usual share necessary?"

"I'll think about it if it's caught in my territory."

Even if we might share a patron/vassal relationship, we must be clear about these kinds of things. But, I think Paul estimates the probability of obtaining the Hair God's fluid as fairly low. He puts off a talk about the details for the time afterwards.

"Milord, I'd like to participate in the search as well, if possible." Ottmar-san, a former guard colleague of Paul and his current Junior Commander, expresses his wish to join the search.

"Ottmar, you've got a day off today, so I don't really mind, but..."

"Thank you very much! Yahoooooo! I'll go at it with full power!!" Ottmar-san heads towards the forest in high spirits.

"Umm...brother?"

"That guy has recently been worrying about his declining hair..."

No matter the era or world, worrying about hair loss remains the same everywhere.



"Anyway, does such a creature really exist in the first place?" Erw brings up a doubt as I, the members I rounded up, and several men under Ottmar-san begin to look for Hair God.

"It doesn't matter either way. We have to establish the fact that we searched for it."

"In other words, an alibi?"

"Something like that, I suppose."

It'd cause various problems if I piss off the other nobles without searching. That's why I need to do my best, even if we don't find it in the end.

"That's going to be expensive...?"

"Not as much as you think."

Since we're looking for a being that might exist or not, I've hired students from the prep school for a part-time job. I have them split up the forest and watch their respective sections by paying them an allowance.

"Just call them necessary expenses."

"Though, what wonders me is the question why Arterio-san is with us."

The chief purveyor of the Baumeister house, Arterio-san, is participating in the search as well. Erw is baffled that such a big shot would show up here.

"It's a measure for the unlikely event of us obtaining the liquid. Erwin, a bloody dispute is going to start, if royalty and nobility try to appropriate the liquid for themselves. I have investigated various things as well, and found records of bloodshed in the past."

"Over hair?"

"Erwin, that's something you can say because of your rich hair. In the eyes of people with little to no hair, they'll consider the liquid as something they want to get their hands on, even if they have to get rid of contenders."

Learning of such circumstances, I feel like I accepted an outrageous request. Given that it's requests from people who can apply pressure on us, it wasn't really refusable though...

"Erwin, can you still say the same even after seeing that?"

"All of you! Raise your spirits and search as if your life depends on it!"

""""""Yaaaahh!""""""

Arterio-san jerks in the direction where Ottmar-san and his men are about to search for Hair God with bloodshot eyes. Somehow, the people participating under him seem to lack hair...

They probably put a maximum priority on recovering their own hair as long as they can get some of the liquid. But certainly, compared to before, I feel like Ottmar-san's hair has thinned out quite a bit.

That makes him probably all the more frantic.

"Just looking at them is already scary..."

"Well, there are various magic potions related to men's hair and women's beauty care...that's why I'm here as well. After all, a merchant might be necessary, seeing how it's something difficult to put a price on."

Given that it'll doubtlessly cost quite a lot of money, Arterio-san is with us in preparation for that.

"Arterio-san, do you want the Hair God's liquid, too?"

"No, I don't have thin hair. Though, Burkhart-san, who wants to look good for his newborn daughter, might need it."

Now that he mentions it, Arterio-san sure has full hair. There's some white hair because of his age, but that's solvable with hair dye.

"I don't have any problems with my hair either."

Actually, Burkhart-san is participating in the search together with Arterio-san. The reason being...

"Does Margrave Breithilde need it?"

"That's not it, Earl-sama. The Margrave Breithilde House's family members mostly don't suffer from hair loss. I've been sent here since it looks like trouble might brew if you obtain the Hair God's liquid by chance."

"Just because of that?"

It's also possible that there'd be various maneuvering going on within the Margrave Breithilde House to obtain the liquid, so Margrave Breithilde himself doesn't seem to be all that eager to obtain it.

"Ultimately it's just a precautionary measure. Hair God sightings are reported several dozen times per year, but the liquid is obtained roughly once in ten times. It's the very definition of an illusionary fluid. On one occasion I also joined the search for it, I recall. Back then I was still a newbie magician. Though I didn't even get to see its shadow."

"I hear there were many cases in the past where people couldn't find it even after mobilizing many magicians. To be blunt, it completely depends on luck...so go at it without straining yourself."

Burkhart-san has obviously no motivation. He might be more eager to get back home instead.

"Well, maybe Doushi needs it as well..."

Actually Doushi is also participating in our search today.

"Burkhart-dono, I'm shaving my head every day. The Armstrong family has only a few members

with thin hair."

"Yeah, I know, I'm aware of that. You were requested to help by nobles related to you, weren't you?"

"It would be a lie if I denied that, but since no surefire method to obtain the liquid exists, I can't promise much either."

He was probably asked to do this by people with thin hair among the nobles of the military faction or something like that...but then again, since Doushi isn't a member of their faction to be precise, I think he has no obligation to accept their plea.

"I'm here because some people will more likely accept the outcome if they see that even my participation didn't change anything."

"Sorry for going out of your way for us."

"I don't mind. Even though a man's charm isn't just defined by his hair, so many adult men are kicking up a fuss over it. What truly shameful conduct!"

It's not that I don't feel the same, but Doushi sure is amazing for being able to state this without batting an eyelid. Since it'd be pointless to keep talking about this any longer, we also joined up with the Hair God search party.

"Sensei, I'm bored."

"I hear you, but make sure to not move from your assigned position. You won't become a decent adventurer, if you don't do your job properly when getting paid for it."

Anyway, there's the question of how we should go about looking for the Hair God. It's not like some ingenious method with a good prospect to find it has been established.

I deployed the hired students at the various spots in the forest where the Hair God has been seen. It was a simple measure to make sure that we'd be able to quickly react wherever it might show up. But, after several hours of waiting, the students started to get tired of it since nothing was going on. After all, even I'd get bored to death if I were to be forbidden to hunt or gather materials because of the need to keep watching a certain location.

"Erw, do we have any likely responses?"

"No, it's not that I know what kind of response to await from the Hair God or whatever, but there's no response or presence indicating something remotely close."

Since the sun set a few hours later, we put a stop to today's search. The search this time around will last three days to cater to the wishes of the high-ranking nobles who are closely observing the whole endeavor.

Today all of us are going to stay over in brother's territory without returning to Baulburg.

"Wend, thanks for the business."

"..."

Several dozen people are going to lodge, eat and drink. That's an income which helps the Baumeister Associate Barony as it's still in the middle of its development.

Come to think of it, the ones earning the most during the gold rush on Earth in the past were the people doing business with the diggers, or so I heard. Still, necessary expenses are just that.

"Your place for lodging and dining has been prepared as well."

Erw, Burkhart-san, Doushi and I will stay over at my brother's mansion. Arterio-san apparently judged it unlikely for us to find the liquid, and thus returned to Baulburg, leaving one of his subordinates behind. Since he's swamped with work, he probably can't waste three days in a place like this.

My brother's mansion was built only recently, and is largely different from the previous mansion of my parents. It's not as big as my mansion, but since its comparison target would be that old shack from the past, it must feel terribly luxurious to my brother and his family.

"Brother, is such an extravagant mansion okay?"

"Well...don't compare it to our previous home, okay...? We've got visitors from outside, and it's supposed to last for a good while. Had we built it too small or skimped on the money, it'd just cost more later on because of all the reconstructions."

As we are guided into the mansion, I see several young women in maid clothes briskly doing various chores.

"Brother! You've got maids!"

For him to even have maids...I can't hide my surprise.

"I've just hired several women as commuting maids from within the territory. The maid clothes are loaned to them for their work here."

"Even so, it's still amazing!"

"Well, I know what you mean, but still..."

At our parents' home, the one closest to what you could call a maid was 『Meyd-san』³, and she worked while wearing her normal clothes. Since my parents didn't have any servants that could be described as housekeepers, you can call the current situation a big level-up.

"Let's have dinner."

³ Another stupid pun. Her name is written as 冥途 (underworld, dark path) and spoken as めいと (meido). Regular katakana for maid is メイド (meido), so yeah, you see where we're heading with this.

Even the dinner consisted of a fairly luxurious menu. Brother had the maids serve a full course, and a delicious cake rounded up the whole as a dessert.

Once again I become worried.

"Brother, is all of this really okay?"

"Wend, you're my patron, so I have to entertain you properly, and since we're also receiving payment for the dining and lodging from the other visitors, it's no problem. Besides, it'd be better for you to not worry so much. Else dad will sink beneath the table."

"Eh?"

Once I look in the direction of my father, he's sitting at the edge of the table with his head hanging and his shoulders slumping.

"I guess it's only natural for Wend to be worried...we didn't provide any decent meals during your childhood...if not for the food brought in by Wend, it'd have been hard for us to even provide anything besides bread and soup... Don't mind me. I know that I was a failure as lord..."

"Father, I'm sorry!"

After this I had to spend quite a bit of time on consoling my father.



"A secret medicine to recover lost hair, eh...? I suppose high-ranking nobles have it hard as well."

Since father has finally cheered up again, we resume our dinner as I explain the details of my current job. As for the disclosure of the information, father and brother are no problem since they're nobility as well. Having said that, it's already turned into large-scale search with people having been hired, so I won't be able to avoid the adventurers learning of it, no matter what I do.

I have no idea for how long the Hair God remains at the same spot, but the number of adventurers booking an inn in brother's territory might increase for a while. Well, if it comes to a hair restorer that always works, high-ranking nobles and wealthy merchants will pay the asking price. It's very likely that people hoping for something like a gold rush will gather here, seeing as they might obtain a sum of money that would allow them to live the rest of their lives off the hog.

"I'll take it as a great chance for us to earn some money."

However, the probability for the searching adventurers to find the target is going to be extremely low. Nevertheless, it might develop into a plain gold rush for my brother and his fief's residents when they do business with the adventurers.

"If it comes to high-ranking nobles, they probably have many occasions where they need to appear in public. It might be better for their appearance to have hair on their head." Father says, but I

actually wonder, what would the surroundings think if a noble suddenly grows hair on his bald head?

In my previous life they'd be suspected of hair transplantation or wearing a wig. But, since the increase of hair through the Hair God affects your own, natural hair, it's maybe not necessary to worry about such things?

While thinking about all this, my eyes suddenly end up clinging to my father's head. Then again, it's not like my father has any issues with hair loss. The white hair has increased in number again, but if he were to worry about that, he'd just need to dye them.

Even if the hair has become completely white, there's still a big difference between having and not having hair.

"Wendelin, you don't really need to give me that medicine..." Father says as if to alleviate my worries after having noticed my look. "There's few people who are troubled with hair loss in our Baumeister family. Although we're a family that has no redeeming traits, only that part is something we can be proud of."

Come to think of it, Erich has rich hair as well. But having such a family trait might be actually great.

Just because they've lost their hair, it's not like the nobles in this world can use a shaved head as some kind of deception. It's because nobles who shave their head will stick out like sore thumbs, or rather, it won't suit them, on top of being considered to have a lack of common sense.

Some among them use wigs, but with the crafting technologies of this world it's plain obvious that those are wigs. There's probably only a few nobles who would openly talk about it, but it looks like it is occasionally used as material to make fun of the wig-wearers behind their backs. I hear that it led to duels in the past after the nobles in question heard of those malicious rumors by coincidence.

The bitterness over hair is really frightening.

For that reason, wealthy nobles put in various efforts in their quest for hair recovery. Though some among them fall for scams involving weird medicines.

『It'd be best to be suspicious of anything involving medicines supposedly letting you grow taller, allowing you to become slim, boosting your sexual vitality, or letting breasts grow』 Elise taught me.

She said there's many people who pay big amounts of money once they're told about dream-like effects, even if the idea itself is clearly fishy.

"Before that, are you really going to find that Hair God?"

"Umm...who knows?" I end up lost for a reply to my father's question.

Given that mother joined us afterwards to talk about the recent situation with Elise and my other wives, we completely stopped talking about the Hair God. It allowed me to fully understand that

people won't trust anything they haven't actually seen with their own eyes.



"Sensei, we haven't found it."

"I suppose even Cindy's good luck is of no help here..."

The search on the second day is already on the way, but there's still not a single trace of that Hair God. Even after using Cindy's girl power, also known as good luck, we haven't managed to grasp a single clue about its whereabouts.

"Earl-sama, it's nigh impossible to find it, isn't it?"

Burkhart-san is also in low spirits. Given that the chances to find it after its sighting are rather low, he probably feels like going back to his daughter as soon as possible.

"We have to look for it for at least three days, otherwise it won't work as an alibi."

"Pointless expenses...or I guess not...considering it's the noble society..."

Because I'm a high-ranking noble myself as well, I've got to take the nobles into consideration to some extent. Even if I don't manage to find it, I must show my sincerity by investing some time and effort into the search.

Of course some nobles will likely blame me for being worthless, either way.

"Wend, the students are clearly losing interest." Erw informs me as the one leading the prep school students I called over for a part-time job.

Since they're prohibited to hunt or gather, and are stuck watching their designated location all the time, their concentration on the job has been waning, I'm sure.

"Please have them somehow endure until tomorrow."

"You're quite the slave-driver. I hope this will end soon..."

The instant Erw files such a complaint, the wind is suddenly whirled up, and I feel as if something has slipped past my cheek at a very high speed.

"Earl-sama?"

"Burkhart-san, did you feel it as well?"

"Yeah."

Right now we're in a place with no wind blowing. And yet we sensed a local breeze and the

presence of something. In other words...

"The Hair God, huh?"

"Most likely."

Ultimately it's no more than an assumption, though. Moreover, currently I can't sense that Hair God-like presence anywhere anymore. It has apparently slipped past Burkhart-san and me at a tremendously high speed.

"Earl-sama, my 『Detect』 doesn't show any response either."

"Same here."

I finally comprehend why magicians don't readily succeed at the capture of the Hair God. Since it's way too fast, it moves out of the range of 『Detect』 before the skill triggers.

"How are we going to capture something like this?"

"Predict a place it'll pass, and plant a trap there?"

"Even though we don't know where it's right now?" Burkhart-san shoots down my plan to catch it with a trap.

He's right. We won't know for sure whether it'll pass the trap's location, and if we plant a magic trap, it'll cost mana to keep it up. Even the idea of planting traps in many places is physically impossible because the area is too big.

"In the first place, we don't know where it's right now, do we?"

"Well, yeah..."

As I'm thinking about Erw's reasonable input, I hear the voices of students from within the forest. It looks like the Hair God has moved towards them.

"Let's go!"

"Earl-sama, won't it be too late even if we go now?"

After Burkhart-san points this out, I realize as well. Even if we head over to the place of the students that caused a ruckus just now, we won't make it in time.

"Honesty, just how are we supposed to catch it?"

As I'm starting to believe that it might be impossible, Doushi shows up.

"Earl Baumeister, it's just by coincidence, but I've felt a Hair God-like presence."

"You too, huh? We have also sensed its presence...eh!?"

The instant we see Doushi, all of us become speechless due to his extremely weird appearance.

"I tried to punch it by intuition, but I didn't hit it. But, it looks like I angered the Hair God! The outcome is just as you can see for yourself!"

The Hair God has apparently used its rumored fluid attack against Doushi. Hair is smoothly extending from his head, which is usually shaved, all the way down to his waist. At the same time it has apparently affected his beard as well. Now he's got a rich beard, making him completely look like a mountain hermit.

"Doushi, that's really eerie..."

"Damn, if this has caused hair to grow in places where it usually doesn't, it will become a major pain!"

After being showered by the Hair God's fluid, Doushi's beard and head hair has become fairly abundant, but as result of that, the precious fluid has been totally wasted.



"I see..."

"It was truly terrible!"

When Burkhart-san, Erw, and I return to the inn after finishing the search on the second day, we fully grasp the effectiveness of the Hair God's fluid as we examine Doushi who has become a long-bearded mountain hermit. Well, the irrefutable proof is in front of our noses after all.

"The hair is definitely nice..."

Everyone agrees with Erw's opinion, but Doushi growing out beautiful blond hair like a woman can't be called anything but eerie. And as if to prove that, children cried in fear, adults ran home, and some elderly even fainted when they saw Doushi on our way back.

Usually I've regarded Doushi's hair style as rather strikingly eccentric, but now I get the feeling that it's actually been gentle in comparison. A blond long-haired Doushi is slightly scary, to be honest here. The unbalanced mountain hermit beard makes it even more frightening.

"Doushi, you're not going to cut your hair?"

"I'm going to wait until the search is over. After all, it's possible that I'll be showered with the fluid again!"

Such miraculous probability...seems possible if we're talking about Doushi, so we abstain from forcing him to cut his hair.

"You should at least trim them a bit, you know?"

Seemingly unable to let it pass despite Doushi's objection, my brother's wife arranges Doushi's hair with a scissor. Thanks to her, I think it might have become a bit less scary.

When she saw Doushi first, she was obviously startled.



But yep, she might be familiar with giving haircuts. Still, my nephews immediately start crying as soon as they see Doushi. I can only hope that it won't turn into a trauma for them.

"You cursed Hair God! Damn you for making innocent children cry!" Doushi is burning with hostility towards the Hair God all by himself, but I wonder...I don't think he's wrong, but isn't that a false accusation, somehow?

"Still, I managed to collect a tiny amount of the fluid!"

"Well done."

Although it's just a tiny amount, Doushi scooped up some of the fluid that fell on his body. As most of it went into growing his hair and beard, it's not much, but it's still unbelievably valuable.

Given that it's an amount that'd allow for the hair of one person to grow back, I'm sure a huge bidding war will start after this search is over.

"Something with an instantaneous effect, huh...? You'll be swarmed with potential buyers, definitely."

Even Erw has no choice but to admit that nobles and wealthy merchants are going to fight over this if it has that much of an effect. He's astonished while looking at Doushi.

"That means, if Doushi is going to play an active role tomorrow and beyond, we'll be able to obtain more of the Hair God's fluid."

"No, it's been truly coincidental that I managed to get my hands on it."

Doushi clearly signals to Erw that he'd be troubled if Erw expected him to pull off tomorrow the same as today.

"I didn't even have the time to consider catching it with magic."

Yep, no matter how much you prepare your spells, the Hair God has the nasty trait to run away outside any spell's range before you can even chant it. Tomorrow will also finish with being an alibi by performing a search.

"Earl Baumeister, it's a great help that His Majesty doesn't desire this medicine."

"No doubt..."

On that day we went to sleep early in preparation for tomorrow, but seeing Doushi in his long-haired, long-bearded version early in the morning was really bad for my heart. I had simply forgotten about his new appearance over the night.

My nephews start crying once again as soon as they see Doushi in the morning.

"Still, it's grown quite a bit overnight..."

His hair and beard should have gained more than 10 cm.

"It's terribly effective..."

"Since I didn't have any issues with my hair to begin with, it's just irritating!"

After breakfast, Doushi has my brother's wife trim his hair once more. But, is Doushi going to be alright at this rate?

I've heard that hair and beard hair contain proteins. In other words, won't Doushi's prided muscles decrease in proportion to the marvelously quick growth of his hair, resulting in him eventually becoming all skin and bones? The growth of Doushi's hair is so abnormal that I've begun to harbor such concerns.

Honestly speaking, I think it'd be good if I don't get showered by the Hair God's fluid.

"(But, it doesn't really look like Doushi's muscles are declining, does it...?)"

I've thought that the hair must come from somewhere, but maybe it ignores physical laws because it's a kind of magic potion? Though, Doushi is eating lots of meat, so the necessary proteins might come from there.

"I had planned to call it quits after today, but..."

It was a coincidence, but it's bad that Doushi ended up obtaining the fluid. The number of adventurers asking to stay at inns in my brother's territory is steadily growing...

『Milord, I think it might be better to prolong the search for a few more days at this point...』

I've received a call through the MHCD from Roderich. It looks like the high-ranking nobles have been applying pressure, asking us to extend the search. Still, for the Earl Baumeister Household to receive an unprecedented level of pressure over something like this...

Hair is truly terrifying.

"I wonder, should I shave my head if my hair starts to thin?"

"That's no good, is it? Considering your position as Earl Baumeister-sama."

Putting it like that, he's certainly right. At such times commoners have it much easier. But, I wonder what to think of always carrying a hat or using an obvious wig...

The pressure on me might be intense because the other nobles think the same, though...

"So, what are we going to do?"

"Keep our eyes open with perseverance!"

"No helping it, I suppose..."

In these last two days, Ottmar-san has mobilized all the fief residents with hair issues and planted a huge amount of nets and traps in the forest on brother's side of the territory. But then again, it's exactly because the Hair God doesn't fall for those traps that it's so difficult to catch in the first place...

"Increase the number of traps and nets! Tighten the watch, and don't miss even the faintest change!"

Ottmar-san is frantically trying to catch the Hair God, capitalizing on his experience and position as brother's Junior Commander.

"Umm...brother?" I call out to my brother who's sighing as he's watching Ottmar-san.

"That guy is truly desperate. He's instigating my residents with the prospect of striking it rich if they manage to obtain the Hair God's fluid. He's also told me that it'll help with the funds for the development..."

On the surface, those are logical reasons, but everyone knows that he's actually doing it for the sake of recovering his own hair. I think they don't point it out directly to him, although they're aware of it, because they sympathize with his situation.

"Only in regards to this case, I can't tell Ottmar anything. Somehow he's quite scary..." My brother looks like he's given up, accepting that he's got no choice but to wait for this Hair God Festival to come to an end.

"Though, all we're talking about here is just a hair restorer..." Erw comments, but his argumentation stems from us having no troubles with our hair. For those affected by hair loss it's a pressing problem. Also, I think it'd be better for Erw to watch what he says.

"Erwin! It's not just a hair restorer! It's a magic medicine that will absolutely restore one's hair! If we can obtain this, it'll lead to a great development for the Associate Baumeister Barony! After all, we'll be able to sell it for a hefty sum of money. Well...I plan to use a tiny bit to make sure of its effect, though...it's not good to sell it without making sure of its efficiency... Anyway, such a way of thinking is wrong for you, who might become a chief retainer of the Earl Baumeister House in the future!"

Erw gets detained by Ottmar-san, receiving a long-winded remonstrance.

* * *

"So, it's already been a full week..."

"Kinda feels long...and also short..."

It looks like Doushi has truly been blessed by Lady Luck. Ever since the second day, there haven't been eyewitness reports, resulting in everyone losing motivation.

Well, it makes sense. Everyone is just watching at the lookout positions assigned to them. Even among the adventurers a fairly big number has given up by now, and the number of those participating in the Hair God search is continuing to dwindle by the day.

"Sensei, we can't quite find it, huh?"

"It's boring."

"It's a pain since we can't do anything but stand watch."

Agnes, Betty, Cindy, and the other part-time working students are bored. You could say that they've done well to hold out so long despite their youthfulness, but I think they've now reached their limit.

"There are no new sighting reports either. Let's wrap it up here for today."

"I'm all for it!"

Once I announce the end of today's search, Burkhart-san is the very first to agree with it.

"Hasn't Margrave Breithilde said anything?"

"There's no way he could. Even if it's sighted, the fluid is obtained only once in ten sightings. My conservative master doesn't indulge in dreams. My dispatch is just an alibi anyway. Damn it, the folks at the capital should simply face reality."

It's a fairly cruel way of speaking, but our side is also wasting a lot of money on this. There's no way we can continue doing this endlessly. There's the pay for the students' part-time jobbing, lodging expenses, etc.

My brother has reduced the lodging prices a bit for us, but if I add up the expenses so far, it's already at an amount of money that'd cause a smaller noble to cry tears of blood. Then again, it only means that high-ranking nobles spend a lot of money on entertainment like this.

"I mean, even I don't have time to waste."

A magician at Burkhart-san's level has been assigned to only watch a creature where it's unclear whether it'll be possible to catch it. Although it's a necessary care of noble relationships, it means that Margrave Breithilde is also burdened quite a bit by his consideration towards the hairless nobles of the capital. I'm pretty sure, both actually want to get back to their usual jobs.

"I had expected that this might happen, so I tried to make something like this, just in case." I show a magic net with a very fine meshing to Burkhart-san.

"It's a fairly elaborate creation, but there's no magician who wouldn't think of such a method."

"Figures."

Catching the Hair God with a magic net...you could call this a fairly cliched method.

"It will be long gone before you can even cast that net."

"In that case, I guess there's no other option but to set up the net in advance...having said that, the probability for the Hair God to go close to the net is low, isn't it?"

And even before that, if I were to cast magic nets all over the place, I would never have enough mana to maintain all of them. The advantage of a magic net lies in its fine meshing when compared to a regular net. In my case, you can also add the point of it being almost invisible thanks to its transparency.

"I will make the meshing even finer."

"If it's this fine, even the Hair God won't be able to get out of it, I guess?"

"Eh? Why phrase it as a question?"

"No one has ever seen the true appearance of the Hair God. According to rumors, it can take on any shape, and also slip through nets, or something like that? Ultimately it's just rumors, the folklore-type at that."

It's capable of an ever-changing appearance, allowing it to slip through nets? If that's really true, I think that even magic won't be of much use here.

"Is this net no good as well? We're going to set it up overhead like this, and wait beneath with jars at hand in preparation for the Hair God to excrete its fluid after getting caught in the net." I show a large jar I'm holding in both hands after taking it out of my magic bag to Burkhart-san.

"That's quite the big jar you got there. Up until now, you'd call a share of fluid for ten people during one sighting a fairly decent result."

The amount Doushi was luckily able to collect is in the range of 20 ml - in other words, roughly the share of one person. The jar in my hands is one of those I've used for salt storage in the past. If it's completely filled, it can hold around 20 liters.

"You're way too greedy, Earl-sama."

"I just thought it'd be easier to collect the fluid when using a jar around this big..."

"The Hair God appeared!"

As we're having such a conversation, a report that the Hair God has appeared comes in from a slightly distant place. As I try to deal with it in a hurry, I feel how a gust of wind passes above my head.

"Again too late, huh!?"

Once I look up with that thought, a huge amount of fluid is raining down from above for some reason.

"Earl-sama!"

Even as I try to deal with it in panic, the fluid ends up completely falling into the jar in my hands. All of a sudden it feels quite heavy, but I prevent it from falling to the ground by strengthening my body with magic in a hurry.

"A sudden rainfall?"

"No, that's probably the Hair God's fluid. Today there's been no rain around this area."

I've ended up with a huge amount of Hair God fluid through an unexpected streak of luck.



"But, why this much?"

"I can only describe it as pure coincidence."

Since we've obtained a big amount of the fluid, the search has come to an end. We return to my brother's mansion for the moment, and check the amount of fluid in the jar.

"The instant it entered the jar, I thought I might drop it since it became so heavy."

"The jar is almost completely full."

It probably should be close to 20 liters of Hair God fluid. Since 20 liter equals 20,000 ml, and if we assume 20 ml are needed per person, this amount will cover 1,000 people.

"What a crazy amount!"

Doushi is also dumbfounded by the amount of fluid that fills the jar to the brim.

"However, how could you obtain this much of it?"

"It's just coincidence, no doubt about that."

Going by Burkhart-san's conjecture, the Hair God has accidentally passed through the area where I had deployed the magic net. The Hair God can freely change its shape, but as the meshing of my prototype net was too fine, it couldn't pass through it without discharging its body's moisture...in short, the fluid. Thus you might say that I have squeezed out a lot from it.

"I see. So, is this the real deal?"

"It is..."

"Yahooo——!"

Next to us, Ottmar-san rejoices grandly without minding our stares. When we tried to apply the fluid on Ottmar-san's head as an experiment...err, test, his hair became very lush, and the areas with thin hair disappeared completely. Since hair is even grown at the areas where the hair roots have died away, the effect of the Hair God's fluid is tremendous.

Because we couldn't confirm anything but a growth boost of the beard and head hair in Doushi's case, that part was still unclear.

"That means we weren't lucky."

The place where I obtained the fluid wasn't on my brother's side of the forest. Since he'd have a right to claim a share of 30% otherwise, it might really be unlucky for him.

"Oh well, whatever. We made some money as well."

Although it's not been a gold rush, but a Hair God rush, brother has also earned a good amount of money through the lodging and dining of the adventurers who have gathered here.

"Besides, holding onto something like this would just be a hassle for a petty noble like me."



With this the one week of search came to an end, and we safely returned to Baulburg.

"Welcome back, dear."

Being greeted by Elise gives me the actual feeling of having come home. When I head over to the living room and look at everyone's faces, they seem to be in the middle of discussing something.

"Ina, did something happen?"

"It's nothing that important, but we've been talking about whether we should cut our hair."

"Eh? Why?"

"You don't know? When you're pregnant, the nutrients go to the baby in your belly, spoiling your hair in return. The topic now is whether to let the hair grow out again after the babies are born."

"You don't say?"

Honestly, I hear about this for the first time. I suppose becoming a mother is quite difficult. But, I kinda feel like it'd be a waste for them to cut their hair after it's grown so beautifully long...

"I won't trim it since it's short to begin with, but the others have no choice."

It looks like everyone except for Luise, who has short hair anyway, is about to cut their hair.

"These days my hair has lost its vigor, and since the color and luster has dulled as well, it's inevitable to cut it." Even Katharina, who always fusses about her hair as a noble, sounds troubled about her hair which has been gradually deteriorating. She's reached the conclusion that her only choice is to cut it.

She's right though. I feel like her hair's complexion has become slightly bad...her coiling ringlets lack their usual springiness, too.

I guess women encounter various problems during their pregnancy. Troubles I don't understand as I've never given birth to a child.

"Wendelin, I just have to grow my hair out after the delivery, so don't worry about it."

"Thou are right, I suppose..." Therese seems to have made up her mind to cut her hair as well.

I like short and long hair as long as it suits the girl, but I'd feel sad if everyone ends up with short hair.

"It's a hair style I've been using for a long time now, but it's going to be for a good cause." In the eyes of Lisa, who's going to become a mother at long last, it's not a situation where caring about hair styles plays a role.

"But you see..."

I really like their hair styles as they're now. But, damaged hair needs hair care. Maintaining their hair with just a slightly nice shampoo and hair care will be difficult, huh...? No, wait. Don't have the perfect item for this?

"Tada——ah! The result of our search this time, enter the fluid of the Hair Go——od!!"

I scoop up a small amount of the fluid out of the jar with my hand, and thinly apply it on Elise's hair. As soon as I do, the hair's quality visibly improves on the spot, restoring it to the beautiful, glossy blond hair from before the pregnancy.

"Ooohh!! This is going to work, isn't it!? Then, the next one is..."

""Waiiit!""

Just as I'm about to apply the liquid on Ina's hair next, Erw and Burkhart-san stop me.

"Hmm? Is something wrong?"

"Well, listen, Earl-sama, wasting it like that is wrong, don't you think?"

"It's not. Hasn't Elise's hair become really pretty thanks to this?"

As their husband, I think it's better for my wives to be beautiful. Besides, the Hair God's liquid is my loot. It's my own decision how I'm going to use it.

"Won't the hair of Elise-jou-chan and the others recover after their delivery? That magic potion is the last hope of everyone, whose hair won't ever return again, within the Kingdom, so I'm telling you it'd be better to stop squandering it."

"It's no squandering. It'll prettify my wives' hair."

"Gaa——ah!"

It appears Burkhart-san's and my opinions don't mesh at all.

"I mean, it's something I obtained, albeit by coincidence. Isn't it fine for me to use a bit of it for my own purposes?"

"It'd become a huge scandal if people learned about you using it for something like this."

"It's alright. We just don't need to tell anyone."

The fact that I obtained the Hair God liquid had been leaked to the outside, but it's not like they know how much of it I actually got.

"In the first place, it gives me a lot more joy to prettify my wives than fixing the thin hair of some random dude I don't even know."

"Wend, you sure don't hold back on saying terrible things..." Erw is shocked for some reason.

But, it's a fact that it's much better for my mental state for my wives, whom I see every day, to look great than making some old dudes happy by allowing them to have thick hair growth.

"I'm with you on that, but you're going to turn all the high-classed lords and ladies with thin hair into your enemies by acting like this!"

What if the fact that I used some of the Hair God liquid for Elise and the other was found out? Burkhart-san explains to us that we'd be hated by the nobles who got the short end of the stick because of that.

"Burkhart-san."

"What?"

"Please keep it a secret."

"Damn it, now I'm stuck holding onto some pointless, silly secret."

I resume my work of applying the liquid. Once I smear it into Ina's hair, the crimson, fiery gleam returns to it. Then I restore the beautiful hair of Luise, Wilma, Katharina, Therese, Katia, and Lisa in turns.

As might be expected of a legendary magic potion. Or rather, if I took this back to Earth, I'm pretty sure the rich people would pay me any amount of money for it.

"Amalie-san, want me to apply it on you as well?"

"I'm not pregnant, so it's okay."

"Please tell me if you should ever need it."

"I'm happy about your consideration, but Burkhart-san's face has become ghastly pale at this point."

"Although it's totally okay for me to use at least a bit of it..."

Having restored the health of my wives' hair, I carefully put the jar with the liquid back into my magic bag.



"Hubby, the area over at the front gate is so dazzlingly bright."

"Katia, you really got a nasty tongue, don't you?"

"All female adventurers are like that. Back then Big Sis was also awesome at trash talking others."

"I can't deny that...but Katia, you've got to slowly fix your sharp tongue, too."

"Big Sis, I think that might be an impossible undertaking."



A few days later, many dazzling ladies and sirs gathered in front of my mansion. Their radiance definitely blinds one's eyes...is nothing Katia or I should say, I guess.

Given that Lisa speaks quite politely as long as she doesn't wear her makeup and goth outfit, she admonishes Katia to fix her usual way of speaking. As Katia herself seems to be strangely hung up on speaking like that, she gently refuses Lisa's advice.

"Quite a number has gathered over the last few days..."

"The Hair God liquid isn't cheap. Only those with substantial riches can actually afford it. Naturally that limits it to high-ranking nobles and wealthy merchants, but you mustn't look down on their ability to gather information."

"So they've assembled to not miss a chance in obtaining a magic potion that definitely works, eh?"

"Yes."

It's the body fluid of the Hair God, so it's not precisely a magic potion, but since its effect is tremendous, it's treated as one.

Real magic potions are concocted by alchemists. It's possible to concoct potions even without being a magician, as long as you've got the necessary knowledge, but because some potions also require you to add mana at the end, magicians have it definitely easier.

Given that a set number of magicians works on magic tools and magic potions, it only increases the shortage of magicians on the whole. But then again, the number of people privately working as alchemists remains low, with the majority being covered by alchemist workshops, which hire alchemists who have the necessary knowledge but are no magicians.

Of course, an alchemist guild exists as well. However, because some magic potions are kept completely confidential, going as far as even forbidding taking the recipe out of the workshop, they don't stand out as much as magic tool workshops do.

While we're on the topic, quite a few hair restorers are up for sale on the markets since they're lucrative as merchandise. They're fairly expensive because they're magic potions, but whether they really work remains unclear. Because there exists effective medicine as long as the hair roots haven't died, not all of them are fakes, but I hear people worrying about their hair repeatedly experiencing how those medicines don't do as they hoped for when they bought them.



"I checked the documents afterwards, but it's been 324 years since a share for 24 people of the Hair God fluid was obtained."

Lisa is really good at deciphering ancient texts. In the past they used the same language as nowadays, but if it comes to very old books and documents, us normal people can't read the characters as they're too scrawly or runny.

I'm thankful to Lisa, because she used the time of her pregnancy, which doesn't allow for her to move around much, to decode and translate the book left behind by Master for me, which I've been postponing to do myself because I was busy with other stuff.

"Isn't that more than a hundred years before the ceasefire agreement!?"

Well, it only makes sense for all those people to become desperate and gather in front of my mansion. Their heads are sparkling as they reflect the sunlight.

"That's why I told you to not use such a precious medicine on your wives!"

"Please cope with at least that much of my selfishness. Or wait, is Margrave Breithilde possibly also worried about his hair in secret...?"

"Nope. If people were to hear of your wasteful use of the medicine, my master would get blamed as well, that's why."

"Wasteful use...just to be clear, this is something I obtained..."

Besides, it allowed me to alleviate everyone's grief over their hair by giving them the chance to keep their hair pretty even during their pregnancies. I'm certain that this is something wonderful.

"No doubt, Earl-sama, you hold the rights over the Hair God's liquid, but look at the bloodshot eyes of the folks standing outside. If things go badly, we could have a riot on our hands."

I guess they won't hesitate to kick down their rivals to recover their long-lost, dear hair. I wish they shared a thick friendship like everyone in the Shonen Jump manga I read in the past.

"I feel like it'd be terrible if they heard of this..."

"Since ancient times, people have continued shedding blood over money, power, women, and hair!"

"Doushi, isn't the last item on your list somewhat weird? Also, you haven't fixed your hair style...?"

Today Doushi is visiting, but he's kept his long hair and beard. Since it's not his usual pineapple hair cut and handlebar mustache, even Elise was lost for words at first. Or rather, Burkhart-san and I still aren't used to it.

When he suddenly greeted me like that in the morning, I was totally startled.

"I will keep it like that since it's a pain to keep trimming it until the effect of the liquid fades in a day or two. Even though it might not look like it, I have actually cut down quite a bit of hair today morning."

If people with no hair problems are showered by the Hair God's liquid, their hair keeps growing excessively for seven to ten days. Because the growth settles down afterwards, Doushi says that he'll abstain from his usual haircut for that period. Given that he'd need to shave his head every day, he's probably considering it a hassle right now.

"I've got a question!"

"Yes, Erw-kun, please go ahead."

"How much would you get for selling the Hair God's liquid on the market?"

"""""" ... """"""

Everyone sinks into silence upon Erw's justified question. It's because a price estimation is kinda difficult for a fail-safe hair restorer.

"Umm...it's not noted down in the old documents, Lisa?"

"It's written that the share of one person cost around 10 million cents."

"The heck!?"

Your hair will definitely recover if you apply it. I think it's an amazing medicine, but in the end it's just a hair restorer. Besides, that's around one billion Yen, so I can only describe it as a crazy price.

The ones who bought it must have been high-ranking nobles. No doubt. That money could be used to boost the industry of a territory...but on the other hand, the lord is the public face of the territory. They probably think it's better to have bushy hair, if possible?

"I wonder whether I'd pay such a big amount of money for myself...?"

Well, that's something I won't know until my own hair thins out, I guess...

My current sentiments of 『We're just talking about hair here...』 might be regarded as the arrogance of a person still having hair.

"Wend, what are we going to do about the dazzling people outside?"

Because even fairly high-ranking nobles have gathered without making a prior appointment, the main street in front of my mansion has become congested... They're going to become a nuisance for the construction work, aren't they...?

"Since I managed to get a full jar this time, I think it's no problem to sell the liquid for one million cents per portion."

Even then, it's still a hundred million Yen. That's no amount of money payable by any ordinary person.

"There might be some who will give up and go back home."

Because I'd never have enough time to listen to the appeals of each and every single person out there, we begin to sell the Hair God liquid after refilling it into one-person-portions. I give priority to the nobles who sent in a written request, but none of the requests mentioned a price.

Oh well, I'd say it'll be okay to charge the same from everyone. Somehow, even just the idea of bartering over the price sounds like a major pain in the ass. Also, they're dazzling.

"Earl Baumeister, what a wonderful achievement!"

"One million cents, you say? Cheap! Isn't that super cheap!?"

"Please sell it to me by all means!"

"I'll be able to get my hair back!"

It's frightening that not a single one of the people gathered in front of my mansion has said that it's too expensive. Everyone pays in cash, and applies the liquid on their head right away. As soon as they do, the hair is immediately restored, no matter how bald they've been before. Even after seeing it happening many times, I still must say, it's frighteningly effective.

"Wonderful! It's a real blessing that I could get my hair back before my death!"

There's even an old man, who looks like he's more than eighty years old, in the crowd, but he seems to think that it's better to have hair, even if he were to die tomorrow. Unbecoming of his advanced age, he rejoices loudly as soon as his hair grows back, albeit being white.

"Wend-sama, the dazzling is gone."

"Wilma, sshhh——"

"Okay, sshhh——, it is."

Once I've sold the liquid to all the people in front of my mansion, all of my stock of it is gone. It was something I obtained by coincidence, but my wives' hair has become pretty, and I saved quite a few of the people worried over their hair, so all's fine in the end. It kinda feels like I've stocked up on good deeds here, and I also made a killing with the sales.

"By the way, what are you going to do about your Hair God liquid, Doushi?"

"Considering my family's tradition, I'll be troubled if I become unable to keep up my usual hair style! Therefore, I'm going to set it aside for the unlikely time when I might need it!"

Doushi is keeping a pineapple hair cut in accordance with the Armstrong House's tradition, so it looks like he wants to reserve a portion for himself if he should ever need to recover his hair.

"Earl Baumeister, you haven't set aside at least a bit for yourself?"

"If my hair should ever thin out, I'll think about it then and there."

That's what I told Doushi, but me actually having put aside some is a secret.

Even so, this was a case that made me believe, "It might just be hair, but hair still is hair."

Chapter 5 - Big Brother and Little Brother, Little Brother and Big Brother

"Milord, today I'd like you to meet with a certain noble, if you could spare some time..."

The bellies of my wives have recently grown quite conspicuously. I spend every day being totally hyped hoping that my children might be born soon...and at the same time praying that the deliveries take place without any complications.

While I'm torn by such mood swings, Roderich shows up, informing me that a certain noble is requesting a meeting.

"The successor?"

"The family's head is sickly, resulting in the heir acting as his representative. In reality, you could essentially describe him as the current family head."

I suppose it'd be impolite if I don't personally meet with him, if he's basically the family head. Nobility is pretty much a pain when it comes to issues of status and honor.

"Is he one of our relatives?"

"He's the son and heir of the Viscount Madson House."

"I see..."

Well, even after asking, I've got absolutely no clue who's that supposed to be... My head still tends to heavily incline towards the thinking of a Japanese. Rather, noble names such as Konoe, Mushanokouji, or Imadegawa would probably be easier for me to remember.

Come to think of it, there are samurai in Mizuho, but none of them end their sentences on ~deojaru, or could be described as court nobles with white make-up and blackened teeth as they appear in TV dramas. Since I'd have likely become rude by bursting into laughter, if the samurai over there were like that, it's good that I've been spared from that embarrassment.

"He asked whether he could have around 30 minutes of your time for some light gossiping."

"I don't particularly mind if it's around that long, but why would he visit me for something like that?"

"It's because the territory of Viscount Madson is famous for its masonry..."

If one were to ask what makes masonry so important, it's the finely chiseled stone sculptures installed on top of bridge guardrails, or on roads to serve as distance markers.

A modern person might instinctively ask, 『Are those really necessary? Wouldn't it rather save on costs to do away with those things?』, but the common sense in this world dictates that architectural

structures look bad without them.

The Viscount Madson territory has little agricultural land since it's full of rock mountains, but they're making good profit with the masonry that uses the stones they can easily procure locally. The stone quality over there is very good, and many exceptional artisans use those for their works.

The Baumeister Earldom also possesses an abundance of stones that can be used for stone pavings and buildings. However, we lack the craftsmen to process those stones. Even though we're trying to recruit such craftsmen left and right, there are still limits as to how many we can get. In the end, we've got not much choice but to nurture our own masons by having young, inexperienced crafters apprentice under retired, elderly masons.

In lieu, it means that we have to buy all the masonry works from the Madson territory until our craftsmen are far enough to stand on their own.

"Viscount Madson and his family have their own circumstances to worry about, too."

"Circumstances?"

"Yes, that place is in the middle of a dispute over the succession."

Tentatively, the oldest son, who's going to meet me today, has apparently been appointed as successor by the old Viscount Madson. However, it looks like he has an older brother who was born by a concubine.

"In that case, he'd ultimately be the only candidate for the inheritance, wouldn't he?"

In this world bloodline plays a very important role for the succession of noble houses. Unless there are some very extraordinary circumstances, it's set in stone for the eldest son of the first wife to inherit the peerage and land.

Still, if you look at the Browig Margraviate, it's obvious, when people disagree, it will develop into a dispute.

"For this reason, the heir wants to enjoy a good chat with you, milord, for the sake of thwarting the succession struggle at its root."

"Ah, as in getting some prestige to his name..."

Something like 『In fact, it's a meeting between two family heads, right?』. Or in other words, I'm supposed to give the heir his much needed legality.

"I've understood the circumstances now. Anyway, there must be some benefit in this for us, like getting a discount on masonry products or some such, right?"

"Yes, that goes without saying."

Nothing less of Roderich. It looks like he's negotiated with them in advance, procuring some nice benefits for the Earl Baumeister House. I mean, even I don't have the spare time to meet people for

free.

In the first place, it's unthinkable that Roderich, who's stricter than me in such matters, would make a mistake in the negotiations.

"To be honest, that heir has a reputation for not being the brightest in scholarly abilities."

I've heard that houses with a reasonable standing have relatives and retainers run the territory's administration, treating the family head as a figurehead, if said family head isn't overly smart. This might be a similar case.

"I guess that means the sickly family head wants to give his stupid heir a chance to get some achievements, huh?"

Fully grasping the father's love for his son, Roderich skilfully used it to make some profit out of the situation.

Man, I gotta say, it's nice and easy to have Roderich take care of such things. Stupid figureheads rock.

"The audience is scheduled to last for two hours."

"Got it."

I swiftly proceeded with my preparation for the upcoming meeting, but at this point, I ran into a huge problem.



"Dear, it's impossible for Ina-san, Luise-san, Katharina-san and me to be present during the audience."

"Eh? Why?"

"Because our bellies are too big."

It's an audience for the sake of giving the other party some prestige, but it's somewhat of a custom to appeal that both sides share a close relationship by having the wives attend on such occasions. In reality, we don't know what kind of character the heir of the Viscount Madson House might have, though.

However, Elise refuses to attend the meeting. It's the same for Ina, Luise, and Katharina.

"Wend, it's normal for a husband to not have his wives appear publicly once their bellies become too big."

In this regard, the common sense of this world rather than the common sense among nobility comes

into play. The assessment that it's bad for pregnant women to appear in public doesn't make much sense to me, though.

And although Ina informs me of it, she doesn't seem to understand the reason behind it either.

Maybe it originates from an old-fashioned folklore that pregnancy is impure, or the idea that it's very likely for a miscarriage to occur if a pregnant woman strains herself too much. Either way, Elise and the other three won't be able to sit in as their bellies stand out too much now since they've become pregnant first.

"What about you, Wilma?"

Wilma's belly is still small. She should be able to attend without any problem.

"Hm——m, difficult."

"Why?"

"I actually know the heir of the Viscount Madson House. It will definitely turn into a fight if we meet."

"A fight?"

Did something happen between them in the past?

"During my childhood, I had some arguments with him when he stayed at their mansion in the capital by chance."

Wilma was apparently ridiculed by him to be taciturn, unsociable, and gross during her childhood. After all, you can say that it's quite normal for stupid boys to tease girls, or he might simply be a guy with a bad character.

Hm——m, it's kinda difficult to judge which applies here.

"Since it's a story from my childhood, I won't say that I have any hard feelings left, but it might become an issue if I meet him again."

"Makes sense..."

Or rather, I'm going to have an audience with such a rude guy? While wondering whether that doesn't qualify as a bit of a problem, I gently stroke Wilma's head.

"I feel a touch of anxiety, but...maybe that guy has improved now that he's an adult..."

"He's evaluated to be an idiot because he hasn't."

"Figures..."

Wilma's way of talking is quite sharp, but she's not wrong about what she's saying. Now I've

become slightly worried.

"In that case, the ones available would be..."

"It would be better for me to not meet with such an unpleasant fellow."

Of course it'd be impossible for Therese...

"Hubby, assuming that guy is really rude, it'll definitely be a bad idea for me to meet with him as I'd likely lash back at him right away."

Katia, no matter how much you don't want to meet with him, I think it's sneaky to use the reason that you'd immediately snap.

"That means, I'm left?"

"I think you'd be the safest choice here?"

Lisa is experienced as the oldest among us, and as long as she doesn't wear that outfit and make-up, the probability of her going on a rampage is close to zero. She might be able to deal with him skilfully as the wife of a noble.

"Rather, why do we have to worry so much over this anyway?"

"Ugh...I'm terribly sorry for causing you distress."

Even Roderich has probably agreed to the meeting with me only because he considered the possibility of the masonry trade being stopped if we dealt badly with the other party, but it looks like he's gradually becoming uneasy himself.

"If Lisa-san attends, it might alleviate some tension if I'm next to her as a maid?"

Amalie-san, I can fully understand the idea behind your words. It might be safer for many women to be present.

"You're probably right. I'll leave it to you then."

"But...somehow I have a bad feeling about all this."

I felt so as well, and in the end those worries turned into reality.



"It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Alban, the one designated to become the next Viscount Madson."

"(Designated? Ah, by his father, eh...?)"

As soon as the appointed time for the audience arrives, I receive the eldest son of the Madson House. He looks like he's around twenty. His appearance clearly gives me the impression of him being a spoiled rich boy, but so far nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Following social etiquette, he's only greeted me normally.

"Please, take a seat over there."

"Thank you very much."

After exchanging greetings, both of us sat down. Then I introduce my wife Lisa, and she sits down next to me. On the other hand, Alban hasn't brought a wife along.

As it looks like he'll be holding the official ceremony to succeed the family headship in a month with his father's sickness being rather bad, he's going to hold the marriage ceremony with his fiancée then. Doing the marriage and inheritance ceremonies at the same time seems to be for the sake of appealing to the fief's population and retainers.

"It might be humble, but please have some of our tea." Amalie-san says modestly, but since it's actually the new mate tea we procured from Helmut, it's a high-class tea.

I hear the guarding of the forest mate trees is becoming stricter as the manpower in the capital's Baumeister family grows, and with the number of trees increasing, the harvest of mate tea leaves has experienced a boost as well. We've procured some of it to offer it to important guests.

"It's a great mate tea. Is it a forest mate?"

Once Amalie-san pours tea in everyone's cup, wearing her maid uniform while at the same time acting as Lisa's helper, Alban notices that it's forest mate tea from just the aroma. He might own the ability to see through high-quality goods since he comes from a good family.

"By the way, who might be the person over there?"

"Ah, he's an attendant. Please don't pay any attention to him." Alban has brought a single youth as attendant.

At first I thought that he might simply be a butler or servant, but the face of this young man somewhat resembles that of Alban. Maybe he's the rumored elder half-brother.

"(What a nasty character!)"

Even though he probably could have had any servant accompany him, deliberately nominating his half-brother might aim at having him give up on the family head succession by clearly showing off the meeting with me.

But, wait a sec. If that's the case, is his half-brother actually someone overflowing with ambition?

I don't quite get the detailed circumstances, but in any case, the audience has started, just as scheduled.

"I'm deeply thankful to you for always providing your masonry products to my Baumeister Earldom."

"My territory is also prospering from the sales to your earldom. It is us who should be thankful here."

Well, yeah, it makes sense. Since we're steadily building roads and bridges, a supply of masonry products is a constant necessity.

"I have also heard that your wives are soon going to give birth to children."

"Yes, it makes me somewhat worried whether the children will be born safely."

"I'm soon going to marry my fiancée as well. I might feel the same as you, Earl Baumeister-dono, once a child is on its way."

"(Huh?)"

Almost I unintentionally gasped audibly. Alban is supposed to be an idiot, but now that I'm talking with him, he's quite normal, isn't he? Why are those rumors about him going around?

"Seeing how the Earl Baumeister House is prospering and rising after being established by you in person, I think it would be great for you to have many children, Earl Baumeister-dono."

"Well, I'm doing my best."

"Having said that, when it comes to increasing the number of wives, I guess you also have to pay attention to the balance with Margrave Breithilde, your patron."

"Certainly..."

I've heard that he's stupid, but this young man seems to have properly investigated our background. I don't know whether he's done it himself, but it's a fact that he's properly informed about us.

"In such a case, the only option would be unofficial mistresses, huh? It'd be fine to simply have them give birth to children without increasing the count of official wives and lovers."

"Haah..."

Yeah, okay, that's something I hear often recently. Roderich blocks off all such talks, but such proposals seem to flow in without any end in sight.

Still, that's not a topic you'd actively broach while still being unmarried yourself, is it? Moreover, according to Roderich, it'd be a bad move for me to have such mistresses right now.

『Since it'd be noble daughters anyway, even if you had mistresses, they'd boldly demand under-the-table payoffs since they'd be related to you, if they gave birth to children. In such cases, it'd be better to have them officially acknowledged from the very start. Those saying that it's fine to keep it

unofficial are usually scammers』

In other words, stories that sound too good to be true have their own snares. Or rather, for me that's not a good story at all.

My children might become magicians, no, according to Arnest, they'll definitely become magicians. If it's exposed that the children of my mistresses are magicians, things will become a major pain in the ass.

"No, I believe the current number of wives I have is plenty."

All of them are still young, and if each of them gives birth to around three children, we will have plenty. Besides, this isn't a 『TV documentary about big families of the Heisei era』. If I had this many children, I'd have trouble remembering their names and faces.

"Please don't say that. Actually I know of two girls I'd like to recommend to you."

Ah, now I understand why this guy is regarded as an idiot. He's not one of those obvious idiots, but rather one who's hard-working but completely incompetent at what he does.

Even though he'd achieve his goal if he simply chatted cordially with me during the meeting, he ends up saying unnecessary things because he's pointlessly greedy.

Because such people aren't identifiable as idiots at a glance, it's troublesome to deal with them.

"No, talk about matters like these..."

"Please wait a minute. They are young women with healthy bodies who won't require any after-care. Their family has a rather low social ranking, so you'll be free to treat them as maids." Alban rattled on while beaming with pride over his own plan having worked out wonderfully, but I haven't missed how his half-brother's expression has experienced a big change.

Alban, that retard, hasn't noticed it, but his half-brother is looking at him as if he's trying to kill him with his eyes.

"..."

Immediately after realizing that I'm looking at him, he goes back to normal, but it's likely that those two girls are Alban's half-sisters and this guy's little sisters. But okay, I get it, he's planning to gain the benefit of being related to me if any children are born out of that connection while at the same time pushing his unwanted half-sisters on me, eh?

However, for him to go with such a sloppy plan that even I'd notice it right away... Him being so deeply convinced of the success of his plan can probably be counted as proof of him being a retarded noble brat just like Wilma said.

"Are they possibly your little sisters, Alban-dono? It'd be rude of me to take such esteemed ladies as mistresses."

Alban is startled, obviously wondering why I know this, but just looking at his face tells one everything they need to know.

Although it was just for an instant, haven't you turned a scornful look full of contempt at your half-brother when you talked about that little mistress idea of yours? Or rather, can you not get me involved in your house's succession dispute?

"Certainly, they're my little sisters, but their mother is of low birth. Still, I think they'll be able to give you plenty of children since they're young. Please make use of them instead of the two over there."

"Instead?"

"I doubt that middle-aged women would be capable of giving birth to your children, Earl Baumeister-dono."

This moron sure is struggling hard at getting back on his feet after blundering once. It'd have been fine if he had put a close to it when his first scenario failed, but instead he keeps going with his own little schemes, while not having any substantial ability at scheming, and thus keeps failing.

Saying that it'd be fine to exchange Lisa, who's soon going to become 30 years old, and Amalie-san, whom I'm treating just like a wife, with younger women because of their age - why would anyone say something so stupid in front of the parties concerned?

Lisa's rank in the hierarchy is low, but she's present at this meeting as my wife. Amalie-san isn't officially my wife, but I've basically approved of her as one of my wives. So why would this idiot insult both of them?

Behind him, his half-brother looks completely flabbergasted. It looks like at least he has a good grasp on our circumstances.

Oh, so Alban fully understands it as well, doesn't he?

"Alban-dono, what's the intent behind your visit today?"

"Of course, I'm here to deepen the relationship between the two of us."

Is he saying that for real? He must be...

It appears that he only looked normal in the beginning, with that front immediately crumbling apart afterwards.

"To me it doesn't look like that at all...but do you have an idea why I would be thinking so?"

"Earl Baumeister-dono, aren't we similar in many respects?"

Hey, dude, that's not even an answer to my question. Anyway, I'm not going to say that I'm particularly capable, but I'm still very convinced of being a better human than you.

"Similar?"

"Indeed. You have eliminated your elder brother, who stood in the way, to become Earl Baumeister. I'm also going to become Viscount Madson instead of Dennis, the older half-brother behind me. Although I also have my position as younger brother to care about, this is yet another duty of one inheriting a noble bloodline. There are some people in our territory endorsing Dennis, but I won't yield to their pressure!"

Somehow, it has turned into an election speech. Besides, does he believe that I became Earl Baumeister by killing my big brother?

Well, he's not wrong, if you only look at the results, and it's not like I'll ever manage to rid myself of the stigma of being the murderer of my brother. But, I'd like to be excused from being considered the same as him.

Rage is gradually building up within me, but suddenly both my shoulders are tapped lightly. Lisa and Amalie-san have signaled me to calm down.

At this rate, I'd have considered blowing this retard away with my magic, but as expected, I suppose that'd be a bad move.

"Hyaaa!" Alban, who has finished his declaration, or rather, election speech, tries to drink his mate tea, which has cooled down, to sate his thirst. However, he suddenly let go of his cup while screaming strangely.

"(Lisa, that's your work, isn't it?)"

As appropriate for Lisa the Blizzard, she has secretly cooled down the tea to a temperature right before freezing solid. In other words, he was surprised by the staggering coldness of the tea.

As a veteran, Lisa is unchallenged in this kind of fine magic control. She's kept the effect of her spell limited to only the tea inside the cup while doing it so inconspicuously that I haven't even sensed her using magic.

"Dear visitor, are you alright? I shall pour a new mate tea for you right away."

Amalie-san quickly cleans away the fallen cup and patches of tea, and pours mate tea into a new cup.

"Maid! Is this mate tea warm?"

"Yes, it was brewed moments ago."

"Very well!"

Having been startled by the tea which was almost frozen, Alban immediately takes a sip of the new tea to warm his mouth.

"Hot!"

However, this time piping-hot mate tea has entered his chilled mouth. Naturally he ends up perceiving it as being hotter than usual, resulting in Alban letting the second cup fall as well.

"It's too hot!"

"Dear visitor, I told you that it's freshly brewed." Amalie-san calmly deals with Alban's protest, but since some time has already passed, the tea inside the pot should have already cooled down to an acceptable temperature.

Of course it was Lisa who raised its temperature. Amalie-san has noticed Lisa's petty mischief, and thus fills tea into a cup anew.

"Aren't you far too rude towards me who's going to become Viscount Madson very soon?"

"I'm terribly sorry, but I have tried to tell you that it might be better to wait for it to cool down since it's hot as it was brewed a little while ago." Amalie-san immediately apologizes to Alban.

Still, even if he might be a noble, it's misplaced for him to scold a maid over tea being hot. In the first place, it's not like she served him tea that was still boiling. This is something he ought to make sure of himself.

"I know you! You have apparently become Earl Baumeister-dono's mistress as an apology for your stupid husband having tried to kill Earl Baumeister-dono and gone under after failing at it! Humph! That's just how big brothers work! Anyway! Old hags are not needed at Earl Baumeister-dono's side!"

His words are gradually starting to become illogical bullshit. The noble, spoiled brat has probably lost it since he's run out of patience after all his plans didn't work out as intended.

"Earl Baumeister-dono, let me provide you with new mistresses instead of these two!"

Despite having raged just seconds ago, he now continues his previous mistress topic while smiling at me. Dennis is looking up to the ceiling behind him, as if having given up all hope. He might think that Alban is a lost case at this point.

But yeah, if I had such a little brother, I'd also be troubled how to handle him. Dennis is probably wondering whether he should stop Alban, but if he did that, he'd just add oil to the fire. Alban doesn't seem like a man who knows forgiveness.

"Hmmm, you don't understand it unless you're told clearly?"

"Clearly, you say? In other words, you're going to accept my younger sisters?"

Just how has he managed to reach such a conclusion? I'm really curious where his groundless confidence is coming from.

"As if! Now listen, you idiot, your constant nitpicking of my wives is pissing me off! We're done here. I'm cutting all connections with you. Get lost, and never come back here!"

"Wh-!? You sure you can talk like this to me? We won't sell you any of the masonry used for construction anymore!"

"Shut your trap! Even without such decorations, no bridge will collapse, and roads will do their job normally as well! Never show your ugly mug here ever again, you birdbrain brat!"

"You bastard! I'll make sure that you'll regret this!"

It should have been no more than a little meeting with the successor of a noble house, but it ended in a full-blown fight between me and the other party. It might have been stupid of me to have snapped so quickly, but if you live a long life, such things happen as well. Besides, the other side is at fault here.



"Wh-!? ...A complete severing of all connections...?"

"Roderich, thanks for having introduced me to such a guy, who was funny in a very particular way."

"..."

Once I inform everyone of the events that took place, Roderich is the first to react, flabbergasted. Rather than being troubled with me, he seems unable to even find any proper words to describe the stupidity of Alban which has obviously exceeded his assumptions by far.

"For that reason, they're not going to sell us masonry anymore."

"That's going to become a problem."

"Really?"

It's what I think, but no one should be troubled if no masonry decorates the roadside or the guardrails of bridges. Though it'd be a different story altogether if there was some magical effect that'd cause bridges to collapse without those decorations. Of course such masonry doesn't exist in this world. Albeit, it might have existed in a distant past.

"I think so as well, but..."

While he does, Roderich seems to have difficulty escaping the common sense of this world. He's tied down by the custom that it'd be weird for a high-ranking noble house like ours to not add beautiful masonry to the roads and bridges in our territory.

"Either way, he's someone saying that I should replace Lisa and Amalie-san with his own little sisters as mistresses without even batting an eyelid. I don't want to have anything to do with such a retard ever again."

Even though I'm having a fair share of troubles with noble obligations here, I refuse to deal with a new King of Idiots.

"In the first place, there's absolutely no way that I'd go along with such a request..."

If I were to accept such conditions, one noble after the other would come out of the woodwork, suggesting similar ideas. Roderich becomes shocked by the extent of Alban's stupidity all over again.

"What shall we do about the masonry issue?"

"We can't procure it elsewhere?"

Certainly they produce beautiful masonry, but it's not like the Viscount Madson territory has a monopoly on it. Seeing how their side told us that they wouldn't sell to us anymore, we've got no choice but to get it from somewhere else.

"Sure, other places produce masonry too, but they won't be able to sell us such huge quantities."

After all, there's always something built within the kingdom. The maintenance of the existing roads and bridges also plays into this. Masonry weathers or breaks after several decades or centuries.

"Right now, the Kingdom's economy is thriving under the influence of the Baumeister Earldom's development. Many nobles are using this opportunity to build new roads and bridges in their territories."

Even the other masonry-producing territories can't increase their output so easily. A sudden increase would be difficult for them to pull off.

"Let's bypass this issue by stocking up small amounts, and postpone the lacking parts for later."

Yep, that's a very Japanese, good idea. If I were to meaninglessly announce the abolition of masonry, it'd clearly label me as a villain who stole the work from our masonry crafters.

Let's go with the plan of authorizing finished roads and bridges for the time being while adding the masonry sometime later.

"Let me just tell you in advance, I won't compromise with the Viscount Madson House, no matter what happens."

Not only did that asshole call Lisa and Amalie-san old hags, but he even stuck his nose into my inglorious past. But then again, I have to admit, Alban has quite the character to have the gall to call himself similar to me.

"Even if we were to compromise on this issue, the idea of having to get along with this guy over the next decades sickens me. He's really the very definition of a dumb, noble brat."

I don't really want to say this since I'm a noble myself as well, but he's just too terrible in various ways. I've no interest in ever meeting him again.

"You're right...he's the kind of man who would keep asking for more if we were to compromise on this..."

If we allow him to mistakenly think that he's above us, he'll likely treat us condescendingly for the next few decades. Looking at the long term, cutting any ties with the Viscount Madson House will be to our advantage.

"I think it's just as you say, milord. We will handle it by shifting to procuring the masonry from another fief."

Roderich doesn't try to influence me into restoring the relationship with the Madson House. He probably believes that it was his blunder since he hadn't realized the extent of Alban's stupidity, albeit he should have known from the rumors.

"No choice. Right, Elise?"

"Yes."

I hardly ever encounter people who are so awful. It stands out because he's a 『noble's』 stupid son, but the rate of stupid children is unrelated to social standing. If you go by probability, there should actually be more stupid commoner sons since noble sons have a chance to improve through education. However, precisely because he's a noble, it stands out all the more.

"Nonetheless, it'd be better if you explained your reasons, just in case."

"Really?"

"Yes."



Thus I leaped to the capital on the following day with 『Teleport』. Today Amalie-san is with me, in exchange for Lisa who can't use 『Teleport』, now that she's pregnant.

"It's been quite a while since I last visited the capital."

Amalie-san isn't wearing her maid clothes this time because she's going to accompany me to a meeting with Minister for Economic Affairs Göpel in the royal palace. He's a new minister who has just recently taken over the post from his predecessor. A plump man in his forties, giving me the vibes of a shopping district chairman.

"So, just as I've told you, that's the current situation."

"Him again...? That youngster..."

Once I explain the circumstances to the minister, he clicks his tongue, starting to grumble about

Alban.

"Again...you say?"

"Yes, indeed. I have no idea how highly that youngster estimates himself, but he has caused similar problems on various occasions."

Claiming to be offended by the other party, he'd leave the meetings after angrily exclaiming, 『We won't sell any masonry products to your territory』. Several such cases had been reported to the minister.

"The craftsmanship of the masonry goods in the Viscount Madson territory is of an overwhelmingly high quality. Obviously, since they have to make a living from processing the great amount of stones in their territory, seeing how little farming land the territory has..."

In the past, the Viscount Madson territory was so poor that they'd be frequently plagued by starvation as soon as a drought hit their lands. It was only when they deliberately reared and protected masonry artisans that the Viscount family started to become rich.

Minister Göpel explains that none of this counts as Alban's achievement.

"That's why it'd be the best for Dennis to succeed. The other moron is beyond any help!"

Dennis is the half-brother who stood behind Alban back then, right? I guess, the elder brother has the better evaluation of the two.

"It sure sounds like you're well-informed about their circumstances."

"I'm an authority in the economic faction after all. Anyway, it's going to be a problem for the Viscount Madson territory."

No matter how skilled their artisans might be, at this rate no customers are going to buy their merchandise with such a new Viscount Madson. And if the masonry business dies out, the Madson territory will revert to being the same poor territory it was before.

"The surrounding territories won't be able to ignore this issue either, once refugees flood their lands to escape famines in the Madson territory. In the first place, masonry goods aren't essential for one's daily life, unlike food!"

Why are masonry decorations used as signs at roadsides, or as balustrades of bridges? It's because the Kingdom and its high-ranking nobles see it as part of the economy. If they flag masonry goods as unnecessary and stop buying them, demand would decline, resulting in the money flow ceasing.

Hence, even if the masonry products might only count as extra expenses for the Kingdom and the nobles, they still use them, enabling masonry artisans to make a living with it. It's nothing you could simply cut down just because it's pointless.

However, if they'd need to deal with unprofessional business partners, it'd be only reasonable for the nobles to stop doing business with the masonry crafters.

"The Baumeister Earldom's development is sponsored by the Kingdom. Because you've been prioritizing speed to some extent, it's logical for you to believe that it'll be fine to install masonry products when you manage to obtain them. I mean, it's not like a bridge can't be used just because it has no masonry added to it. Still, if that stupid blockhead keeps this up, Madson's masonry artisans are going to be out of work soon!"

Indeed, I don't need to force myself to buy the masonry products from the Madson territory because I can patiently wait for other territories to provide me with what I need. For the Baumeister Earldom which is currently going through a phase of a large-scale development, it won't pose much of an issue to have many bridges and roads without any masonry. After all, it doesn't really matter whether masonry is present or not.

"Because you've promised us that you'll definitely add masonry products as soon as you can get the necessary supply, you won't hear any complaints from me, Earl Baumeister-dono. Rather than that, the problem here is the Madson territory."

"Do they have a patron?"

"It'd be so easy if they did... A patron could apply enough pressure to make Dennis succeed. Well, we've got no choice but to come up with another way..."

With this, the short meeting comes to an end, and Minister Göpel leaves, deep in thought. He's probably thinking about some kind of measure against Alban.

"Let's go, Amalie-san."

"Gladly."

Next up is my promise to meet with Erich at his mansion, but there's still some time until he comes back home after having finished work. Accordingly, Amalie-san and I use this opportunity to enter a coffee shop with just the two of us for the first time in a long while.

I've made sure to not get exposed as Earl Baumeister by changing into clothes generally used by commoners.

"A mate tea, and today's recommended cake set."

"I will take the same."

We immediately call a waitress over and make our orders.

"I wonder what we look like to those around us?"

No idea. It's not like there were no lovers and married couples with this much of an age gap back in Japan. If it's this world...well, I suppose calling us sister and her younger brother would be the proper approach.

"A sister and her little brother? Or, if I were the wife of a high-ranking noble, you'd be my young

lover?"

I hear that a certain number of noble wives, who finished their duty of rearing children, surround themselves with younger men. Usually that's the kind of relationship when you occasionally spot an elderly, noble lady being accompanied by a young, handsome man. It might be somewhat similar to the woman having fallen for a host.

Because many of those ladies' husbands rather keep their young wives or lovers company, their husbands often approve of their wives' infidelity as long as they don't give birth to any children. I don't have any such wives around me, though.

Especially in Elise's case, she'd be harshly criticized if she ever did something like that because of her family's strong ties to the church.

"Amalie-san, our ages are not that far apart, okay?"

"I suppose, you're right...then it's going to be a sister with her little brother, after all."

Figures. Come to think of it, since I've talked a lot more with Amalie-san than with Kurt, calling her a big sister doesn't sound that wrong to me.

"Wend-kun, it's nothing you need to worry about." Amalie-san gently admonishes me.

"I'm not really worried..."

"Then it's fine. In the end, the opinion of others doesn't matter anyway."

"Yeah..."

Amalie-san seems to be worried that I might pay undue attention to Alban's insults. But am I really doing that?

The retard tried to get along with me by saying that we're similar, but I can't agree with that since we differ in too many things. Going by the outcome, I've killed my older brother. Is Alban also about to kill his half-brother? But, the premise is completely different here.

It's not like I'm worrying about it so much that it'd make me feel depressed, but it still got stuck in a corner of my mind after being told all that.

I think that's pretty much describing how I feel about it.

"It just made me think about various things, but brooding won't resolve anything. It's all a matter of the past now, too."

"Indeed."

It's just as Amalie-san says. Thanks to Alban's insults, I've also brooded over various matters from the past, but it's not like thinking about is going to change anything, right? As it's already done and over with, rewriting the outcome isn't possible anymore.

"That's why I said, you don't need to worry about it."

"Okay."

I feel like her saying this took a weight off my heart. Moreover, it gradually woke in me the urge to get my revenge on that retard. That asshole has called Amalie-san an old woman.

"Ah, however..."

"Mmh?"

"I feel that I did something bad to you, Karl and Oskar..."

It's what I somehow feel, but once I actually voice it out, I cannot help but believe that I've said something terrible.

"You did?"

"Going by the outcome, I've destroyed your family with my actions."

Amalie-san living separated from her children right now is because of me.

"Oh, so that's your take on this...but, you don't need to mind it."

"Why?"

"I don't know what my two boys might be feeling deep down. Even though they seem to idolize you. But, as an awful woman, I like my life as it is right now."

"Really...?"

"The people around me might consider me to be a terrible woman, but I like my current life, so you don't need to worry about me."

"Okay, I understand."

I feel like her words give me some more peace of mind.

"Amalie-san, should we move on then?"

"Sure, let's do that."



We leave the coffee shop, and head over to a store. Actually, I've been asked by Elise and the others to get something for them.

"Underwear for pregnant women...I wouldn't be able to buy that out of embarrassment...if you weren't with me..."

Although no one besides me can actually do this, I wouldn't really want to enter an underwear shop by myself... Just Amalie-san being with me is already a big help.

"No need to be embarrassed about it, Earl Baumeister-dono."

"Wha-!?"

Once we enter a high-class underwear shop which is famous even in the capital, we run into Lukas Götz Beckenbauer, the director of the sorcery guild's research division. He's a genuine pervert who summoned Ina and Luise's underwear through a magic circle...well, to be precise, it's been me who summoned them with my magic, I guess...

"Come to think of it, you mentioned last time that your home ran an underwear shop, didn't you?"

It might be the reason why he's so strangely well-informed about underwear.

"Indeed. My older brother had inherited this store."

"Okay, so why are you here today?"

"I'm helping out."

He used past tense back there because his big brother suddenly passed away a few days ago. Moreover, he left no children behind, resulting in Mr. Beckenbauer's second son taking the shop over as inheritor.

"A new owner quickly taking over is fine and all, but my son is still a youngster, and various problems have cropped up. Thus my wife and I help out like this on our off-days."

"Is that so...?"

This guy's knowledge about underwear is truly deep, but he's still somewhat a pervert, so yeah...

"It's the underwear for pregnant women your wives had ordered, right? They're ready for you to pick up."

Or rather, this guy is even fully aware that it's underwear ordered by my wives.

"I merely remembered it by chance because the order was so big." After explaining himself, Mr. Beckenbauer spreads out one piece of underwear after the other in front of me so that I can check their quality.

Well, as might be expected of him, his handling of the underwear is skillful, but that still doesn't change me regarding him as nothing more than a perverted geezer. It's clear proof that the first impression plays a big role among humans.

"That's all. Also, are you possibly going to buy underwear for the lady over there as well?"

"Yes."

He might be a pervert, but he's not bad as a businessman. Noticing that I might feel bad about leaving only Amalie-san out of the loop after having bought underwear for all my other wives, he uses that opportunity to immediately encourage me to buy her some underwear as well.

"Eh...? I don't really need any."

"Just regard it as thanks for today, okay?"

Given that I'll also have a benefit from it as the one who's going to see her underwear later, it's no loss for anyone.

I ask Mr. Beckenbauer to recommend some underwear to her.

"Since she will need to try them on, I'll leave this part to my wife. Sweetheart!"

"On my way. Oh, welcome Earl Baumeister-sama. Thank you for always relying on our shop."

Given that it's not like I can watch Amalie-san changing her underwear either, I leave the rest to Mrs. Beckenbauer. They have a dressing room, which Mrs. Beckenbauer uses to have Amalie-san try on various pieces of underwear.

"Isn't this a bit too bold?"

"Around this much exposure will please your husband."

"It's rather skimpy though..."

"Madam, this type of underwear is currently in fashion in the capital. Also, this year's popular color is black."

"Black? But I like white..."

"If you always wear the same color, your husband will get bored of it."

Even just listening to them talk, Amalie-san enjoys herself...not. It sounds like Mrs. Beckenbauer is recommending her fairly bold underwear.

"Earl Baumeister-sama, we've finished choosing."

"Very well, please bring me the bill."

"Certainly. Thank you for your continued patronage."

Deciding to leave the fun of finding out what underwear Amalie-san has chosen for later, I pay the

bill.

"Earl Baumeister-sama, you're always welcome to come back here when you get a lot more wives."

Mrs. Beckenbauer's remark makes me flabbergasted. I mean, I'd rather not get any more wives.

"Earl Baumeister-dono, thank you for the purchase."

"No problem, but anyway, how are things proceeding with your magic circle?" I ask Mr. Beckenbauer about the research of the magic circle that used my mana to summon all kinds of things.

Dude, isn't that actually your real job?

"Improvements of magic circles like that one only proceed if you pile up an astronomical amount of trials and errors. So far I haven't made much progress at all. The way ahead is still long."

Despite his research not progressing, Mr. Beckenbauer doesn't look like he minds it. I feel like this guy actually has a fairly decent character, seeing how he helps out in the shop under these circumstances.

"Leaving that aside, Madam, the underwear you bought today has the feature to adjust to the sagging of your breasts and butt as you get older. Please make use of it by any means..."

"They aren't sagging that much yet!"

"Dear, why must you always say one comment too much!"

Once again, Mr. Beckenbauer went too far by blurting out something unnecessary, earning himself a double slap by Amalie-san and his wife. Yep, it's good that this guy hasn't inherited the underwear shop.



It's just the time when Erich would finish work as we step out of the underwear shop. After heading to his mansion, he greets us at the front door.

"Wend, it's great for you to have come. Long time no see, Amalie-san."

"You have grown up into a handsome man, Erich-sama."

"Really? Well, it's nothing I could actually tell myself."

Since Amalie-san is still a family member of the Baumeister House, Erich also treats her as sister-in-law. Given that he's a cheat when it comes to handling women, he's happily chatting away with Amalie-san, even though it's been a good while since their last encounter. Yep, Erich is genuine, natural normie.

The two continue their friendly chatter.

"Amalie-san, I hear another idiot has shown up..."

"Yes."

Of course Erich is talking about Alban here.

"Erich, why are dumb nobles drawn to me?"

"Wend, do you really want to know?"

"No, forget it. I'm just grumbling."

Why are idiots always swarming to me like ants to sugar, is just what I always think after being forced to deal with one of them.

"Grumbling, huh...? Let me just tell you for caution's sake: the ratio of stupid nobles approaching either of us is the same."

"What do you mean by ratio?"

"Look, right now the number of visitors you have to deal with is a hundred times more than what I have to handle. Let's say one in every ten is an idiot, then I'll be visited by one, and you by a hundred. But the ratio remains the same, right?"

I think Roderich is warding off the majority, but every once in a while one slips through anyway.

"The second son of the Viscount Madson House is famous for being an idiot. However, the eldest son had a good reputation."

Okay, it looks like Dennis is a decent person after all.

"But, is his family lineage inferior? At least that's what Alban said."

"It's not really all that inferior."

Since Erich has provided dinner for us, we talk while eating.

"Viscount Madson's wife has married into the family from the Baron Hohrad House."

However, the legal wife didn't manage to get pregnant up to an age close to thirty years. As it was natural for this world, the Madson family reacted by welcoming a concubine.

"She's the eighth daughter of a poor noble living in the capital. As his concubine, she gave birth to Dennis-dono and his two younger sisters."

"I can totally relate with the part of her being the eighth daughter..."

I'm an eighth son after all.

In such cases, a noble family would adopt the man born by the concubine as heir. However, right after the concubine gave birth to Dennis, the wife suddenly got pregnant with a child which she hadn't managed so far.

"Uwah! That sure sounds troublesome."

Of course, the wife wanted the child, which she delivered while damaging her belly, to inherit the house. Ever since then the Madson House was enveloped in an internal dispute over the inheritance. The retainers and residents divided into two factions, supporting either Alban or Dennis.

"Isn't it kinda weird to treat the daughter of a Knight as a lowborn, even if she's the eighth daughter?"

"It is. Moreover, Alban has nothing going for him besides his family lineage."

This is how the two brothers were born with one year between them, but while the elder one is excellent at anything, the younger one sucks at everything, just as one could guess from his previous behavior. Support for Dennis to be the suitable successor has been growing steadily, but the official wife and some retainers are opposing it, and with the family head ill, the whole situation has turned into a disaster.

"So it's a family strife as you can find them anywhere..."

"Alban has been calling Dennis lowborn for a while now, for the sake of getting the upper hand. Though, you could also say that he has no other card he could play."

Makes sense, seeing how he completely loses out to Dennis when it comes to ability. Not having any advantages besides being the official wife's child must be quite painful.

"I see. That does sound terrible."

"So you're going to leave them to their own devices, Wend?"

"Well, I was told that they won't sell us any masonry products."

"Oh okay. It'd be quite possible for the other side to look down on you, if you were the one to compromise. It'd be better to stay clear then."

The talk about the Madson House comes to an end with that last comment of Erich. Afterwards we happily chit-chat while finishing dinner, and then Amalie-san and I return to my mansion in Baulburg. 『Teleport』 is really handy for times like these.

Once I get back home, I pass the requested underwear to Elise and my other wives, and after properly checking out the underwear I bought for Amalie-san...though it didn't end at only looking...I go to sleep.



"Wend-kun, you have a visitor."

On the next day, Amalie-san - now back to wearing her maid attire - announces a guest.

"Amalie-san, there's no need for you to wear your maid uniform today, is there?"

"Somehow, I have started to like wearing it."

"Okay, if that's what you want."

The maid uniform on Amalie-san is one of the modern-styled uniforms I had commissioned as a prototype. Only the skirt has been lengthened for its adoption by the Earl Baumeister House, but the design is far cuter than that of the traditional maid uniforms.

"Leaving that aside, who's the guest?"

"It's the eldest son of the Viscount Madson House from before."

It looks like Alban returned to his own territory after getting all angry, but the eldest son has apparently stayed behind. But, what kind of business does he have with me?

"I have some time, so I guess I'll listen to what he has to say for a bit."

There's also the matter with the masonry supply. I think I should at least hear him out.



"Please call me Dennis."

"Earl Baumeister. I don't have much time, so keep it short."

I intend to at least listen to him, but since I've got other obligations as well, I can't spend too much time on him. Besides, since I'll be made light of if I don't come across cocksure, I urge him to hurry up with his business.

"I'd like you to buy the masonry products of our Viscount Madson territory again, Earl Baumeister-sama."

"Are you an idiot?"

I become worried whether this guy, who's been considered to be excellent, has actually grasped the real issue behind the current problem. I mean, we can buy their products, but it was their side that told us that they wouldn't sell to us.

"Go and persuade Alban first before coming to me."

"That's..."

Figures, he can't. Alban only recognizes Dennis as a lowborn brother. If Dennis were to admonish him, the situation would get even worse.

"I'd like you to somehow consider a cooperation with us, Earl Baumeister-sama..."

"Why me?"

It was their side who requested a meeting, pissed me off with selfish, bullshit suggestions, and finally told me that they wouldn't sell any masonry products to us. Just what does he want my cooperation for?

"Your side started talking about the hierarchy of my wives, and even tried to push your little sisters as lovers onto me, right?"

"That's..."

"At that point, it was already set that I'd cut all relations with you. I'll buy the masonry products from other territories, and even if the installation of masonry gets slightly delayed because of that, the royal palace has promised me to waive it. So, now you see how things stand. Goodbye."

Listening any further is a waste of time. Since I've got no reason to compromise with their side, I quickly leave my seat.

"Please wait! At this rate, our masonry business will..."

"That's not my problem, is it?"

Besides, don't you have plenty of other customers, even if the Baumeister House stops doing business with you? Though their numbers are steadily dwindling thanks to Alban...

"Can't anything be done about this?"

"Dennis-dono, you're fundamentally mistaken. And I won't lend any help to people who don't understand what's going on. After all, it'd be just a waste of time and effort."

"What do you mean by that, Earl Baumeister-sama?"

"Dennis-dono, you're said to be a smart guy, but you hate getting your own hands dirty, don't you?"

Yep, what Dennis must do now is to disinherit Alban with the help of the retainers and residents. Once he becomes the new family head, he can start working on improving his relationship with me. However, Dennis apparently doesn't want to do that.

"Dennis-dono, you simply don't want to cast away your reputation of being an excellent older

brother who supports his useless younger brother lord, right?"

"..."

If he were to disinherit his younger brother, people claiming that Dennis is a scary elder brother who stole the peerage from the true successor would appear, no matter how useless his younger brother might have been. Dennis very likely hated to have his name sullied by that.

"You have two choices left. Snatch the peerage from your younger brother, and become the new lord yourself, or leave the territory."

"Leave the territory, you say?"

"Aren't you way too naive to believe that you'll be able to assist your younger brother in the future? No matter how great your assistance will be, Alban will always burn with hatred against you."

Alban would regard Dennis as dangerous because he could try to take the peerage and land off him. At this rate, he might plan to assassinate Dennis.

"Which side do most of the retainers support? Yours or Alban's?"

"..."

"Since you're staying silent, I guess it's your side."

"..."

Given that Dennis hasn't denied my comment, the trust of the retainers in him must be strong as well.

"Then you've got no choice but to make up your resolve, and get rid of Alban. If he should become the next lord, your sisters will be forced into an even worse situation."

The worse the Madson House's distress, the worse the families his sisters will be married off to. Above all, Alban hates his half-sisters. He won't hesitate to use them as political tools.

"You have no option but to resolve yourself. At least I don't plan to ever negotiate with Alban again."

"You won't negotiate with Alban-sama ever again...?"

"Sorry, but I don't want to ever see his stupid face again either."

"...Okay. I shall dirty my hands, for the sake of my sisters."

Dennis makes up his mind, excuses himself, and returns to his territory.



And then, one week later, I received a call through the MHCD from Margrave Breithilde.

『Alban was disinherited?』

『Well, he had the reputation of being useless to begin with. I hear Dennis-dono's sympathizers among the retainers and residents approached the current lord, demanding to appoint the elder brother as next lord』

『Viscount Madson accepted?』

『Alban has a history of having caused various problems, and thus he readily went along with their demand, it seems』

『I see』

Another week later, Dennis visited me for greetings after having safely succeeded to the lordship from his sick father.

"Alban and his mother have been sent to a church."

If he had shown mercy and allowed them to stay in the territory, they might have tried to start something. Thus Dennis sent both of them to the church.

"Are you okay with this?"

"Yes."

Even though it should have been a simple meeting, it took quite a bit of time.

"In line with this, we will give you a temporary discount on masonry products. Since it's the base of our livelihood, we can't reduce the prices too drastically, though..."

"That's very welcome."

The meeting proceeds without any issues, but at the end, Dennis hands me a letter. It's from the previous Viscount Madson who's still in his sickbed.

"Let's see... 『You have my gratitude for pushing Dennis' back』, huh...?"

"When I approached father about Alban's disinheritance, he told me, 『So you finally made up your mind, huh?』."

So it wasn't as much of an issue as expected. Apparently Dennis' father also regarded Alban as unsuited to inherit his title. He probably held onto him because he was his wife's son, and in the hope that it'd be fine as long as he had good advisors, but since Alban was much worse than he had expected, he started to wish for Dennis to succeed.

"Father says that he can now die in peace."

That's how the meeting safely comes to an end.

Once I return to my private quarters, Amalie-san is waiting for me with mate tea.

"Wend-kun, you're a kind man."

"Really? I think I said some harsh things, though?"

I mean, I told him to take down his own brother. I can't really consider that to be kind.

"Didn't it work out well in the end? It's simply what I believe on my own, so it's also fine for you to have a different opinion about it, Wend-kun."

"I'm kind, huh?"

"Yes, you are."

With Amalie-san insisting on it like that, I also start to believe that it might be so. Does this also stem from me becoming a father myself soon?

"Elise and the others are due soon, aren't they?"

"I'm looking forward to it."

"I figured."

I continued chatting with Amalie-san while drinking her mate tea. Now there's only two months left until Elise's expected delivery date.

Chapter 6 - Graduation and Future Careers

"Sensei, I have a question.

"Sensei, let us go to a cake shop again."

"Sensei, please take me along on future hunts, okay?"

Agnes, Cindy, and Betty seem to be full of spirit today as well. They approach me while smiling as usual. During the last year, they've drastically raised their mana pool and skill in magic. It's something that also makes me proud as their teacher.

"I suppose, it's okay since I've got some spare time today...Cindy, the cake shop will be our last stop, okay?"

"Ye——es, I understand."

"You really do?"

"I mean, Betty, you just said earlier that you want to eat some cake, didn't you!?"

"Don't argue. Let's first start with Agnes' question..."

""Oka——ay.""

My work as a teacher is going very well as my life as a newcomer temporary teacher continues in Baulburg's adventurer prep school which has opened ahead of schedule. Currently I'm actively teaching magic theory and application to the magician class with Agnes and the others.

I was worried because I hadn't taken any teacher-training curriculum during my university days in my previous life, but it's easier to simply teach than endlessly worry about it. And I feel like I'm managing my teacher job better than I had anticipated.

Whenever I ask the students about my teaching style, they tell me that I'm teaching them in a way that is easy to understand while being kind and enthusiastic. The elderly teachers, who used to be adventurers, might have more knowledge and experience, but it's not like they received any special teacher training either. It's also not said that they'd be great at teaching others, even if they might have been excellent adventurers during their heydays.

I mean, I've often heard such stories in the world of baseball in my previous life. For example, a great player doesn't automatically qualify for being a famous coach.

In that case, wouldn't it be better to add an education and training course for new teachers at Baulburg's adventurer prep school? But, if I do that, it's also possible that the older teachers will oppose it, I think.

"I think there will be some who will deny it out of pride or because they're obsessed with their own teaching methods while being too confident in themselves, but many teachers should be thankful for such an opportunity."

When I consult with Principal Hendrick in the capital, he praises me for having come up with a good idea.

"Huh? I thought you'd be against it."

I was sure that most of the teachers wanted to use the teaching methods they believed to be the best.

"Many of the teachers have originally been excellent adventurers. And excellent adventurers operate by adapting to the situation. If you tell them that they can receive training on how to teach others skilfully for free, they'd usually take that chance. The eccentric ones will quickly find it difficult to stick around, even if they are talented. But then again, such folks don't care about becoming teachers in the first place."

I suppose that means the number of those against it won't be as high since it'll be training for their own job. Besides, the teacher job might be somewhat unsuitable for oddballs and aloof geniuses.

"Okay, just as I thought, it'll be bad if we don't standardize the teaching methods then."

"We will go ahead with this. As our prep school has a long history, it's suited to take the lead in a matter like this. We just need to have the other prep schools cooperate, which will eventually lead to drawing up a joint curriculum."

Hendrick was formerly an excellent adventurer, too. One of the qualities of such adventurers is the swiftness in making decisions and acting upon them. After all, such adventurers wouldn't be able to survive if they kept pondering while about to get attacked by monsters. In short, 『Poor Thinking is Futile』.

I thought that prep schools might be more like public offices since they belong to the adventurer guild as their parent organization, but it looks like new things can be decided quickly if the one at the top is smart.

"Earl Baumeister-dono, could I have you outline a manual for magicians as well? No need to hurry, though."

"I don't really mind..."

Although I've improved on it a bit here and there, my manual mostly consists of what Master has left me. It also includes the teaching of Burkhart-san...and a tiny amount of Doushi.

"I'd say, let's have it dubbed as being written by Alfred-dono with some editing by Earl Baumeister-dono, Burkhart-dono, and Armstrong-dono."

"Okay, I'll take care of it."

Master will become the author of the manual which will be used when teaching magicians at prep

schools. Master's name will be passed down to future generations after he died all too quickly despite having been more talented than anyone else. If this leads to more people acknowledging him, it'll make me as his pupil proud as well.

"Earl Baumeister-dono, you're probably busy, and our side also needs to prepare, so let's tackle this slowly."

After being told so by Hendrick, I started to gradually sort the writings Master left me during my free time.



Such events have taken place as well, but I'm still managing somehow as a teacher. I try to carry out my job while receiving some training from Burkhart-san, who occasionally drops in, in addition to the teachings by Master.

"Earl-sama, you sure are a diligent guy. You've even put Al's writings together?"

"I simply decided to do it, so that's all there is to it. Besides, who else is going to pass on Master's achievements to the future generations, if not me as his pupil?"

"I wish I had such a diligent, loyal pupil as well~"

Strictly speaking, am I not his pupil, seeing how Burkhart-san is my Master's master? But, I think he got plenty of pupils anyway.

"What about Katharina?"

Since she's been improving her abilities under his tutelage, he must be considering her to be a good pupil, no?

"Katharina-jou-chan is a genius. Such geniuses are ridiculously unsuited for teaching others. You see, as a magician I never managed to win against Al and Doushi. It resulted in me investing a lot of effort to somehow reach a point of being able to rival them, but all the planning and scheming has been useful for my teaching later down the line."

Luise, who possesses prodigious abilities in the Magic Combat Style isn't fit to teach others at all. She has become a special instructor as figurehead while leaving all of the dojo work to her brothers, and I guess Katharina is just like Luise.

"I'm sure a pupil as you desire will sooner or later show up, Burkhart-san."

"You're right. I've still got a few dozen years of active work ahead of me anyway."

Magicians tend to live longer than normal people. It's very likely that Burkhart-san will remain active for another 30 or 40 years.

"But, have a peace of mind. Earl-sama, you're a hundred times more suited for teaching others than Doushi."

"Can you really count that as praise?"

I'm happy to be told that I'm suited to be a teacher, but I feel kinda conflicted about Doushi being used as a comparison target. After all, no one is as picky in choosing pupils as he is.

"Still, aren't you quite popular as a teacher?"

Well, sure, I think my students idolize me. When I've got some time, I also train their practical skills, like hunting methods and similar, by heading outside Baulburg.

"Many monsters resemble animals in their shape. They're stronger, bigger, and faster, but their basic way of life is similar. Thus it's necessary for them to get used to hunting as many wild animals as possible before they grow up into adults."

"Makes sense. Moreover, if they hunt a lot, their pocket money will also increase."

"Yep."

This is no joke either. If their livelihood isn't guaranteed, the students won't have any spare time for education. For intermediate magicians and below, it's better to possess very efficient wands, and robes endowed with a superior defense ability going beyond that of metal armors are necessary as well since they make a very big difference when it comes to survivability. Since it'd be better for the students to obtain these before actually entering monster domains, they should buy them as soon as possible by earning the necessary money through part-time jobs. It's what I've been telling my students to the extent of making their ears bleed.

"Earl-sama, it'll be impossible for you to stay a teacher indefinitely, but it sounds like several decent magicians have shown up this year."

From the standpoint of elderly magicians like Burkhart-san, it's preferable for as many talented, young magicians to be discovered as possible. This might be owed to the lack of magicians in this world where the number of magicians is directly linked to profits.

"Keep at it, Earl-sama."



While being cheered on by Burkhart-san, I continue teaching my students how to hunt.

"I think we'll go back to eat something, and then go home. It'll be sensei's treat."

"Yahooo!"

"Thank you very much, sensei."

As I do things like treating my students to sweets and meals after coming back from hunting, it makes me actually realize that I've become a real teacher. And the ones I'm particularly favoring among my students are Agnes, Betty, and Cindy. Since their mana is still growing, I'm teaching them without caring about the time invested.

Because of that, I'm teaching them various things outside class, and also take them along when I'm going out somewhere on my days off, resulting in the time spent together with them increasing. Given that I only had a little brother in my previous life, it might simply give me joy to do all this as it feels like having obtained little sisters.

After my reincarnation, I was the youngest child as the eighth son, and even though I had elder half-sisters whom I didn't see often, I didn't have any younger sisters.

"Agnes, I think you're still using a bit too much mana when charging spells. Try to relax a bit more."

"Okay. But, my mana paths are expanding thanks to my daily meditation, so..."

"Widening your mana paths is for the sake of swiftly adjusting the mana used for spells. Wasting mana is another pair of shoes."

"I see...I understand."

"Cindy, if you keep eating this many cakes, you'll get fat...I guess not, thanks to being a magician."

"Indeed. I've been doing plenty of magic training. Sensei, fat is a taboo word for ladies. Didn't you get scolded by your wives about it or some such?"

"Well, yeah, they did scold me..." I clearly recall Katharina's words as a diet demon.

Magic seems to consume calories in addition to mana, and thus there are almost no fat people among magicians. That's why I unintentionally end up teasing Katharina who regularly plans diets despite not being fat. However, if she should ever reach her ideal body type, us men might judge her to be too thin.

I remember that even my previous world had big disagreements between men and women about what to describe as the perfect body type.

"Hunting, huh? Is there something you want to hunt, Betty?"

"I was asked by the guild to obtain a larger amount of guinea fowls, but unlike other prey, guinea fowls are very perceptive of human presences, and even if you aim at them with magic from far away, it's not easy to hit them."

"I'll help you out as part of your training. It'll be strict coaching, though."

"Yaaay, thank you!"



After finishing today's fun lesson, I return to my mansion, but the second I step inside the mansion, I'm confronted by Amalie-san.

"Wend-kun, were you out with your pupils again?"

"Yes! They are growing every day."

The other day we barely escaped death during the underground ruin incident, but I doubt there's anything as great for training as actual combat. As I'm watching how Agnes and the others keep improving, it also reflects the effectiveness of my teaching.

"There's not that much left until their graduation, but I'm sure that Agnes's group will become famous magicians who will carve their names into history."

In such a case, it'll raise Master's reputation even further, and naturally it'll also increase my evaluation as the one who personally trained them. Personally I don't really care all that much about being assessed highly, but my cute pupils, who I consider to be my little sisters, smoothly growing up makes me happy.

"I think I might actually be suited for being a teacher. Oh, right! Even after their graduation, I'll be able to keep coaching them. The three are my pupils, after all."

If I keep training them even after their graduation, I'm sure that they'll grow even further as magicians. I think that's a very wonderful prospect, but for some reason Amalie-san looks unhappy.

"Huh? What's wrong?"

"I'd like to ask you one thing. Wend-kun, what are you?"

"Umm, a teacher."

"Oh my..." For some reason Amalie-san falls over as soon as I answer that I'm a teacher.

I think it's my first time to see someone fall over in reality.

"Your teacher job ultimately is temporary, right? I mean, before that."

"Before that, you ask...?"

It looks like it'd turn into a philosophical answer if I think too deeply about it, but I'm Earl Baumeister, and the father of children who are soon going to be born. Becoming a father is a major turning point in a man's life, and the responsibility coming with it feels heavy.

I wonder, does Amalie-san want to talk about my resolve and thoughts about this matter?

"But, Amalie-san, am I not doing my very best to become a good father and noble?"

No matter how much I enjoy it, it's not like I'm only concentrating on my work as a teacher. Every day I work hard to continuously develop the Baumeister Earldom for my children, even handling annoying paperwork for that sake.

The less Elise and my other wives could move around after becoming pregnant, the more I worked on construction with magic. As told by Roderich, I've been traveling all over my earldom to help in the development with my magic. This is also something I do for my wives and my soon-to-be-born children.

"Aren't you forgetting something? Wend-kun, you're also the husband of Elise-san and your other wives."

"But look, I haven't missed that part either."

I can't remember who said it, but according to a story I heard in my previous life, pregnant women are very unstable emotionally when giving birth for the first time. Accordingly, I properly talk with my wives every day, including physical contact. Especially Elise receives a lot of pressure from other people to give birth to a male heir for the Baumeister House.

In my eyes, as someone who's still influenced by the values of modern Japan, it doesn't really matter whether it's a boy or a girl, as long as it's born safely, and it only makes me consider all those people applying pressure on her as pesky outsiders trying to meddle with the families of others.

I hear that Katharina is also expected to give birth to the successor of the Waigel House, and my other wives have weird relatives who are counting their chickens before they hatched by saying bullshit like 『If it's a girl, I want you to marry her off to some family』, although they're not even part of our family.

I've been running around, doing my best to support my wives by telling them to not mind all that background noise. It's just what I think, but I believe I'm doing all I can as a husband...

"You see, not only do I handle my teacher job, but I also don't forget to properly do my other work and to support my wives. Even if you search the entire Kingdom, you'll find only a few husbands who are investing as much effort as I am."

Yep, I'm doing my very best. But, why is Amalie-san looking at me with a face full of mixed feelings?

"Wend-kun, are your students cute?"

"Yes. They're idolizing me as their teacher."

There's no way that I'd feel bad about being idolized. All of them are different when it comes to their mana pool and talent, but they're growing up while studying earnestly. Helping them heals my heart that got hardened by the Empire's Civil War and my association with retarded nobles.

"Rather than destroying in war, I prefer rearing students through education. They're much better

than stupid nobles who grew up into rotten adults."

The war is already over, but the inflow of stupid nobles, who seem incorrigible, is going to keep up until my death. Considering that, teaching students at the prep school alleviates the mental pain.

"Yep, I said something great there."

"Well, I won't doubt that you've said something nice, but..."

In that case, it'd be fine for her to openly show how deeply moved she is, but it looks like something is bothering after all.

"Wend-kun, you're giving special attention to three of your students, aren't you?"

Oh, I see. So that's the part bothering Amalie-san, huh? She's wondering whether I'm cheating on my pregnant wives with Agnes, Betty, and Cindy.

"Now listen, Amalie-san, I'm just teaching those three while favoring them because of their genuine talent."

I'm well aware that I'm dotting on them as little sisters, but I don't have any ulterior motives in that.

I honestly explain my feelings to Amalie-san.

"You've taken them out to play during your day off, haven't you?"

"That's because relaxation is also necessary at times. 『Study well, and play well』."

Because of their big bellies, I can't take my wives out any longer. However, I want to go out to play every once in a while, too. Of course I don't forget to bring presents for my wives whenever I go on a trip. Even if we might be married, I believe such little, attentive courtesies are indispensable.

"In the first place, those three are my cherished students. I wonder why anyone would get the idea that I'd make a move on them...it makes me truly sad. I suppose it must be the gossiping of some vulgar noble."

I believe I should properly explain my feelings here. Since Amalie-san is as scary as Elise, if she gets truly angry, it's better to resolve all misunderstandings as quickly as possible.

"Hold on. It's not like I'm blaming you for cheating, Wend-kun. I'm just saying that you're leaving a flank open as a noble."

So, cheating is fine... Unlike modern Japan, this world is very tolerant! Having said that, I won't cheat anyway.

"What do you mean?"

"Those girls are already seen as your lovers in the capital."

"Why?" I reflexively tilt my head to the side in confusion upon Amalie-san's remark.

Those three are my lovers? What's up with that!? Are you nobles of the capital fishy weekly magazines and variety shows for women, or what!?

"Wend-kun, sometimes you're really dumb, aren't you? If you favor them so much, and take them out all over the place, it's not just the nobles who would think so. The girls' parents are thinking the same.

"That's...I'm sorry for their parents...but I must clear up that misunderstanding by all means."

I'm sure that any parent would be worried if such rumors were to circulate about their unmarried daughter. After all, it'll become a huge hindrance for a normal marriage in the future.

"No, you misunderstand. Their parents are overjoyed by this. They're planning to give you their daughters."

"Pardon——!?!"

I'm going to marry Agnes, Betty, and Cindy? No, no, no, no.

"I had secretly thought that I'd greet their parents in my position as Earl Baumeister after getting invited to the girls' marriage ceremony as their magic master...and wondered whether I should prepare some conversation topics in advance..."

Since the people participating in the marriage ceremony might pay attention to my speech, I had planned to go with something slightly clever, but...

"Thine way of thinking is completely off. Not only Amalie, even I'm shocked." Therese shows up at that point.

Since Elise and the others are behind her as well, I guess everyone has assembled.

"If their parents knew that you're thinking about it like this, dear, I think they'd be sad instead."

"No, I mean..."

I think it'd be better for them to find a nice husband rather than marry with me who's already got plenty of wives.

"I believe that having their daughters married to you instead of some unknown guy gives their parents a peace of mind." Elise explains to me with an expression that's colder than usual.

So my perception of the situation has been wrong?

"Elise heard the rumors from Cardinal Hohenheim."

Ina continues with the explanation, but in short, since I protected the three from the Baron Bayer House's solicitation, and had them change schools after hurrying the construction of the prep school

in Baulburg, people seem to believe that I'm sheltering the girls.

"The ones spreading the rumors very actively are the folks of the Bayer House, I hear."

"Luise, that much is predictable."

As the three wouldn't go to the Bayer House no matter how persistent their recruiting might be, the Bayer folks have been harassing them terribly.

"Wendelin-san, you're favoring your students too much."

"You think?"

"Katharina, are you jealous because you've learned most of your magic by self-study?"

"Wilma-san, please keep your weird teasing at bay..."

Wilma's sharp retort causes my heart to grieve. Come to think of it, Katharina has spent her student days as a loner.

"...I guess I didn't manage to perceive Katharina's feelings. Come with us next time as well, okay Katharina?"

Sorry, Katharina. I wasn't able to guess your sad past. Even though I also was a loner in my past...

"That's not what I meant...anyway, I didn't have such a lonely past!"

Since the loner got angry after having it pointed out to her, I'll pull back here for the moment. If I'm asked why I understand something like that, it'd be because I was a loner as well.

"After the birth I want to practice magic with you though..."

However, she doesn't deny the part about training magic together. Those cute parts of Katharina are one of the reasons why I love her.

"Still, Wendelin, thou really can't get accustomed to behaving like a noble, can thou?"

Isn't that only natural? There's the influence of my previous life, and moreover, I never planned to become a noble to begin with.

"Okay, then be my guest and tell me how to skilfully resolve this issue as a noble, Therese."

Now that it has come to this, I ask Therese for help as she's the one most likely able to provide a good solution.

"A good way to resolve this? There's none."

"Isn't that quite the bold statement there?"

"Ina, the worth of nobles is defined by having such rumors spread about them. Only nobles of low status would pay attention to each and every single rumor. In Wendelin's case, it won't be any issue at all even if he truly takes the three as his wives."

"No, I wonder about that."

There's the part of me having to balance the number of wives with Margrave Breithilde, my patron, and another worry would be that the Kingdom's government might have a say in this as well.

"Many Earls have a lot more wives than thou, Wendelin. Thou don't need to worry about it."

"Then why blame me?"

Just why is the majority of Elise and the others speaking against me on this? It's not like they're harshly rebuking me, but I feel like I'm at an overwhelming disadvantage here since I'm only one person as their husband.

Recently I've started to clearly feel the drawbacks of polygamy. It doesn't appear often in novels, but it's an inherent problem of harems.

"Let me warn thou, thou need to also consider the situation of those three."

In other words, she's telling me to have them contribute to the Baumeister Earldom's development while skilfully sheltering them.

"I've been taken in by you after losing the duel, hubby, so you can do as you like for all I care."

"True. If necessary, I will continue to teach them magic."

Going by Katia and Lisa, it sounds like they don't care which path I choose. This world is truly open-minded when it comes to this aspect. In Japan my social reputation would have likely plummeted to the very bottom.

"Either way, unrelated to the context of me being a noble, I simply want to train those three, and have them graduate from the prep school without any problems."

I've got no ulterior motives in this. I merely want to raise the next generation by teaching magic to talented youths, just like Master taught me. This wish probably stems from the fact that Master couldn't really pass on his teachings to others while alive.

"I must raise a somewhat larger number of pupils to make up for Master. I'm still a novice myself, but I'll be able to leave behind Master's achievements for future generations by doing this."

"Dear..."

Elise and the others look at me with respect. It looks like I finally got them to understand my feelings. I'd be troubled if they kept suspecting my actions to be laden as much with secret motives as other big nobles. Well, while you can say that the majority of the folks in the capital don't have any such aims, it's also inevitable to suspect them since they're making moves on young women the

second you turn your eyes away from them.

"So, in the end, what do you want me to do, Amalie-san?" I ask her.

Going by Amalie-san's character, I doubt that she'd criticize me over just some aristocratic mistake.

"Ah, you see, I'm not pregnant, and everyone else has long entered their stable periods. So don't go out with just those three, but take all of us out to play on your days off instead. All I'm asking is for you to have some dates with us in Baulburg."

"Eh!? That's okay?"

I've been spending my time with Agnes and the others since Roderich and the others would never leave me alone if something happens while I'm forcing Elise and the others to walk around with me.

"Something at the level of a little stroll won't have any impact on pregnant women."

As expected of someone experienced at childbirth, Amalie-san knows far more about pregnancies than I do. It's just that I didn't know about this at all, but I guess it's the same for Roderich and Erw, or rather, the entire male camp.

"Sorry, it was inconsiderate of me..."

"Since pregnant women have a tendency to seclude themselves, such a change of pace is necessary as well."

I suppose it's rather an issue to not have them go outside because of an excessive worry that something might happen.

"Umm...was it the same in the Knight Baumeister House as well?"

"No, cautioning such things was unnecessary at that place."

Come to think of it, Amalie-san did things like going out into the garden to harvest our home-grown vegetables and herbs for cooking until right before her delivery. Even at home, she twisted ropes, repaired things, and so on...I guess it rather proved to be fortunate that our family wasn't very noble-like.

As for going out...we didn't have any stores in our Knightdom anyway, so the question of going out on dates or such never came up. Mother Nature was right around the corner as soon as you left our mansion...but then again, you can also say that territory had nothing else but nature going for it.

"Since anyone would get bored staying at home all the time, I think it's a good idea to go out every once in a while."

"Okay, I understand."

Since I haven't realized the matter with Agnes and the others, nor what Amalie-san pointed out just now, I feel very grateful. Because you could describe a married couple, which doesn't speak about

such things, as finished, it's great that my wives bring up such matters with me.

"Let's go out at once then."

Now that I've made up my mind, I decide to have Roderich arrange everything so that I can go out with Elise and the others, using the golden opportunity of me having a day off.

Thereupon...



"Oh, isn't that Lord-sama and his wives?"

"It's quite the spectacle, isn't it?"

"Taking plenty of pretty wives and having one child after the other born because you're born as a man, isn't that very enviable?"

"This time it's not the usual girlies, huh?"

"Probably because he got scolded to occasionally look after his wives."



"...I se——e."

Certainly, it's just as Amalie-san said. Even Baulburg's residents think that I must have been finally scolded by my wives for always taking only Agnes, Betty, and Cindy out to play.



"Won't those three join the ranks sooner or later anyway?"

"Isn't the number of his wives going to grow even further?"

"That's wonderful, no? Baulburg will get lively, too."

"Yeah."



Moreover, the residents believe that Agnes and the other two will become my wives in the future.

"See, everyone thinks so."

"Yeah..."

That's a big maybe there...but the probability of it happening is rather high. Still for the moment I'm their teacher.

I solidify my determination to do my very best at teaching all my students at the prep school, including Agnes' group, until their graduation. Let me just tell you, it's definitely not like I'm postponing the issue or anything, okay?

* * *

The seasons pass by, and before I realize it, spring has arrived again.

Just when I feel like having gotten used to my job as a teacher, my students are about to graduate. Given that it's not like I can afford to always work as a teacher, it's been set that my temporary teacher job will come to an end for the time being.

It's planned for Elise, Katharina, and Lisa to work as temporary teachers as much as possible, limited to Baulburg's prep school.

"Sensei is...very deeply moved!"

"Why are you sobbing around here by yourself, Wend...?"

Society calls it graduation, but at the adventurer prep school it's seen as having completed courses. The necessary credits can be achieved within a year without trying the impossible, but since minors aren't allowed to enter monster domains, it's possible for them to keep taking lessons in courses outside the necessary curriculum. In those cases, the lessons take place in the afternoon and evening to not overlap with the lessons of the other students.

Even professional adventurers are allowed to take lessons they need on single occasions. It costs a bit of money, but since prep schools receive subsidies in the territories they are located in, the fees are fairly cheap.

We didn't know those details since we've only gone to our prep school for a few months, but the adventurer prep schools are unexpectedly accommodating. Since you can take the necessary courses as long as you have money and time, the prep schools feel more like schools offering courses catered towards working adults.

Given that it's my first graduation, even though I'll have many chances to meet my students afterwards, I cry while being emotionally moved. Erw rolls his eyes at me pulling such a one-man show.

"You just don't get it, Erw. My very first students are going to graduate. I'm sure, all of them are also deeply moved..."

"Really? They look happy to me."

Ahead of Erw's look, the students are cheerfully chatting after receiving their certificates for having completed their courses.

"Since I've become an adult, I'll form a party with some friends to challenge the Demon Forest."

"I'll reach adulthood next year, so I'll hunt in the Baumeister Earldom until then. Since I've already got a party, I wonder whether I should take some lessons outside the obligatory ones while working on our party's teamwork."

"I think a course with practical lessons related to camping would be pretty neat."

"Yeah, that sounds useful. I'll take it as well. Our courses included a basic training in this, but I'd also like to take a course where those things are trained on-site."

"Hmm, should I take that course as well?"

"It'd be better to do so."

All of them chat while having big dreams for their lives after graduation, but not a single one of them is crying. Just as Erw says, it feels out of place for me to be the only one sobbing here.

"Huh? It's weird, isn't it?"

Since it's their graduation, at least one person should have teary eyes... Which reminds me, I didn't shed any tears back when we graduated either...

"Why do you think that the students would cry over something like this, Wend?"

"Well, you see..."

With Erw pointing that out, I scratch my head in embarrassment since it's definitely not like I can say that I've been influenced by TV-Dramas.

Nonetheless, the students appear to be grateful for my efforts as one after the other approaches me to express their thanks.

"My magic has improved thanks to you, sensei."

"Sensei, your way of teaching was super easy to understand."

"Would it be okay for me to ask you to teach me magic again?"

"Isn't that only natural!? I'm your sensei, after all!"

Indeed, all of the 61 students of this magician class are my precious students. I tell them that they can always rely on me when they need some help.

"Sensei! Thank you very much!"

"Oh, yeah! Let's toss sensei into the air!"

"Yaaaah!"

Thus the graduation ceremony of the young magicians came to an end in an emotional way, but...



"Are you going to employ all of them for the Baumeister House after they retire as adventurers under the pretext of them being your students? That'd trigger a harsh backlash by the other nobles..."

When I give Roderich a rundown about the emotional graduation ceremony, he pulls a bitter face.

"Eh? I haven't said anything like that though..."

"In my ears your words sounded like they would certainly interpret it in such a way."

"Ah!"

I recall that I told them to rely on me whenever they're in trouble.

"They will think that they can come to us whenever they feel like retiring as adventurers to serve nobility."

"But, magicians are in great demand, so..."

Naturally the competition to recruit magicians is fierce because of the low number of available personnel. And the magicians have no issue with serving any house as long as the conditions fit their demands.

"At present there's only a few noble houses that can offer higher wages than us..."

The Baumeister Earldom has plenty of budget as we're still in the middle of development, so we want as many magicians as possible. We can also guarantee a fairly good treatment if they come to us.

"Seeing as you told them that you'd hire them at the Baumeister House in the worst case, they'll be able to make big demands during future negotiations. Even if they get hired at wages as high as ours, it's very likely that the market price will skyrocket in the future thanks to you, milord."

"Ugh! It's not like I promised that I'd hire them...also stuff like government service or mediating a

job change would also be an option..."

I end up overwhelmed by Roderich's questioning.

"Don't worry. Everyone's economic situation will have improved by that time..."

Due to the development in the south-east, and the influx of big funds related to that, the Kingdom's economy will keep growing. If this new wealth spreads to the nobles within the Kingdom, they shouldn't complain to me over some small increase in the wages of the magicians...at least I hope so...

"The economic growth triggered by the Baumeister Earldom has been dubbed as 『Baumeisternomics』!"

"What a weird name..."

Back in Japan, many politicians and economic commentators used such branding on TV and in newspapers as well. I couldn't actually feel it myself with my small pay, but it's said that economical conditions are easily affected by moods.

Since it won't get any worse at least, I'll force my way through here. In short, all will be fine as long as I avoid Roderich's hounding.

"Given that it's done and over with anyway, it's pointless to talk any further about it. Even their governmental service is a matter that might take place several years later."

"You're absolutely right. This is no more than an expression of beautiful affection between teacher and students."

"Well, I suppose we can leave it at that. By the way, milord, about the three girls you're favoring above your other students..." Roderich starts a new interrogation, this time about my favorite pupils Agnes, Betty, and Cindy.

"You knew of them, Roderich?"

"Look, if you shower them with your love so much while frequently taking them around Baulburg, it's hardly imaginable that the residents of this city wouldn't learn of it sooner or later..."

Nevertheless, I must say, my private life surprisingly draws a lot of attention. Even though I'm no actor or model.

"Are you saying this seriously? Milord, currently you're the most prominent celebrity in the Kingdom..."

"Yeah, I know."

Roderich probably means my achievements in the Empire's civil war more than a year ago. Still, it's quite troublesome.

"So what are you going to do about those three from now on?"

"They've already graduated. They should decide their own paths in life."

Agnes is looking for a party where she can join as an apprentice. Since Cindy and Betty are still minors, they seem to hunt around Baulburg while taking courses they haven't taken so far. All three mentioned that they'd act as a team again after reaching adulthood.

They've chosen proper careers. But that might only be expected of the top-students trained by me. I'm expecting that they'll definitely become first-rate magicians.

"...Huh? You should shelter those three."

"Now listen..."

Just how's Agnes' group any different from the other students, including the men? A difference in talent?

"Well, I guess it's going to be alright for now..."

Once I press Roderich for an answer, he suddenly becomes unwilling to speak up for some reason.

Thus the young magicians have all graduated without a hitch, and started to walk their own paths through life. As their class teacher, I've finished my work as a temporary teacher, too.

Even after the promised one year came to an end, I took up the job as temporary teacher every once in a while, but with the prep school in Baulburg filling its teacher vacancies, the need for me to always help out vanished as well.

My wives are soon going to give birth. The first to deliver is going to be Elise, but afterwards, my other wives will give birth one after the other.

"Roderich, I'll do my best as a father. We're going to hasten the development of the territory."

For this reason, I focus on foundation works in my earldom once again. Since Roderich is dishing out one development project after the other, all my energy goes into realizing those foundation works.

With all my wives on maternity leave, I'm the only one capable of handling this work, but at this point, the perfect helpers show up.

"Sensei, I'd like to learn public works as well."

"Me too."

"We'll be able to do this kind of work after retiring as adventurers, right?"

"I see, I see, you three sure are enthusiastic. Construction magic has some parts requiring a very delicate control. Especially if other workers are around, you must absolutely avoid hurting them

with your magic. Sensei is going to teach you from scratch."

""""Thank you!""""

Since Agnes became an apprentice magician in another party, she couldn't show up often, but Cindy and Betty helped out with the construction in the Baumeister Earldom on many occasions while matching it with their hunting.

At first they needed coaching, but that was something Katharina required as well. Nowadays, after immediately learning the ropes, they can swiftly take care of our requests.

"You see, that's why I told you it'd be alright, milord."

"No, those three are ultimately my pupils, okay?"

"For now, yes."

Roderich says some suggestive things, but thanks to me teaching the three about construction magic, the construction work in the Baumeister Earldom is proceeding smoothly. We've managed to skilfully fill the spots left open by the maternity leaves of Katharina and Lisa.

Of course I'm paying them wages, and it also spurs on their growth. This is something very auspicious for me as their master.

"Milord, I'm looking forward to the future."

"And that anticipation of yours doesn't contain any other ulterior motives?"

"I'm sure you're just imagining things, milord."

In Roderich's mind my marriage with Agnes and the others seems to already be set in stone, but since those three are still children, it's a non-topic.

While making sure of my pupils' growth as magicians, I waited for my wives' delivery dates.

End of the Book Extra - Maid, Accompanying the School Trip

"Eh? You're going to have them go on a trip before the graduation? How is that necessary?"

"I mean, this place is a prep school."

"I've never heard about Breitburg's prep school, the capital's prep school, or any other prep school for that matter taking their students on a trip before graduation..."

"Then I'll be the first, I guess. I'll dub it 『School Trip』."

"What are they going to learn on that trip? Besides, there's also the issue with the expenses!"

Somehow Master and Erwin-sama have an argument. Master apparently wants to take the students, who're going to graduate very soon, on a trip.

It's the first time for me to hear talks about the students of the academy or prep schools going on a trip, but it looks like it's yet another of Master's unique ideas. He's even decided the naming for it to be 『School Trip』.

Erwin-sama seems to mostly oppose the idea with his argumentation centered around the problem of payment and the question of what the students would learn on such a trip.

He's right. It'll cost a lot to take a great number of students on a trip. For the Baumeister Earldom, which is still in the process of development, allowing that many people to travel will be a tough burden. After all, the transport of materials and personnel needed for the development have been prioritized until now.

However, Erwin-sama should realize another fact. If Master comes up with something and starts to talk about putting it into practice, it means he won't yield on it, no matter what happens.

"Lea, those are the times when a wife must assist her husband the most. Since you're going to become Erwin-sama's wife soon, make sure to not be negligent in your preparations."

"Understood."

Dominique-neesan has apparently anticipated that Master wouldn't give up on his idea of 『School Trip』. Since she believes that Erwin-sama is going to accompany him in the end, she's telling me to assist him as I'll also come along.

I see. She's absolutely right. Supporting my future husband can only be called the proper duty of a wife.

"In other words, you're telling me that I should go all lovey-dovey with Erwin-sama to create nice

memories on the trip, right?"

"As if!"

Ugghh——! It's been a while since I last suffered Dominique-neesan's knuckle. Her blow has truly penetrated my brain. But then again, it's not as long ago as I've mentioned a second ago. It's just, she always hits me so hard that I tend to forget the blow itself.

"Anna-san, you understand as well, right?"

"Yes. Will there be a need to help with the camping as well?"

"You can't exclude the possibility."

Dominique-neesan tells Anna-san, who's going to marry Erwin-sama just like me, to get ready to leave on the trip as well.

She's currently working as a maid in the Earl Baumeister mansion as training before her marriage. Although she's Erwin-sama's childhood friend, my ability as a maid is superior! In short, I can run the household more skilfully as his wife...there are times where I consider it like that as well, but...despite hailing from a rural merchant's house, Anna-san is almost perfect when it comes to housework, allowing her to quickly grow accustomed to the mansion here.

Given that a tiny, rural merchant house has no maids, she's apparently been strictly trained in things like house chores in preparation for her marriage into another family. Even though Dominique-neesan had often hit my head with her iron knuckle back when I only arrived at this mansion, she only gives Anna-san light warnings...I feel like it's somewhat unfair.

"Anna-san gets things done after a short explanation, without the need to warn her overly much."

"Guh! Did you read my mind, Dominique-neesan!?"

"For how long do you think we know each other? Even without having mind reading abilities, it's easy for me to imagine what you're thinking, Lea."

No way...doesn't this make me a simple-minded girl?

"Since Master is surely going to consult Roderich-sama, the shape of that school trip thing should be decided in the next few days. Once we hear the outcome of their discussion, we will know whether it's going to be camping or a stay in an inn."

"Camping...somehow that doesn't really sound like a trip."

Since it's going to be a trip, I'd like us to at least stay in an inn, no matter how run-down it might be.

"It's all about the issue of how much budget will be available. If Master covers the inn fee with his pocket money, it's possible that it will prove difficult to do the same trip in the following years. I think it will result in going camping in Baulburg's outskirts."

In that case, it wouldn't require much of a budget, and it'd have the advantage of serving as training for camping after the students become adventurers.

I believed that it'd definitely turn out as Dominique-neesan said, but...



"Eh? A field trip into the Demon Forest, and lodging in a nearby hot-spring inn? The school sure is splurging there."

"It appears that Master has been quite tenacious about this matter."

It's an event called 『School Trip』, thought up by Master, but somehow it's been decided for us to go out to the Demon Forest with all of the prep school's students. Dominique-neesan is fairly surprised by this as well.

"Let me be frank: is the budget going to be alright?"

"According to Roderich-sama, it's going to be realized thanks to Master's efforts baring no rest, his flawless persuasion and limiting the budget to the utmost through the students paying their own expenses."

First off, the travel to the Demon Forest is going to take place on a currently noncommissioned airship where sailors are being trained. Given that the airship doesn't yet allow for guests to officially board, the journey is going to be for free while serving as a training for the sailors at the same time.

Next, they're going to have the adventurer guild sponsor a small amount of money as this entire trip is treated as semi-training course for the sake of getting the students ready for their adventuring by showing them the situation over at the guild's branch, and allowing them to go on a field trip to the Demon Forest, albeit limited to looking from outside.

Afterwards, all the students are going to hunt in the still untouched nature north of the Demon Forest, and the costs for the trip will be covered by selling the spoils to the guild.

As for the inn, I only remembered after being told about by Dominique-neesan, but the Earl Baumeister family owns a rest house at a hot spring close to the Demon Forest. Apart from the holiday house used by Master and his wives, the Baumeister House's retainers and their families have a rest house they can book for cheap. A lot of people look forward all year long to go to this rest house to take a break.

It looks like the students of the prep school will be allowed to lodge there. They aren't the Baumeister House's retainers, but since they're students of the prep school whose facilities are run by the Baumeister House, Roderich-sama negotiated with the lodging house's owner to get permission.

Either way, I wonder just what has stimulated Master to put this 『School Trip』 thing into practice.

It's really odd.

"For such a reason, I'd like you two, Lea and Anna, to accompany Master and Erwin-sama and help them out on site. I can't go myself since I have to take care of Elise-sama and the others."

"Okay, I understand."

I see, Anna and I will assist Master, who leads the 『School Trip』, and Erwin-sama who comes along as his aide.

"But it's really amazing. Students can go on trips at the adventurer prep schools managed by high-ranking nobles."

In the eyes of Anna-san, who has never left her village until she came here, trips seem to give her the impression of luxury. Because of that, she looks totally hyped after hearing that she'll be able to come along.

"Anna-san, such events don't take place at the houses of other high-ranking nobles. The prep school in the capital doesn't do it either."

"Is that so? That means Earl Baumeister-sama is a very great man, doesn't it?"

Anna-san seems surprised by Master's generosity, but if you crunch the numbers a bit, you'll immediately see that it doesn't cost that much money... The ones earning the travel expenses by hunting at the destination are actually the students themselves.

"Dominique-neesan, is it okay for Anna-san and me to only take care of Master and Erwin-sama?"

"There is staff at the rest house, but since the number of lodgers will be rather big, I'd like you to help the staff with food preparations and cleaning as much as possible."

Okay, so it's the same as usual, I suppose. Because I'm a capable maid, I'll do my best at working energetically, all for the sake of being considered 『great wife material』 by Erwin-sama.

"Ah, but I've heard that the rest house has a hot spring, so it should be fine for you to enter the bath during your free time."

If things go smoothly, I think it could turn into a nice mood by me entering the hot spring all alone with Erwin-sama. Considering this, it makes me look forward to this job very much. Anna-san might be thinking something similar. I'll give it my all here!

"Please take care of it, Lea, Anna-san."

"Please leave it to me. I'll enjoy a steamy hot spring time with Erwin-sama!"

"Just why do you have to derail the conversation in such a way!?"

Ouch... This is the second, continuous knuckle hit by Dominique-neesan since yesterday, but just as usual, her merciless hits sting. Is this stinging pain going to fade away once I enter the hot spring?

* * *

"All of you, make sure to stay together and don't act by yourself! First up is the field trip to the newly-built Demon Forest branch of the adventurer's guild."

"Wend, why are you looking so happy about all this?"

That's how the school trip started. After the medium-sized magic airship safely arrives at a port close to the Demon Forest, the accompanying teachers give instructions to their respective classes.

Master, Erwin-sama, Anna-san, and I are in charge of the magician class. Since Anna-san and I wear our maid uniforms, we look completely out of place near the Demon Forest.

"Lea-san, somehow I feel like we're being stared at..."

"I want to head over to the rest house as soon as possible."

It's not like we can simply go ahead to the rest house, and thus we first head over to the Demon Forest's guild branch. Because a big group of boys and girls is walking around, they garner the attention of the adventurers who wonder what's going on.

Since Anna-san and I wear maid uniforms, it feels like we are in the focus...

"This is the reception."

Given that all of the students have already sold hunted game to the branch in Baulburg as part-time job, it's kinda redundant to give them such an explanation at this point, but I guess this is also part of the school trip.

Next, we're led to the facility where the hunted game is dismantled, then we inspect the Demon Forest from outside, and lastly we head over to a plain.

"You still aren't allowed to enter the Demon Forest, but the density of prey around here is high. Please do your best at earning your travel expenses."

If they can hunt plenty of game, the school trip expenses will drop to zero. With that motivation by Master, the students begin hunting in the name of giving their training so far the finishing touch.

"That means, we're up now."

Meanwhile, Anna-san and I prepare lunch.

"Though most of it has been prepared in advance."

If we had to make lunch for so many people from scratch now and here, we wouldn't be on time. We're just going to get the food previously prepared by Dominique-neesan and the other maids

from Master's magic bag, and distribute it. All we have to do is to reheat the pots with soup.

"I don't quite understand whether it's a trip or training."

As Anna-san says, the students' travel expenses will be paid for thanks to this hunt, but I think only the trip of an adventurer prep school would include hunting. That's why it's called 『School Trip』, I guess.

"What are they learning from this?"

Now that she mentions it, there's no need to explicitly come to the Demon Forest to hunt since the students are doing it every day after school anyway. Oh dear, I suppose I truly can't understand the far-sighted and deep intent behind Master's idea.

"No kidding, he suddenly comes up with something weird, and stubbornly insists on it being carried out."

Erwin-sama comes over to check how things are going on our end. I think he wants to make sure that the food can be handed out on time.

"Well, it's okay since everyone looks like they're having fun. If you show the students the rough adventurers near the Demon Forest and the ill-mannered folks at the guild's reception, telling them to not become like those people, many students should pay attention in the future. By actually taking a look at the materials of the Demon Forest's huge monsters when being dismantled, it might decrease the number of folks dying after getting reckless. It looks like they've also taken a look at the place where the wounded are treated. Maybe it's not bad to show them such reality before they become adventurers themselves. Veteran adventurers tend to consider such things, but they don't have the time to pass on their experience to everyone about becoming an adventurer. Our Lord found a perfectly fitting name for it with 『School Trip』, I think."

At a first glance, it looks like playing around, but I guess Master is properly thinking about the students entrusted to him.

"The economy in our territory gets incited in proportion to the students moving around. Once they become adventurers, they'll definitely stay in an inn at some point, so this also serves as training for manners and similar. If the students behave properly as customers, the inn's side will give them discounts for extended stays, prepare lunch boxes, or do their laundry. That'd be much more beneficial to the students than being hated for bad manners, right? However, unexpectedly no one teaches them stuff like that."

"To think that far ahead...Master is truly amazing."

Anna-san, who's still a relatively new addition to the Baumeister House, feels deeply impressed by Master's intentions. I haven't noticed that this simple school trip event has so many beneficial parts to it either.

For some reason, Erwin-sama's expression doesn't look overly cheerful as he explains all that, though.

"Erwin-sama, is something worrying you?"

"No, those advantages persuaded Roderich-san to agree with this event, but somehow I can't get rid of the suspicion that Wend simply wanted to carry out such an event for his own amusement."

"" ... ""

He's right, now that he mentions it, it sounds logical... I don't know what Anna-san is thinking about this, but even if it's just as a helper, she should be happy as she was able to come on this trip. Besides, hot springs are waiting for us once we reach the inn.

I'm looking forward to whatever situation might come out of this. It's the perfect time as Dominique-neesan isn't around either.



"Oh, Lea-san, Anna-san, it looks like we're going to share a room. Please take care of us."

"Please teach me even more elaborate dishes in the near future."

"Me too please. Ah! A dessert that would please sensei would be great, I think."



With the hunt ending safely, we sell a huge amount of game to the adventurer's guild, resulting in a complete coverage of the travel expenses. This time Master had apparently promised to pay it out of his pocket if they were to be short on money since he was the one to suggest this whole trip to begin with, but in such a case, the 『School Trip』 would have likely remained a one-time-only event. Master looked very relieved when he learned that they hadn't gone into the red with the expenses.

Next we moved to the rest house where we'd spent the night, and brought our luggage to the rooms assigned to us.

This place can't be compared to Master's holiday villa or the exclusive, high-class vacation house for the chief retainers, but since it's a new building, it's very nice. Splitting the classes up into boys and girls, all of them are assigned a room in groups of five or six. Anna-san and I share a room with Agnes-san, Betty-san, and Cindy-san.

I'm still teaching the three how to cook every once in a while, so I think we've been put together in one room because of that relationship. Since Anna-san often teaches them cooking together with me, Agnes-san and the other two are acquainted with her as well.

By the way, Master and Erwin-sama are staying in the room next to ours. Naturally there's no way for the two to share a room with five or six other guys, and thus they're sharing one room together.

I think it'd have been fine for them to stay at the holiday villa, but since Master is participating as a teacher of the prep school, they're lodging in this place as well. I guess you can describe Master as a surprisingly earnest person...

"Lea-san, there's no work left for us."

"That's definitely unexpected..."

Since many students are staying over, Anna-san and I have accompanied the group, also with the intent to help out, but because more staff than expected works at this rest home, our help was turned down. Since we were told by Master, 『Isn't it fine for you to rest up then until we go back home tomorrow?』, once we informed him of the circumstances, we've basically received a free pass to enjoy our free time without reservations.

Because the staff working here is also proud of their duty, I doubt that it'd be a good idea for us to force our way into their work. A truly excellent maid can make a clear distinction between work and private time. Besides, seeing as Master told us to take a rest, even Dominique-neesan shouldn't be able to bicker about it.

"Since it's a rare opportunity, let's enjoy the hot spring."

"Lea-san, do you know about the hot spring in this place?"

"Yes."

Given that I've originally been sent here to assist Master, I've naturally checked out the information of this rest home beforehand.

"Please relax, Agnes-san. About the hot spring over here..."

Unlike Master's holiday villa and the vacation house used by the chief retainers and their families, the extravagance of the facilities falls slightly short, but other noble houses don't even provide a rest house for their low-ranking retainers in the first place. In other words, this is also an expression of Master's tolerance and deep compassion.

"It's very big and has large bathtubs, segregated by gender."

The hot spring facility is big enough that all the prep school students lodging here today could enter simultaneously without a problem. Moreover, since it's properly divided in men and women sections, it's unnecessary to worry about being peeped at, too.

I wouldn't mind if Erwin-sama came to take a peek at me, but I'd hate it if the other guys would also ogle me.

"Moreover, there's also something called a family bath."

This is a private hot spring that can be entered together with your family.

"Family means it's okay for men and women to enter together?"

"Well, they're family after all."

Cindy-san acts like it's very commonplace...

"Then I'll invite sensei."

"That's a no-no."

Even if Cindy-san might be Master's pupil, it's not like they're family. A man and woman, who aren't married to each other, entering a bath together is rather questionable. Warning people about such things is yet another task of a maid...at least I think it is?

"Then it'd be no problem for me to enter the family bath together with Erwin-sama, right?" Anna-san suddenly goes for the big shot here.

Certainly, Anna-san is Erwin-sama's fiancée. Entering the bath together...isn't allowed since she's still not married officially to him...or rather, isn't she in the same position as me?

"Fu fu fu. In other words, it means I have a chance as well."

Anna-san, don't think that I'd simply let you wander off to nonchalantly invite Erwin-sama into the family bath without inviting me as well!

"Anna-san, it's taboo to steal a march."

"Meaning?"

"It'll be a contest!"

I don't think that it'd be much of a problem if I emphasized my seniority here, but considering the future, we should have a fair contest on this. I have prepared Master's invention, Othello, which is currently a hype in the earldom.

"The winner will be allowed to enter the family bath with Erwin-sama."

"I see. The rules are easy to understand."

Anna-san and I begin to play Othello with the right to enter a bath together with Erwin-sama as a trophy. But...

"I win!"

For some reason, Anna-san wins the match. Even though I should be more familiar with Othello...

Am I possibly very bad at this game?

"The match lasts until either of us has three wins."

Now that it has come to this, I've got no choice but to switch to a war of attrition! It'll be fine as long as I win in the end!
As long as I win!

"Agnes, anyone plays until three wins, you know?"

"Cindy-chan is right!"

"Ee——h!"

Next to us, Agnes' group has started to play Old Maid with the right to enter the family bath with Master as a trophy.



Just when I thought that Agnes-san would win since she's good at games like these, it actually happened, but Cindy-san and Betty-san used the same move I used.

No matter how much you delay the game, all will be fine if you win at the end.

"I've won three times."

"As I thought, it's better to go with five wins."

"No, saying this now would be too unfair."

Huh? Or rather, why do I suck so much at Othello? It's a mystery...or I guess not. So far I've played against Dominique-neesan many times, but I've hardly ever won against her...

Haven't I totally messed up with my choice of the match's content——!?

"It's three wins with this."

"Agnes, anyone plays until five wins, you know?"

"I'm with Cindy-chan on that!"

"You two are slyyyy——!"

Cindy-san and Betty-san repeat my words. I feel a deep sympathy between us.

"Lea-san, please don't hate me, but a match is a match."

"That's how it is, Cindy, Betty."

As expected, the strategy to delay it to five wins hasn't worked. Anna-san and Agnes-san head out to invite Master and Erwin-sama to the family bath. But, an unforeseen accident occurs at that point.



"Erwin-sama!"

"Sensei!"

"Hmm? Anna, you still haven't gone bathing? Since I've already gone bathing in the public one with Wend, it'd be best for you to get in quickly as well, Anna. It's a hot spring, so it feels really great."

"Agnes, have you been playing in your room with Lea, Anna and the other two? It'd be better for you to enter the bath before it's closed."

Back when it was settled who would enter the family bath together with Master and Erwin-sama,

the two had already finished their bath — that's the kind of unforeseen accident I meant.

"Uuuhh...Lea-san, you've aimed for this..."

"Cindy, Betty, you've aimed for this..."

No, no, no. I can't read Cindy-san and Betty-san's minds, but I haven't planned things this far! Honestly, it's simply a coincidence that it has turned out like this! ...Honestly, okay?



"The hot water sure is wonderful."

"It definitely is, but...right, Agnes-san?"

"No kidding, Anna-san."

As there was absolutely no way to invite the two men, who had already taken a bath, to take yet another bath, the five of us used the large bath in the public area. Agnes-san and Anna-san are grumbling around a bit, but I'll simply ignore them and enjoy the bath.

"Hmm, still, all things considered..."

"What's wrong, Lea-san?"

"Our breasts are way too average!"

Of course it's not like I'm harboring any such futile aspirations as getting close to Elise-sama, but even though we're going to marry Erwin-sama in the future, Anna-san's and my breasts are average at best. Considering Haruka-sama who possesses quite a big rack, this will turn into a problem in the future, won't it?

"They'll grow eventually."

"Really?"

"I'm sure they will, Lea-san."

Going by our ages, the growth spurt for Anna-san and me should start soon. But then again, it's also a question of what humans would do if they had no hope for the future.

I'm sure they'll grow.

"Does having a chest the size of Elise-sama make sensei happy?"

"But, Agnes! We still have hope! Look at Luise-sama!"

"Hmm, makes sense. Our breasts are average, and Cindy-chan's is a bit above average...still, even Luise-sama is a go!"

"Betty, it's alright since our chests are still growing!"

Come to think of it, Agnes' group, who's aiming to become Master's wives, have average chests lacking any individuality. Still, the words 『Bigger than Luise-sama...』 have encouraged Anna-san and me as well.



『Achooo!』



Just now it felt like I heard a sneeze resembling Luise-sama's voice from somewhere... But, since Luise-sama is currently at the mansion in Baulbug, I must have imagined it.



"Sensei isn't a man of such a low caliber that he'd discriminate against women for their breast size!"

"You're right! Even Luise-sama is a go! Even if they're on the smaller side, it's absolutely no problem, right!?"

"The overall balance plays a big role as well. Since I'm training myself through hunting and such, my legs are slender and my butt is tight as well. Agnes-chan is sitting a lot because she's studying, so she's a bit flabby."

"I'm not that flabby!! Betty, even though your legs might be slender, they're muscular, making them kinda unsuited for giving lap pillows."

"The other day I gave sensei a lap pillow after he became a child, but it didn't seem like there were any problems with that."

"Right now, my breasts are small, but they'll grow very soon. Unlike Agnes and Betty, I have a future ahead of me."

""Our ages aren't that far apart!""



Girl's talk is the highlight of every trip. Even after we returned to our room, we kept talking about various matters until late into the night.

The 『School Trip』 consisted of only one-night stay-over, but I enjoyed it very much. Contrary to usual, I earnestly prayed for the 『School Trip』 to be held in the coming years as well. Things like this trip are necessary for a woman.

* * *

"I see, the rest house had enough staff, so there was no work for you to be done, you're saying?"

"Yes. Until we arrived there, we've been doing our work properly."

"Well, I guess it's fine if Master allowed it."

"Was everything alright over here in the mansion?"

"Yes. Last night Luise-sama was worried that she might have caught the flu since she suffered from a weird sneezing, but her sneezing remained limited to one."

◆◆◆

After we returned to the mansion once the 『School Trip』 ended, I reported the rundown to Dominique-neesan, but she didn't say much about the matter of me not having worked at all after reaching the rest house. I'm pretty sure it's fully owed to Master's authority.

"Come think of it..."

"What is it, Dominique-neesan?"

Is there something she's going to point out?

"It's about the family bath..."

"Ahaha, you mean it was wrong of Anna-san and me since we aren't officially married to Erwin-sama yet?"

Since Dominique-neesan is such a serious bore, she maybe wants to warn me about it, despite it ending at an attempt.

"No, I won't tell you anything so stiff. I think it's a great facility to have a family bath you can enter with your family members. Anyway, why was it necessary to have a match with Anna-san about who was going to enter the bath with Erwin-sama? It'd have been just fine for all three of you to go in together."

"Ah..."

Now that Dominique-neesan has pointed it out, I've noticed it myself as well.

That's it! Since both of us are going to become Erwin-sama's wives anyway, there was no need for an unproductive quarrel! How foolish of Anna-san and me! Even though Erwin-sama always tells us that disputes don't lead to anything!

"Even though it would have delighted Erwin-sama very much without any inconveniences to any of us whatsoever if us three had entered together! Moreover, for the straight-laced Dominique-neesan to have realized something I failed to notice!"

"Who's straight-laced!?"

I mean the part of you immediately giving me a knuckle blow.

"Today the top of my head stings especially intensely..."

Sooner or later I might actually start to shrink from those hits.

"You're right, it's just as you say, Dominique-san!" At that point, Agnes-san, who had come over to learn cooking today, butted into our conversation while donning an expression full of regret over having blundered.

Moreover, Cindy-san and Betty-san, who are behind her, have similar expressions.

"Sensei often enters the bath with several women, so there wouldn't have been any problem with us three entering the bath together with him!"

"Only now realizing that part after having it pointed out to us! I also wanted to enter a bath with sensei!"

"No, that doesn't work for you three, you know? It's not like you're married to him."

""It wouldn't have worked!?"""

"Obviously not."

Unlike with Anna-san and me, Dominique-neesan calmly declines the option of a mixed bathing for the three girls. As expected. That's a straight-laced person for you. Dominique-neesan's straight-laced way of life has been contributing to the maintenance of order within the Earl Baumeister mansion...

"Who's straight-laced!?"

"Even though I haven't said anythiiiiing!"

"You haven't said anything, but you thought about it, right?"

"Uhhh...I can't deny that."

Once again Dominique-neesan has read my mind. I've started to become worried about what she's turning into.

Disclaimer

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