

## SPELLCRAFT 671

### SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar

#### Chapter 671: The Statue

"We need some people to watch over the fort and protect Aloe," I said, preparing to transport the team to see the problem with Kuzon.

"There's no need. This place is protected by your Magic, as well as mine. If they can break through this place, then there's no one we can put in charge that'll stop them."

As always, Neron made another fair point. But we couldn't just leave Aloe in her comatose state without any protector.

"I-I can stay!" Asa raised his hand.

I couldn't allow that, considering he wouldn't be strong enough. But then again, who else would volunteer?

Perhaps Edward or Ciara? But the former would rather help Ana, and the latter? Maybe—

"Just leave your Automatons here and help Kuzon! Can't you just teleport back when the barrier is breached? Neron has time powers, doesn't he?!"

Ana's loud voice brought me back from my deep realm of thought.

After properly going over her suggestion, as well as the very heavy gazes of everyone around me, I decided to go along with it.

"Fine. We'll do that."

\*

\*

\*

>VWUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUSSSSSSSHHHHHH<

The blue portal opened wide and we were all instantly sent to an odd-looking place.

Neron, Serah, Asa, Ivan, Jerry, Lemi, Ana, Maro, Ciara, Edward, and then me.

I did as Ana suggested, so no one was left behind.

We were met with a small room—well, not too small, but considering our number, it wasn't exactly very spacious either.

A chair—which was similar to a throne—was displayed in front of us, and behind it were many wires. I deciphered that this technologically advanced setup had some relation with Beruel, though I couldn't be fully sure.

'Where are we exactly?' I had only analysed the trajectory based on Ana's previous coordinates, so I was clueless.

"It's my Fort, but... it's different."

The entire place seemed just like how Beruel would like his fort to be. After all, everything around us was layered completely in gold. I felt like it was a bit too extra, but who was I to judge?

"This way." Neron spoke, floating away from the room where we appeared.

He left through a large hole in the wall, a hole I deciphered was probably caused by the walls being destroyed by forceful entry.

Just by looking at the cracks and the formation, I could guess that much.

'But breaking through pure gold... hmmm...'

We all followed Neron out of the hole, experiencing a different setting from the more clustered room.

It was a large hall—probably used for showcasing or keeping several items. However, it looked incomplete for some reason. What seemed like several glass tubes and pipes filled the damaged area.

"T-this is..."

My eyes, just like everyone else's, caught something at the centre of the hall. It had the form of a person but was completely covered in gold—like everything else around us.

"You really are an odd one, Beruel." I murmured as we drew closer to the golden statue.

I didn't expect him to decorate his place with the statue of a man who was not himself. Besides, I was amazed that the statue seemed so out of place—standing at the center of everything that surrounded it.

'It also doesn't have any scratch on it. Strange.'

I calmly observed the statue, but Beruel and Ana seemed to be in an excitable state. Their highly pitched voices told me that something was indeed up with the figure.

"T-that's him! The one who attacked us."

"His name is Kido, the Second Seat of the Cult."

'That means he's powerful, right? Hold on... this is the actual person? Did Magic do this to him?'

I was even more intrigued at this point. It indeed had all the details a normal person had. But was that enough proof that this was the actual person?

I mean, Magic could achieve the same effects.

"Neron, could you—"

"I already used Time Immersion to check the events of the past."

At this point, I stopped staring at the statue and looked at him. Ana, Beruel, and literally everyone else, looked at him.

"Ana was right. Kuzon was in terrible danger." He sighed.

'A-ah...!' Realizing the blunder I'd made, my expression turned sour.

For a moment, a solemn silence filled the air. I knew it was possible for me to be wrong, but I always prepared for the worst. It wasn't like I regretted my actions, but—

"Wait, you said he 'was' in danger! What about now?" Ana's voice rang of desperation.

Her wide eyes pleaded for hope, but Neron's solemn expression didn't seem to insinuate that. Even I felt my heart race at this point.

"Yes. It has been a difficult battle, if I could call it that. Kuzon had been on the losing end. In the end, this person used Magic to transport him to a place by using Original Magic. A place he clearly mentioned to be within himself."

According to Neron, this man named Kido was far stronger than Kuzon and took him somewhere else. However, not long after, he began to become petrified and turned into gold.

He turned into gold, and the element spread all around us, transforming everything else into the same substance.

'So that's what Beruel meant when he said this place is different.'

"S-so, you're saying Kuzon won the fight?" Ana's eyes widened even more.

"He did."

However, even with Neron's affirmation, why didn't he seem very happy? He looked a little at a loss for words, and that couldn't be good.

"I resonated with the statue when I was in Timeless World. It's nothing but gold now, but I sensed two traces of energy mixed within. One belongs to Kuzon."

'H-hold on... what is Neron... saying?'

My current expression had to be that of an idiot, because I didn't understand where this was going. No, I probably did, but I didn't want to admit it.

I couldn't!

"Just as Kido died, Kuzon met the same fate. That's what I've been able to deduce from everything I've seen and investigated."

No way! Just... no way!

Neron had no motive or reason to lie. He was most likely even right, but... I just couldn't believe what I just heard.

"Kuzon... is dead?"

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 672: Grief**

Silence enveloped the vicinity as we all stood, shell-shocked by the undeniable truth that confronted us.

"Kuzon is... dead?" A voice echoed in the vast, golden room.

I wasn't certain whether it belonged to me or not. The voice gave off a hollow sound, almost as though it was straining to speak. I couldn't understand, but I knew very well the tight and deep emotion locked in the sound.

"U-uh...?" I felt my vision blur, and my heart tightened in shock.

Kuzon was the one person whose death I never expected. We weren't particularly close, but... I hadn't expected his demise—at least not like this.

"Hicc... hicc... no way. I don't believe it. I don't... it can't be..." Ana's shaky voice was accompanied by her sobs.

Her small frame trembled, and the paleness of her face showed a look of despair mixed with a bit of disbelief. Tears cascaded down her cheeks, and her scrunched-up face depicted the agony and frustrating sorrow that was permeating her very being.

I had no idea what happened between Ana and Kuzon in the time they were away, but...

... Her sorrow seemed to come from a genuinely deep place—much deeper than I, or anyone else in the room, could fathom.

"Apologies, young Midas..." Beruel whispered.

Even the Fairy King displayed some degree of sorrow, a face I had never seen him make before. My thoughts tried to consider what could have given him a change of heart, but now was probably not the time.

"Nooooo!!! He can't be dead! H-he can't be! K-Kuzon is... he's invincible!"

At this point, Ana was crying in Edwards's broad arms, and Lemi was also comforting her. I tried speaking, but the lump in my throat prevented me from uttering any word. Rather than speak words that eluded even me, I tried observing the golden statue myself.

Perhaps we were drawing our conclusions too early. I understood that Neron was brilliant and incredibly skilled, but there were still many tests to run. So many possibilities.

"Maybe..." I whispered while drawing closer to the statue.

"Don't bother. I've tried everything. He can't revert, even with Time Manipulation." Neron stopped me with a sigh.

It seemed he had read my mind perfectly. I was grasping at straws, I knew fully well, but... this was a friend—a comrade. Was it foolish of me to imagine ways that could work?

"Wait! You can still try, Jared! We have so many Arcanas, right? There has to be one that can break Kuzon free. Right? Right?" Ana's eyes were wide open, and it was just like looking into a mirror.

One close look at her desperate face reminded me of how foolish I was being.

"None of the Arcanas in our possession can do anything about this."

Kuzon's body, or rather, the statue of Kido had completely changed properties to gold. There was practically no way to change it back. According to Neron's words, and what I was sensing, it seemed like the body had always been gold—completely inorganic.

Besides, there was no Soul present.

"I'm sorry, Ana. Kuzon is..." I whispered, a lump forming in my throat.

Why couldn't I say the rest of my sentence? Hadn't I lost people in the past? I knew it didn't get easier, but why was I acting like such a child? Everyone around me was getting emotional and breaking down. As the adult—the oldest—I was supposed to lead by example.

I was supposed to—

"DO SOMETHING!" Ana interrupted my thoughts, yelling furiously at this point.

Her widened eyes leaked out more tears, and I could see her face morph from an expression of sorrow to that of rage.

"DO SOMETHING, JARED!"

My heart ached as I stared into her blue eyes, and I wanted to tell her I could figure it out or find a solution, but there was practically no alternative. No way out.

"THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT, SO DO SOMETHING!"

"Calm down, Ana... you don't really mean that." Edward tried to hold her closer to him, but she pushed him off in a swift move.

"I-if... if you hadn't wasted so much time... then Kuzon would probably still be a-alive. T-this is all your fault!"

Ana drew closer to me, though she was quickly stopped by Edward and Lemi. I could say or do nothing but remain transfixed in my position. I couldn't argue with her because she was probably right. If I hadn't spent my time overthinking or doubting the accuracy of Ana's words, then perhaps—

"There's no need to cast the blame on anyone. There's nothing Jared, or anyone here for that matter, could have done to help." Neron's calm tone suddenly intervened.

I found my gaze resting on his completely stoic face as he walked between Ana and me.

"B-but, if not for the delay, then—"

"Then we would still be too late. I used Time Immersion to check the past. If we had left exactly when you explained Kuzon's plight, we would still be late." He explained, still maintaining his cool.

I found myself wondering how Neron could be so calm and logical in times like this. I thought I had just been giving myself excuses, which was why my mind couldn't bear to raise even a single defence for myself.

"Besides, Jared is the leader here. He had to consider many factors, and he couldn't jeopardize the safety of the team or the mission. Besides, Ana..." Neron sighed, now moving closer to the young girl.

He placed his hand on her shoulder and nodded slightly. I couldn't see the face he was making since his back was facing me. However, a very gentle aura shrouded him.

"... You're not the only one who has lost a friend. Cut him some slack."

I couldn't understand why I felt indescribably relieved to hear Neron's words. It felt like something had finally broken loose from my heart. As a result, yet another thing burst free from within me.

'A-ah...?' I felt them—hot liquids—leaking from my eyes and streaming down my cheeks to touch my sheen.

My jaws trembled, and I could feel my sweaty hand constantly shaking. The tears blurred my vision, so I couldn't see anyone else around me, but... I could tell.

I wasn't alone in the tears.

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 673: Parting Gift**

"Kuzon was more than a friend."

Ana pushed Neron's hand from her shoulder and walked away from him. Edward tried to hold her again, but after giving him a deathly glare, he froze in his tracks. Lemi fell silent, most likely knowing her place in the grief of her friend.

Ana ignored everyone else and drew closer to Kido's statue. Her hand was stretched out, and she slowly moved closer. She despised the face she saw, but Ana knew full well that the boy she cherished so much dwelled within the villain's body.

Yes, Kuzon was still in there. With that thought, Ana advanced closer.

"W-wait, isn't that—!"

"It's fine. She won't be harmed." Neron interrupted Edward's worried objection.

No one stopped her, and she didn't want them to. For Ana, all she wanted was absolute silence. She needed to think. She needed to calculate. She needed to fully comprehend everything.

'I'm not as strong or smart as Jared and Neron, but...' Ana gritted her teeth as her palm felt the cool surface of the gold statue.

'... I'm brilliant. You said so yourself, Kuzon. You called me a genius. You said I was amazing... right?' Tears resumed their downward spiral, and Ana began sobbing some more.

"I'm amazing enough to save you, right? You think so, don't you, Kuzon?"

Ana knew what the smartest people in the room were telling her, but she didn't think she could believe their words. No, she had to have faith. She needed to trust in her own judgment and ability. She had to see herself the way Kuzon saw her.

As an amazing genius!

"I'll save you. I promise, I won't—"

>SHIIIIIIINNNNNNNGGGGGG!!<

A sudden flash of light appeared, causing everyone's eyes to bulge in shock—Ana's most of all. Her heart raced, and her tears began drying up as her face broke into a hopeful smile.

"I knew it! You can't be... there's no way you're—"

"Kuzon is dead." A feminine voice cut Ana's rushed words off, and the brilliant light that appeared right above the statue suddenly manifested into a small, winged entity.

The entity was shrouded in blue and golden attire, and her flames were of identical hues. Her appearance was majestic, but also quite familiar.

"Xenia... is that you?" Ana muttered, watching what she could only recognize as Kuzon's familiar, emerge from nowhere.

The winged entity smiled, nodding as she slowly descended to create an even plane for a conversation.

"In the flesh. I believe this is the first time we are conversing, Anabelle." The winged, flaming being had the most enchanting voice.

Unfortunately, it was laced with as much distance and grief as the rest of the people around.

"Y-yes. Xenia, you're here to save Kuzon, right? He said you're very powerful. You will help him, won't you?"

Ana's face seemed forced at this point. It seemed the young girl already knew the answers to her enquiry, but she still fought to hold on to her deluded belief.

"No. I can't help him. None of you can, so don't bother." Ana's expression instantly crumbled when Xenia uttered the words she had been rejecting for so long.

Even though she had disproved Neron and Jared's logical words with some degree of hope—considering Magic was all about doing the impossible—Ana could no longer maintain her position once Xenia gave her verdict.

No one understood Kuzon more than Xenia, and they were both partners. If his Familiar could say there was no hope, then what was her justification for still attempting to find a way?

Ana found herself in a dilemma.

"T-then, why are you... here?" She could barely manage to say.

"Kuzon told me to give something to you as his dying wish. I already went to your previous location, but to think you all came here so fast..."

Jared and Neron exchanged quizzical looks. They both didn't sense anything wrong with their barriers, yet Xenia said she went to their base. It roused their suspicion, and their level of grief didn't affect their wariness.

"Don't worry, I didn't interfere with anything. Now back to topic..." Xenia stretched out her hand, and golden sparks appeared around it.

"Stretch out your hand, Ana."

"W-wha—?"

"Your hand. Stretch them out."

Ana felt confused by the demands of the Familiar, but she reluctantly obeyed her instructions despite recoiling from the shock of Kuzon's demise.

>VWUUUMMMMMM<

A great surge of energy descended on Ana—or more specifically, her ring finger. The concentrated golden particles finally took form and gave the appearance of a ring.

The golden ring, bright and immensely concentrated in energy, sat on Ana's finger, with the girl expressing nothing but surprise and downright confusion.

"Kuzon wanted you to have this... something you can use to remember him by." Xenia nodded lightly.

Her face seemed to be calm, but the Familiar was experiencing just as great a turmoil—if not more—for losing her perfect host.

"Goodbye, then. I will be taking my leave."

Xenia began ascending, slowly vanishing in a golden light. Her gaze rested on a weeping Ana, who was now violently crying as she fell to the ground. Her heart tightened, but a creature such as herself could probably never have apathy towards humans.

Kuzon was simply the exception.

"Wait! May I ask something?" Jared's voice suddenly pierced the air.

Xenia ceased her ascent and curiously stared at the young one who requested an audience. She understood the relationship the blond shared with her dear Kuzon, so she decided to give him a shot.

"What of the Arcanas in Kuzon's possession? And the one with his opponent, Kido? Did you manage to retrieve those?"

His question created a lull around him. Even Ana, who had been crying violently, slowly ceased her weeping and glanced in Jared's direction with the most amazed face—and not the positive kind.

"I understand your reasons, which is why I do not take offence to your question. The answer is no. Kuzon's Arcana and that of his opponent can be considered to have suffered the same fate as their owners. They're gone."

"I-I see. Thank you, Xenia..."

The blazing Familiar nodded her head, and in a burst of blue and golden flames, she vanished from sight. Still, even in her absence, the entire area remained completely silent. It wasn't a calm kind, though.

A rising ambience of unease began manifesting.



"With this information, we know that the enemy won't be able to get their hands on the Arcanas. It's unfortunate that we have lost our chance to obtain two more, but at least this will be—"

>WHOOOOOSSSHH!!!<

Everything happened in a blur, but those who were fast enough could see how Ana lunged at Jared from her position, displaying nothing but murderous rage on her face.

"YOU...!!!"

Whether fortunate or not, Jared caught her slap before she could properly plant it, and he gave her a somewhat surprised look. His eyes rang of genuine confusion—a sharp contrast with Ana's completely pissed-off glare.

"How dare you, Jared... or should I call you Lewis Griffith?"

"..."

A very heavy atmosphere took over, and with everyone bearing witness to this confrontation—or rather, clash—Ana's disdain rose to a frightening new height. Enough for her to finally reveal the churning declaration she had kept within her for too long.

"I utterly despise you..." Her tone was hateful as she directly stared into his eyes with repulsion and utter disgust.

"... Lewis Griffith!"

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 674: Shocking Confession**

"Ana, what are you...?" I was flustered, to say the least.

For one, why was Ana being so aggressive towards me? I only asked the question I did because of our mission, and also because we still had enemies who wanted to bury us.

If I didn't make those inquiries and it turned out the enemy could actually obtain two more Arcanas, it would have made our problems increase.

Besides, having two more of the world-defying cards was something that would only help our cause, not hurt it.

So why...? Why was Ana upset?

I stared into her eyes—so filled with hot tears and bitter rage. This probably had less to do about me and more to do with her grieving. Unfortunately, she completely dragged me into it by the statement she uttered next.

"I utterly despise you, Lewis Griffith!"

The contents of her words were just as shocking to me as the fact that she openly addressed me as my past self.

In a combination of panic and surprise, I looked around me to see Lemi's expression remaining almost the same. If anything, she too was glaring at me.

'Lemi knows too?! Does everyone know, then?' Fortunately, other than Neron and Serah, everyone still seemed ignorant.

They showed surprise, but it wasn't as though Ana was currently a credible source. It wasn't too late for me to change their minds.

'But doing so would paint Ana as a liar to others, and it would also paint me as a liar to Lemi and Ana. Damn it!'

I returned my gaze to Ana's glare. She was gritting her teeth at this point—almost as though she would rip me apart if I let go of her hand.

"Why are you doing this, Ana?" I sighed, letting go of her hand.

My voice was calm, and I expected some degree of sanity between us. Surely, we could both reason together like friends—or perhaps even just humans.

... At least, that was what I hoped.

>WHAP!<

In the end, she still wound up slapping me before walking out on me.

'I could have stopped it, but what's the point? At least this way, she has released some of her grief and frustration on me.'

While I couldn't agree with Ana right now, I understood it was out of the turmoil going on in her heart. Also...

'... As long as I don't directly admit I'm Lewis Griffith, she can't prove it. It would be better if I stayed silent on the topic.'

"Hold on, is it true? You're Lewis Griffith? Like the one who died over five hundred years ago?! My buddy, Lewis?"

Of course, I didn't account for Beruel. How could I have let his existence slip my mind?

The Fairy King drew closer to me, narrowing his gaze as he observed me. I knew I had to do something fast. Else...

"I have no idea what you're—"

"Whoah! It makes sense now that I think about it. You were acting all familiar with me back when we first met, weren't you? And all these things you achieved... it can only be possible if you're not a child. I suppose the most convincing is how you allied the nations and took care of the Demon Army. Lewis Griffith would have done exactly what you did."

Beruel fluttered around me and kept chattering while making his inferences.

At this point, everyone was getting even more curious about whether Ana's statement was indeed more than just an angry rant. I could see it in their eyes.

They wanted the truth.

'Damnit, Beruel. Neron... help?' I glanced in the direction of my mentor, but he gave me a neutral shrug.

In essence, he was telling me "It's your call."

I disliked it when Neron decided to stay out of matters. While I knew I had to make my decisions myself, it was always nice to have guidance.

Especially because I was currently panicking.

'I mean, Maria didn't freak out too much when I told her, right? Maybe it won't be that bad...' I thought to myself.

A major factor I had to consider, however, was that Maria was in love with me—or at least, she professed to be.

And I could tell that she meant it.

'Everyone in this room has varying opinions of me. We're bound together by trust and goodwill. If I admit to hiding something as huge as this, then the results could be catastrophic.

I glanced at Edward, and he was simply looking at me expectantly. I couldn't tell whether he'd be disappointed or not.

What about Ivan? Or Jerry? Ciara seemed like she didn't even care. Maro seemed genuinely stunned.

'Damn it...'

This wasn't the way I thought things would go down. In fact, I was currently of the belief that I should just keep the truth hidden.

However, that would only hurt my case—especially if Ana refused to back down.

"Haa... everyone, Ana is correct." I began in a somewhat tired tone.

To be honest, this really was the best course of action. Neron probably knew it but didn't want to impose the choice on me, so he decided to be neutral.

'If I leave this uncertainty hanging around, it'll hurt the team. Looks like you win, Ana.' I glanced at the short girl, and she was still frowning while crossing her arms.

"In my past life, my name was Lewis Griffith—The Great Sage of the Eastern Kingdom."

I saw some jaws drop. It was expected, but... certain faces twisted in anger.

Lemi, for example, seemed angry. I understood why she would, but... this was getting hard for me.

"I got reincarnated in this time, and in this body. Don't ask me how, because I also have no idea. I have my memories of my past life intact, and I have already told a few people about this."

Neron and Serah casually raised their hands in admittance.

"I never openly admitted to this because, ever since I was young, there has been an organization that has been after my life. From the first week of my birth, even till I was barely a teenager, and then at Ainzlark. I believe this organization to be the Nether Cult, and I was going to tell you all after the threat had been extinguished."

I gave a sad smile while staring at their mixed reactions. Who would have thought that everything would come crashing down so easily?

"That's all."

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 675: Subtle Discord**

Silence.

An unbearable, unwelcome silence permeated the vast auditorium.

Conflicted emotions arose, and the multifarious expressions on the faces of the people present displayed the intensity of the current situation.

Anger. Disappointment. Shock. Indifference. Several reactions leaked from the faces of the listeners of Jared's confession—thus causing an uncomfortable decorum. Sounds of inhalation and exhalation interrupted this silence for some time, but ultimately someone had to speak.

And that person had to hurry.

"S-so, you're actually..."

"I don't understand any of this. It's too shocking."

Different people spoke. Their voices overlapped with one another, but out of everyone who spoke up, there was one who didn't utter a word—of course, other than the young girl who instigated all of this and the couple who weren't surprised by the news.

"I just have one question..." The silent one finally spoke up.

Her black and white hair fluttered behind her as she approached Jared's motionless figure, and a cold gaze was evident on her face. It was difficult to understand how exactly she felt, but it certainly didn't seem positive.

"... Were you really ever going to tell us? Tell me?"

Silence suddenly rang among the plentiful voices, and everyone ceased their comments to listen to Jared's response to the one thing they must have all thought of at least once.

Jared Leonard, now revealed to be Lewis Griffith... had he ever planned on confessing this truth to his friends if Ana hadn't put him in such an awkward position? Would he have denied any familial connection to his own daughter? Would he have kept such a fundamental secret from everyone?

Everyone stared at him for a response to that.

"I..." The young boy uttered.

So far, he had maintained his stance of truth. He was walking on a slippery slope, and any error on his part could be irreparable. With this on his mind, Jared wondered what he could say.

'The truth? Or should I tell them what they want to hear?' He sighed.

In the end, he had to keep treading the path of honesty—considering he had already begun.

"... I'm not sure. I don't know if I would have ever told you recently, but..." Jared remembered how Maria had confirmed the truth due to the Pope's game in The Cathedral.

If it hadn't been for the conditions, he wouldn't have said anything. However, after Maria told him about Ana and Lemi being suspicious of his identity, with both of them being nearly certain of it, he knew he would have to say something soon.

Thus, he changed his mind at that point and decided to reveal everything once the time was right. In essence, his initial position of keeping his secret changed due to the very reason that they were already figuring out the truth.

'How can I, in good conscience, say I would have told them otherwise?'

The previously uncomfortable atmosphere turned heavy as Jared's allies felt just how distant their supposed friend had been this whole time. A man about a century old, who was meant to be dead for over half a millennium, was who they thought was their friend.

Once the reality dawned on them, even the surprised ones slowly moved to the point of disappointment. It was at this point that they all realized one truth that they had been too ignorant to see all along.

Jared Leonard was completely different from them.

It all made sense now. He lived in a completely different world—heck, he even had a completely different life. Was there any hope of him ever seeing them as equals?

As these difficult thoughts ate through their trust for the boy whom they had all unanimously agreed to be their leader, Neron finally stepped forward.

"Okay, that's enough." His voice roused everyone, bringing them out of the mental slump they were experiencing.

"I know what you all must be thinking or feeling. I won't even try to justify Jared's actions or give you reasons to. That's something he must do by himself."

Neron possessed a particular charm that made him unavoidably attractive. Even though everyone was wallowing in their shock or distrust, they could not resist his voice, as well as his modest appearance.

The black-haired man moved to stand beside Jared, making a tired sigh as his face still contained a certain blankness that was akin to boredom—or perhaps even lethargy.

"Let's not forget the reality, alright? I know your egos have been bruised, and your bonds of friendship have been injured, but that changes nothing." Neron's calm voice soothed the tension with ease.

"Changes nothing? You're kidding, ri—?"

"Jared, no matter how much information he has compartmentalized, still possesses the means of leading this team into victory. He has somehow successfully gained the upper hand against the enemy due to his strategy, and despite how you might feel, his interests are for humanity and the allied races."

Ana felt a flush of embarrassment as Neron silenced her. The sharp look he gave Lemi also discouraged her from any further efforts of resistance.

"Whether he didn't tell you about his past life or not is immaterial to our relationship as a team. Besides—and I don't mean to offer this as a defence, but Jared's past identity is a private matter that has no bearing on this mission."

Whether or not his audience accepted his words, Neron managed to make everyone silently consider the meaning behind them.

"If you feel your egos and personal entitlement are far more valuable than the current mission, or the goal of stopping the Nether Cult—whose member did this to Kuzon, who have done worse, and who will do even more terrible things if they get the Arcanas—then you're free to allow your emotions to take control of your dispositions."

Neron's words caused cognitive dissonance within his listeners. On one end, they realized what an unreliable and secretive friend Jared was, however, they also understood what a great and indispensable leader he was.

As things stood, they needed him.

"Jared Leonard or Lewis Griffith... whoever he really is, his knowledge and contribution have made him relevant for our survival."

### **[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)**

#### **Chapter 676: Emergency At Base**

"You all haven't suffered any misfortune due to him keeping his identity a secret, and I'm certain a good number of you also have things you are yet to tell your friends."

Wavering gazes and guilty expressions could be seen on the faces of Neron's listeners. He had said he wouldn't support Jared, but his words clearly indicated that everyone else was being faulty in their current judgement.

"I urge you all to keep your private sentiments as just that... private. Let's focus on the matter at hand and choose the most effective method. Can we do that?"

Silence permeated the hall, and the audience was struck with paralyzing awe and conflicting thoughts. Neron's points were difficult to argue against, and it would be selfish to even think of opposing them.

Thus, the silence.

"I said... can we do that?"

Neron's voice was just as calm, just as sincere, and just as direct as ever. However, something about his voice carried authority this time around. His black eyes and utterly unfazed expression must have contributed to that fact.

"Y-yeah..." The audience had to say.

And so, whether or not it was ideal, the conflict became resolved.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was amazed—no, beyond amazed.

As I watched Neron defend me in front of everyone, a warm feeling coursed through me. Like a small fragment of light, mending my broken heart, I felt true relief and security behind his words.

'Despite him saying he won't support me, he's actually...'

Sure, Neron wasn't actively speaking on my behalf. Rather, he was addressing the audience and more or less talking about them. Still, I could tell that he meant well. He said everything out of goodwill.

'Reminds me of his reaction when I first told him...' An internal smile manifested within me.

Neron had actually shown me the most peculiar response when I made my revelation. According to him, while it had been a bit of a phenomenal revelation, he hadn't been offended by my decision to keep my identity a secret. He also posited that my secrets didn't make him trust me any less, and he couldn't deny my results and observable behaviour.

In his words—

"You are a necessity to this world, Jared. That much is enough for me to tolerate your existence... no, even support it."

Neron's position seemed to stem from an objective standpoint, but it also affected his subjective interaction with me. To be honest, while I knew it was too far-fetched to expect the same reaction from everyone else, I had hoped for something similar.

'I guess Neron is the only exception.'

Sometimes I had to consider who was actually the reincarnated one out of the two of us. Neron's genius and brilliance were almost unreal. However, when I asked, he told me a very straight "Nope."

Apparently, he didn't know one could reincarnate until I told him about it, and he was now interested in the concept. I didn't think Neron would lie about such a thing, considering there would be no benefit in it.

In contrast, if he was a reincarnated soul like myself, it would be more advantageous if we pooled our memories together and gained new knowledge on both Magic and history.

'His intelligence, maturity, and skills are just astounding.' I found myself smiling as I observed him and the effect his words had on everyone.

Neron was right about one thing, though. I had to defend my position myself. I felt bad for not revealing things to them, but my reasons were genuine. The emotional saturation of everyone almost made me forget about that fact.

I simply had to present my case and render my apologies where they were necessary.

'If they still can't bring themselves to forgive me or understand my reasons, then...' With a sigh, I stepped forward and made to give my position on the matter.

"Everyone, I—"

My eyes instantly popped wide open, and so did Neron's. We both stared at each other, as an understanding was established between our senses when they picked up a particular signal.

"Jared..."

"Yeah. I understand." It was unfortunate, but we had to pause the apologies for now.

Something was occurring back in the base. My barrier and that of Neron had picked it up and notified us. Apparently, it was something serious... and powerful.

"We need to head back." I swiftly tried connecting myself to the Automatons I had placed within the premises, but something kept interfering.

"Something is happening back in the base. We need to go."

Despite their shock and distrust, my allies gave positive responses—most simply nodded at my words. Swiftly pulling out the appropriate Spell Card to use, I readied myself for our Mass Teleport.

"Head on without me. I need to check out my samples and gather them. They're very important to my work... and our deal." Beruel glanced in Ana's direction and nodded.

"That's true. I'm coming with you to help." The girl responded, almost as though relieved that Beruel had raised the topic.

"You sure?"

"Definitely. They can leave without us. Besides, I still haven't completely explored this base of yours."

"Well..."

I watched the exchange between the two, and Beruel glanced in my direction—most likely so I could give my input.

"It's fine. Just take care of yourselves. Here." I threw two Spell Cards at the two of them. "They're laced with Aether, so you can use them even with interference."

Ana might not have completely understood the implications behind my statement, but I was certain Beruel did. He was a member of the Cult, after all.

"Thank you, Lewis." The Fairy King said with a smile and a light nod.



Something about his tone and expression felt slightly different from the haughty man I remembered. I mean, Beruel hadn't really been harsh towards me, but he hadn't been completely nice either. He had always believed himself to be superior, and I'd had to agree with him on that in order to get his help during the war—whether through pity or pride.

But now, he seemed to have changed.

'Old age, maybe?'

"I still need an explanation concerning your relationship with the Cult, as well as your current motive. For now, though, I'll choose to trust you." I nodded at him, and he nodded in agreement.

Thankfully, he knew where we both stood.

"Alright, then. We'll see each other soon."

Space warbled, and within moments we were warped to our destination—the base.

[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

**Chapter 677: Aftermath Of Grief**

>VWUUUUUUSSSSHHHH<

Space warped and the group vanished to their destination, leaving Ana and Beruel behind. The two remained transfixed until they were certain the team had completely disappeared.

"Huu... finally." Ana sighed with relief.

It seemed the tension had been too much for her, and she now felt capable of enjoying the less crowded area.

Lemi had even offered to stay with her, but Ana needed this alone time for herself. She craved it.

"I'll leave you here with the statue. I'll go get my things." Beruel's voice woke her from her meditative silence.

"N-no, I could still come with you."

"It's alright. I understand why you chose to stay behind. Do what you must. I'll be back once I'm done packing everything. If you still want a tour by then, I'll happily oblige."

Ana's face displayed surprise. She never expected Beruel to be so considerate, and that emotion of shock slowly transformed into gratitude.

"Thank you." She nodded with a soft, nearly teary smile.

"No problem." With that, the Fairy King flew off.

As he distanced himself from Ana, he could already hear the sobs and embarrassing cries of pain and sadness. He, who had lost all of his loyal subordinates, understood the pain she was going through—perhaps even more than most.

The poor girl had to know the truth—that she wouldn't see the one she loved again. He was gone. Truly dead! Beruel could sympathize with that, at least. After all, everyone who had sworn personal loyalty and devotion to him, even his most loyal subordinate, was no more.

"A sad fate indeed. Young Midas... look what you've caused."

The Fairy King knew full well that if all three of them had faced Kido, they would all be dead by now. Kuzon had actually sacrificed his life so they didn't have to. He knew all that, and yet...

"... Why does it still irk me?"

Beruel couldn't answer this question, nor could he resolve the complicated feeling he had towards Kuzon. However, one thing was for sure, though.

'I'm no longer their enemy...'

He knew it would take some time to convince Jared—or rather, Lewis—and everyone else that he was done with the Nether Cult, but Beruel strangely felt compelled to do it.

'To think Lewis is still alive in this world, though...' He smiled as he flew past the golden hallway and approached his storage space, hoping everything was still intact.

'He probably placed an undetectable tracker on me, as well as a listening device. That sly Lewis.'

Still, the Fairy King understood his previous friend's skepticism. They indeed had much to discuss, but he had to focus on the immediate matters first.

'The samples of my subordinates. I need them.'

>WHOOOSSSSHHH<

Beruel quickened his pace, finding himself panicking for one major reason. With everything around him irreversibly turned into gold, he feared that the same fate had befallen his samples. In fact, he had every reason to believe so.

'No... please no!'

If they had all been petrified, the deal would have been for nothing. He too would have to be prepared to part with any hope of his subordinates being revived. The very thought made his heart ache ceaselessly.

Fortunately, his fears were for naught.

"T-this is...?" Beruel's eyes widened with indescribable surprise the moment he arrived at the vast storage room.

His eyes took in everything around him, as well as the strange occurrence that happened at the end of the hallway and on the ground leading to the storage area.

"The gold... the petrification... it stopped just before it spread inside here." Beruel's voice shook as he spoke.

What could this mean? It was too great a coincidence for him to simply conclude that it had happened by mere chance. The gold literally stopped before it reached the storage that contained several tubes and vats of organic material.

After watching in silence for so long, Beruel could only arrive at a single conclusion.

"Young Midas... you did this, didn't you?"

The old fairy didn't know how to express his thoughts in words. His complicated emotions and thoughts concerning Kuzon slowly began to unravel, and once the knots became untangled, the Fairy King nodded in both respect and gratitude.

"Thank you... Kuzon. Thank you so much."

\*

\*

\*

After sobbing and crying and sobbing, over and over again, Ana finally stopped.

Her eyes were swollen and irritated, and a few droplets of tears still cascaded down her face, but she was done with her throes of sorrow.

Her eyes were on the golden statue of the despicable enemy that caused Kuzon's death. This being was responsible for taking him away from her, and yet...

'I can't bring myself to stare at it with disgust.' Kuzon's body was within the statue, after all.

As she thought of the statue, Ana remembered the numerous memories she had with Kuzon, whether it was when they had been at Ainzlark, or even after. His smile, his jokes, his casual aura... his confidence.

"I... I..." Ana found her voice trembling as she broke into sobs once more.

"I should have... I s-should have told y-you how I really felt."

Her heart pounded, and it hurt so much. The feelings she had kept bottled up for too long due to her series of disappointments... they were finally finding expression. It was too late, but the dam was too full to be contained any longer.

"I should have told you how much I love you!"

Her voice echoed in the large auditorium, responded to by merely echoes. She was all alone, kneeling before an inanimate statue—the very definition of loneliness.

"I... I love you..." More sobs cracked her voice as she felt the golden ring on her finger.

After looking at its smooth surface and caressing it for so long, Ana couldn't deny the feelings she had for him... and the one he had for her.

"I promise you. I promise... I'll bring you back."

She didn't know how yet. She didn't understand the concept or the method. However, Ana said this with all of her conviction and all of her heart.

She would improve her knowledge of Aether. She would use everything at her disposal, and she would tirelessly do everything possible... everything for her grand cause.

Her new purpose.

"No matter what, Kuzon... I'll bring you back!"

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 678: A Friend's Return**

"Looks like we made it back in time." I murmured, proceeding from the blue portal I created.

Every other member of the team stepped out as well, with Neron directly behind me. We looked around us and found nothing to be in any form of jeopardy. The barrier was still active, and the landscape had been preserved.

'I can reconnect to my Automatons now!' My eyes widened and I started to quicken my pace.

My biggest fear had been that the enemy had attacked this place. The sudden burst of energy that the barrier recorded didn't seem like a fluke. Had we been compromised? Was our location unsafe? These questions were relevant, but one was even more so.

'Is Aloe safe?'

At the thought of this, I swept through the area with my senses and made my way towards the base building.

'This feeling... An Arcana?!' My eyes widened, and I swiftly teleported myself and everyone around me into the base itself so as not to waste any more time.

>WHOOOOSSSHHH<

The moment we appeared, we all glanced in the direction of Aloe's enchanted bed. We had worried looks—at least, I was certain I did—but who would have thought...

"A-Aloe...?"

... We would see the sleeping beauty now seated upright and staring at us.

Aloe's blond hair seemed golden as it flowed down to her shoulders and fluttered in the soft breeze. Her brilliant eyes caught my attention, and as we gawked at her, she also stared at us with an expression of surprise.

"Jared... everyone..." Her voice was calm and gentle.

A warm smile spread all over her face, and I could tell how happy she was to see us. However, what was even more amazing, was what she held in her hands as she looked in our direction.

"Is that...?" I murmured, pointing at the card in her grasp.

Aloe shifted her gaze to the object she was holding—which was obviously an Arcana—nodding as she smiled more softly.

"Yeah. It's called [The Moon]. I met its owner in my dream, and she actually gave it to me."

Perhaps Aloe was tired, considering how she hadn't been conscious for some time. Besides, her tone and expression told me she wasn't exactly in top form.

"It's good to see you safe and sound, Aloe. I'm so sorry I resorted to such a reckless plan." Maro stepped forward and bowed his head to the still staring lady.

"A-ah, Maro, it's alright. We did what we had to do to win the fight, right?"

As expected, Aloe remained kind hearted as she accepted Maro's apologies, and the welcome of everyone else.

Everyone except—

"What's wrong, Asa? You won't welcome me back?" Aloe smiled sweetly at the boy.

I had also noticed the pouty Beast folk who chose not to say anything to Aloe. Rather, he simply stood still and stared at her with some sort of dazed expression on his face.

"You... you're not..." He murmured.

Everyone in the room paused in welcoming Aloe back from the realm of unconsciousness, and instead focused on Asa, and the kind of reaction he was having.

At the very least, no one expected it.

"... You're not Aloe!!!" He yelled; with almost all the strength he could muster.

His reaction shocked all of us, and I personally stared at him in surprise. If anyone would be happy about Aloe's return, it would be Asa, right?

Yet, why was he being this way.

'Perhaps he's right.' I thought to myself.

Could it be possible that we were somehow underestimating the miracle that brought her out of an unidentified coma?

Could we be ignoring the suspicious convenience of it that Aloe managed to be awake and with an Arcana?

Could we also be ignoring the fact that Aloe was in possession of an Arcana out of thin air.

'So, I should indeed remain critical...' However, I had run as many tests as I could during my brief exchange with Aloe, of which I learned that she was perfectly normal.

'It seems to be her.' I glanced in Neron's direction to hear his opinion on the matter.

His nod and shrug showed that he agreed with my observation—probably because his own bore the same results.

'I admit that it's possible she isn't the same Aloe as before. I trust my friends, though.' There were two things I wanted achieve with Aloe's warm welcome.

'First, was to get as much information as possible, and the second is to closely monitor her.' By doing these things, I was giving Aloe the benefit of the doubt.

Still, I hoped this blond and beautiful lady before me was the genuine one, and I was certain others felt the same way.

"Asa, wait!"

It seemed the young Beast folk couldn't take it anymore as he sped away from our gathering.

He ran out of the room and past the hallway—most likely heading outside for the fresh air. I heard his footsteps grow duller and fainter, before returning my gaze to Aloe.

"Did you do something to him?!" I asked, cocking my head.

She shook her head and sighed. Her expressions definitely counted as the most worried or devastated.

"I'm just as confused as you... as well as a little hurt that he wouldn't even greet me."

I could tell from Aloe's sighs that her exhaustion wasn't just physical any longer.

"Why don't you rest your body, first? There's much to do, and a lot to discuss." The moment I told her, she eyed me with curiosity, but I was determined to let her rest.

"Relax." I nodded, leaving her in the room along with my automatons as guards.

The Team Members once again expressed how happy they were to see her. It was definitely a happy moment for everyone.

A moment I didn't want to interrupt.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Haa..." Aloe plopped down on her bed, tired of everything she'd had to go through simply because she woke up

As she stared at the ceiling, watching the pure and simple design on it, she wondered if they would all understand her reasons for taking so long to wake up, as well as taking over someone else's body.

'That Asa is very perceptive...' She knew she had to be wary of him.

Even Jared didn't completely trust her, so had her work cut out for her.

'I'm sorry everyone. You all seem like wonderful people. Aloe is really fortunate to have people like you...'

Still, she knew her mission wasn't going to be stopped. She had to complete it at all costs!

'Please forgive me, Aloe. But this is something I have to do.'

\*

## [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

### **Chapter 679: Preparation For The Inevitable**

Tension

Tense silence filled the room, causing even me to feel a little—no, quite a good amount of—discomfort.

I was standing in front of an audience whose trust I had most likely lost, after all.

"I want to officially congratulate everyone for a job well done."

We were currently in the large plains just outside our base. I chose this spot because of how free the area was.

Unfortunately, it did nothing to relieve the tension that was already built up.

A day had passed since Aloe awoke from her comatose state, and she was perfectly sound at the moment. She—as well as everyone else—was seated on the plain, staring at me as I made my address.

Edward, Ana, Beruel, Ivan, Jerry, Ciara, Aloe, Asa, Maro, Neron, Serah; my allies awaited my voice... and I had to deliver.

"We currently have thirteen Arcanas in our possession. One is with Jane Ursula, one is with Elrich Lenderwale, and the others are divided among you. And as it currently stands, we have the superior number."

I glanced in Beruel's direction and smiled at him. It really was good to see him as a part of our team—though I had to thank Ana and Kuzon for their efforts in achieving it.

It had been a day since Kuzon's death and her express display of disgust towards me. We hadn't talked since then, and I could tell that she was still plenty upset.

'It's best I leave her alone. In fact...'

From the gaze of everyone around me, it was pretty clear how very skeptical they were going to be towards me.

'I told Aloe after she rested up yesterday, and she was also very surprised—well, more intrigued than surprised...'

Thankfully, Aloe wasn't annoyed. In fact, she was curious and wanted me to tell her more. It felt a bit too much, but I suppose her enthusiasm was justified.

In essence, other than some exceptions, the members of the team weren't completely trusting towards me.

And that brought about tension.

'Just do what you have to do, Jared. You don't require validation to achieve the goal that is required.'

In essence, I couldn't waste my time worrying about my emotional needs, especially now that our plan had reached such a precipice.

"However, that doesn't mean we have won the battle yet. Obtaining the Arcana was simply a preventive measure. It was executed so that the Nether Cult wouldn't take the Arcanas themselves."

I couldn't have known that the plan would be achieved with such relative ease. I was certain that we would encounter more difficulty, but the team was fortunate to have survived the trials of the Labyrinths and in obtaining our prize.

"Now that we possess the majority of the Arcanas, it's only to be expected that they'll choose to strike our premises. If they still do not have any idea about our location, then they will invade the Eastern Kingdom—perhaps even the allied nations."

A wounded animal was far more deadly than a perfectly healthy one. While the latter would be more sedentary due to satisfaction, the former would be desperate.

"We've wounded the cause of the Cult. It's only inevitable that they strike."

According to the info I received from Beruel, there were currently three dangerous members of the Cult—of course, not counting their leader.

"The First Seat is said to be unstoppable. As we saw in the Beast folk Nation, he possesses tremendous power." I declared.

I had to accord respect to the man whom even Neron wasn't sure of beating. Besides, Beruel wasn't one who was fond of exaggerating the abilities of others over his own, but even he testified to the power of the First Seat—enough to make me wonder.

"With Kido dead, that leaves the Third Seat. She's a Succubus—a rare Crimson Demon who is said to be completely immortal and indestructible."

According to Beruel, she was as tenacious as a cockroach, and none of his abilities worked on her. Images of Karlia popped into my mind when he described her, but when I asked for the Succubus' name, Beruel said he didn't remember.

'I even mentioned Karlia, but he didn't recognize that name. Just how terrible is his memory?' Perhaps it had something to do with his view on women.

Fortunately, it seemed he was changing his views a little.

Well, names weren't relevant. As long as we had the knowledge of their abilities and the way they operated, it would be fine.

I refused to believe Karlia was a member of the Cult, and since there wasn't enough proof to conclude on that, I decided to focus on the important aspects of the Nether Cult.

"The final member to be wary of is the Maiden in White—the assistant of the Cult Leader."

According to Beruel, she was very strong... as well as old. She was the one that invited him to join the Nether Cult, and after asking around he found out that it had been the same for every Cult Member.

Apparently, she had been the one managing the affairs of the Cult, and they never physically met the Cult Leader until the recent years.



In contrast, this Maiden in White was always there, and her presence was something that even Beruel found to be scary.

"She can't be human." Was his final comment on the maiden.

Also, as expected, he didn't know her name.

'It can't be Lilith, right? No way...!' The image of an old acquaintance flashed in my mind.

Lilith's choice of outfit didn't fit Beruel's description, and it didn't seem like she would be a part of a cult.

However, it had been centuries since I last saw her.

I couldn't fall into the pit of assumption.

"We also have Stefan, Legris, and the Cult Leader—all of whom are very dangerous people."

I had no idea what the Cult Leader could do, and neither did Beruel. However, if the three most dangerous members of the Cult could be in support of him and act in subordination to him, then he had to be very powerful.

'I won't have any problem with Stefan, but Legris... now that's an issue.' My thoughts trailed.

"In any case, I just want to implore us to be more careful and prepare for the backlash of our actions. We'll need to act soon too."

I nodded at my audience, clearing my throat as I prepared the last portion of my speech.

"I'll be leaving for the Capital now. There are a few things that need to be resolved.

### **[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)**

#### **Chapter 680: Return To The Capital**

There were a couple of reasons behind my departure.

One was obviously the high tension that was going on among everyone. The atmosphere of distrust was heavy, and even though I had rendered an apology, that simply wouldn't suffice at this point.

'I would have to reconnect with them on an emotional level. Unfortunately, there's no time for that now.'

The best thing I could currently do was give everyone some space. If I removed myself from the equation, the heavy atmosphere would lighten—if only a little. Besides...

... I had other reasons.

'The Netherlore Family trial should be concluding. I'll get to see Maria soon, then...!' I had no idea why my heart was racing in excitement.

Or perhaps I did, but simply chose to feign ignorance.

'In any case, I'll need to speak with Elrich Lendertwale, as well as the king. Things have gotten too serious not to include them.'

I couldn't see the future, but I could at least predict it. What our Kingdom, and not just ours, would have to face eventually, needed time to be prepared for. The Nether Cult had enough influence, resources, and willingness to plunge the Eastern Kingdom and the Demon Race into war—just so they could have a smokescreen for their activities.

I could only imagine what lengths they would go to in order to eliminate us and obtain the majority of the Arcanas.

'Still, we have more Arcanas, which gives us the advantage. The problem is that we're too inexperienced to wield them. Arcanas are difficult to control. It took me years to learn the ones I know. I couldn't even master [The Hermit], and my control over the others is simply due to learning their sequence and adapting them into my Original Magic.'

The reason I could use the [Strength] Arcana so efficiently was because it was pretty much natural to use. Its process was simple, and I was sincerely grateful to Merlin for making it less difficult than I imagined.

'The Labyrinth was the toughest part for his own Arcana.' Since there were different creators for the different Arcanas, I had to expect variations.

In essence... I had to avoid generalizations.

'That's enough thinking. It's time to go.'

>VWUUUSSSHHH<

Space warped around me, and I began making my exit from the crowd. My gaze met Neron's, and he nodded calmly at me.

'As long as he's here, it's going to be fine.' With that thought echoing in my mind, I vanished.

\*\*\*\*\*

"It's finally over..." Maria heaved a sigh as she exited a large courthouse.

It was a bright and sunny day in the Capital, yet the girl's weary expression could give everyone the wrong impression. It wasn't that she was sad, or cold, or tired. Perhaps one could say that she was simply bored.

To be honest, she had been expecting the trial of her rival family to go down more smoothly, but the poor girl hadn't—for once in her life—experienced a true trial before now.

The drawn-out process, the back and forth, the uncovering of even more atrocities of the Netherlore Household, the culmination of evidence, the exchange of rhetorics, and at long last... the sentencing.

'I didn't know justice could be so complicated.' Another sigh escaped her lips.

Jared placed her in the capital for both personal and official reasons, so she knew it was an unavoidable responsibility. Still, it didn't make her feel less inclined to take any more of the boredom that had shrouded her for the past couple days.

'Watching them get sentenced was satisfying, though.' Maria smiled.

The Netherlore Family had been conducting several atrocious experiments—including human ones. They had been exploring an element called 'Nether', supposedly discovered by their first patriarch who founded the Netherlore branch after succeeding from the Helmsworth family.

Not only were the experiments unauthorized by the crown, but they were also inhumane and dangerous. For example, the Nether Beast that attacked Maria when she was little, and then the one Jared had killed. It was pretty obvious that they were doomed after their activities were found out.

'Jared really did an amazing job...' Maria forgot all about her boredom once she pictured the boy who made all of this possible.

A smile slowly formed on her face as she walked down the large stairs of the exterior courthouse and made to return to the Royal Palace to inform her family of the conclusion of the case—as well as the announcement of her return to the team.

Her silver hair fluttered elegantly with the wind, and her bright blue eyes captured the bright sky. She was feeling rather energetic now. If the young girl was being honest with herself, she knew the reason for this change of emotions.

Maria couldn't wait to see Jared, as well as the others.

"I miss him so much, and—"

"Oh? Miss who?" A voice suddenly emerged behind Maria, causing the young girl to leap in surprise.

"Eeep!"

She swiftly twisted her body in mid-air and turned to face the owner of the voice. Her body was still excited from the shock, thus making her eyes widen even more the moment they captured the one responsible.

"J-Jared?!" Maria exclaimed.

The young, blond boy was standing and smiling at the flustered Maria. He had a gentle smile and a calm demeanour, and with both hands in his pocket, he coolly expressed his satisfaction at Maria's lost composure.

"You really should be more vigilant. You wouldn't want to be caught off-guard, now would you?" He grinned.

"Y-you—!" Maria rushed towards him, as she became red all over her face and her brows twitched in both annoyance and relief.

"It's you! What am I supposed to do against that?" By the time she reached him, they were mere inches from each other.

Her fierce blue eyes met his dark yellow ones, and they both stared at each other for a while.

"You look good. How did the proceeding go?" Jared finally broke the awkward silence.

Apparently, Maria didn't seem to be too interested in doing so.

"Was the verdict to your satisfaction?" Even with these questions, Maria did not respond.

Jared began to break into a nervous sweat. The young girl just kept looking at him without saying a single word in response to his questions.

'Is she angry? In a bad mood? Were things that bad? Not you too!' Were the most likely thoughts that were going on in Jared's head as he stared at Maria.

"You know..." Maria drew closer to Jared.

Their faces were apart by only a few centimeters—enough to make anyone lose their nerve. Jared's previously calm face seemed to slowly display shades of pink, while Maria's beautiful one was pretty much saturated by her blushing.

"... I could kiss you so easily right now."

Jared's eyes popped wide open as he stared at Maria's daring smile. Her fierce blue eyes showed that she wasn't kidding, and her track record made it pretty obvious that she could indeed do something of the sort.

Stuck in a confrontation he hadn't planned or predicted, Jared couldn't help but utter the only words his lips could release before they were once again smushed.

"W-wha...?!"