

A Familiar Disaster

Megumin was heading out of Axel after yet another fruitless day of trying to find a Party that would take her. Not that she was discouraged! She was the great Arch Wizard of Explosions! Within her veins flowed the power of the Crimson Demons! She was certain that out there she would one day find someone who appreciated and understood Explosion magic the same way she did! And in the meantime, she had her daily spellcasting practice to look forward to. Why even now, she could feel the power roiling in her veins, threatening to burst out and leave her body a lifeless cinder if she did not cast her spell and calm her burning soul!

Finding herself an empty clearing, the great Megumin of the Crimson Demons channeled her infinite power through her mighty magician's staff and gave voice to the song in her heart! **"From the darkest depths of loneliness, burst forth the burning passion! The passion which consumes all, leaving naught but ash! *Explosion!*"**

Some nearby adventurers heard the cataclysmic blast that turned an otherwise serviceable field into a glowing crater, but all they did was shake their heads. "It's that time of day isn't it? The crazy mage is at it again."

The familiar lassitude of mana exhaustion overcoming her body, Megumin let herself fall back to the ground. But instead of landing on the soft patch of grass she had expressly picked out for the purpose, she found herself falling through a green ringed portal and into a strange, unfamiliar place.

Normally Megumin would find this more exciting, if not worrisome. But right now she was both helpless and filled with the supreme calm that always descended on her once she exhausted her mana, so the best she could muster was some mild curiosity at this surprising occurrence. Besides, when she did emerge from the dark tunnel and into a new location, her appearance seemed to coincide with a fairly large explosion, one sadly not caused by her. Megumin chose to take this as a good omen.

When the smoke cleared from her attempt at the Springtime Familiar Summoning Ritual, Louise Francois le Blanc de la Valliere was overjoyed! Because there, visible through the fading smoke, was a shape lying low to the ground! Was it a snake? An alligator? Neither were exactly her preferred choice for familiar, but after spending her entire first year at the Tristain Academy for Magic explosively botching every single spell she attempted, Louise would even be willing to accept an overgrown weasel!

As a quick wind spell from Professor Colbert dissipated the last of the haze, Louise felt her heart plummet. Lying on the ground staring up at the sky was an ordinary looking brown-haired young girl. Her yellow-trimmed red dress and brown cloak looked normal enough, but lying next to her was a strange looking staff and a very peculiar hat - black, pointed, with two large red buttons placed above the stitched lining giving it an impression of a toothy grin.

The girl turned her head to look at Louise, revealing eyes of an unusual crimson shade. But other than that, there was nothing unusual about her. Even her clothes and very odd hat were made from everyday materials. Naturally, it was that infuriating Kirche von Zerbst that gave voice to what Louise was secretly dreading, "Did... did the Zero end up summoning a commoner girl? Hah, that's perfect, a useless familiar for a useless mage!"

At first Louise tried to plead with Professor Colbert to let her summon new familiar, but the professor was adamant. One summoning only, this was a sacred law that none may break unless their first familiar died. It didn't help that some of the other students pointed how humans, even commoners, had never been summoned before, and maybe the girl was just some farm girl Louise had bribed to make it look like she had summoned something instead of botching the spell as usual. Face burning with humiliation, Louise turned to her 'familiar' to finish the binding ritual.

By this time, the girl had taken hold of her staff and had placed her hat back on her head, but was still sitting on the ground. Scoffing, Louise barked, "You! Commoner! Stand up already so we can get this over with!" All she got in response was a stream of nonsense syllables.

"Oh Brimir, you can't even speak Tristanian. Look, I... need... you... to.... stand...up."

Amazingly, speaking slowly and loudly accompanied by hand gestures didn't work. Louise just got more nonsense words before the girl offered her up her hand.

"What... I'm not going to pick you up! Pick yourself up!"

The girl raised a stoic eyebrow while keeping her hand extended. A discreet cough from Professor Colbert reminded Louise that the longer this lasted the bigger a fool she looked. Snarling she grabbed the girl's hand and dragged her to her feet. Once the girl was upright, Louise let her go and leaned forward to give her a quick peck on the cheek that would seal the familiar bond. Unfortunately for Louise, Megumin had yet to recover from her mana exhaustion. So the minute she let her go, Megumin started tipping forward, turning a discreet peck into a brief liplock.

Louise's reaction was instant, panicked flailing sending her familiar skidding several feet along the ground, once more flat on her back. Behind her she could hear Zerbst's obnoxious catcalling. "Zero, I always thought you were a cold fish! Way to prove me wrong! The fire, the passion, ah my heart swoons!"

Louise turned around to fire a furious diatribe, but was interrupted by a young girl's voice speaking in a dust dry tone, "I agree, that was most inappropriate. Both the kissing and throwing me around like that. Do you treat all your guests that way?"

Louise could feel her sanity starting to unravel as she turned her fury on her familiar. "You! Familiar! You speak Tristanian?! Then why were you pretending otherwise?"

"Ah, I have no idea what that is. You all just started making sense all of a sudden. I think it might have something to do with this." The familiar waved around her left hand, displaying a runic design that had appeared on the back. "Can someone please explain what all this is about?"

"Allow me," spoke up Professor Colbert. "You, young lady, are at the Tristanian Academy of Magic, and I am Professor Jean Colbert. You have just been summoned by one of our students in the sacred Springtime Familiar Summoning Ritual. Those marks on your hand are your familiar runes, signifying your bond with your master, and as you surmised, probably the reason you can now speak our language."

The girl frowned at this. "And what if I don't want to be a familiar? Can't you just send me back?"

"I am afraid not. The summoning ritual is irreversible, and the familiar bond can only be broken by death."

"I see. Do you kidnap people like this often?"

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, you are in fact the first human summoned as a familiar in recorded history! Also, I don't think your situation is as bad as you think. Miss Valliere is the daughter of some of our foremost nobles, being her familiar can be quite an honor."

"That's right!" broke in Louise. "I am Louis Francois le Blanc de la Valliere, third daughter of the Duc de la Valliere! So show some respect!"

Alas for Louise, her attempts to impress her familiar were summarily destroyed once more by Kirche von Zerst, who had strolled up to join them. "Yeah, show some respect for Louise the Zero, familiar! She is unique in all of the academy as the only mage who has never correctly cast a spell! Well, I suppose she has cast one spell properly now that you're here. Although even there she managed to be a Zero, summoning a commoner!"

"Shut up, Zerst! No one asked you!" screeched Louise.

"Why darling, I - " Zerst's rebuttal was cut off by a stern "Ahem!" from Colbert. "A little more decorum please ladies, as befitting your station." Turning his attention back to the still prone girl, he said, "I'm afraid we have yet to be introduced. May I help you up, Miss...?"

"Megumin. Ah, but I'm afraid I can't stand. I'm still too tired."

"Oh my, were you injured somewhere? I shall take you to the infirmary immediately!"

"No need. I am just tired. All I need is a bit of rest."

"Well at least let me Levitate you to a proper bed," said Colbert, waving his staff and lifting the girl off the ground with a Levitate spell.

"Oh, you are too kind Professor."

"Do not mention it, Miss Megumin. Miss Valliere, you have prepared quarters for your familiar, I trust?"

"I... have a place in my room..."

"Excellent, then let us proceed. Miss Zerst, I trust you have your own duties to see to?"

Zerst took the hint, but not before delivering a parting shot, "A familiar who is not only a commoner but the laziest commoner in all Halkegenia. You've really outdone yourself, Zero."

Louise was not happy. When they had gotten to her room last evening, Professor Colbert had declared the straw pile completely unfit for a young lady - never mind that as a commoner Megumin had probably slept on worse. Then he'd given Louise a stern look as if it was *her* fault her familiar was some insolent commoner instead of a proper animal or magical creature like everyone else's! And as a last insult, the Professor had insisted on letting the filthy commoner rest on *her* bed while they waited for a proper cot to be brought in to replace the straw.

By the time the cot had been placed and the professor had left, Megumin had started moving around again. Louise had tried to get some work out of her by getting Megumin to undress her and do her laundry, but that had led to all sorts of drama. Megumin had blushed furiously, mumbled something about kissing and undressing and used panties, and then ended up calling Louise a pervert and hiding under her blankets.

It had taken a minute for Louise to parse the insane logic behind Megumin's accusation, and by then she was just *done* with this rude, nasty, lazy, incorrigible *BRAT!* Louise had been briefly tempted to pull out the riding crop her older sister had sent her for dealing with unruly familiars, but she desisted. First, because she had been feeling tired and wanted to sleep herself. Second, she wouldn't put it past the little brat to go running to Colbert, and then she'd be in trouble for 'mistreating a lady' as if the commoner was any such thing!

That had been yesterday. Today was the day that classes were cancelled so everyone could bond with their familiars. At first, Louise had planned to leave Megumin to her own devices and spend the day in the library. However, after two people stopped to ask her if she had really bribed a commoner to pretend to be her familiar (and another three had asked if her familiar had run away) she'd gone back to her room, dragged the brat out of the bed, then forced the brat to follow her out into the grounds. At least this way Louise could prove she had a familiar, no matter how worthless.

Of course, this meant she had to deal with Megumin. After just a few minutes aimlessly wandering the grounds, Megumin had casually asked, "You're pretty unpopular aren't you?"

"Shut up! What does a commoner like you know?!"

"I know what I heard. Do you really botch every spell you try?" After getting only a seething silence in response, Megumin continued, "Look, it's obviously a problem with your stats. Do you have an adventurer card?"

"Stats? And what is an adventurer card?"

"Figures. That explains why you're trying to class into Magician without the correct stats. You should really get that checked out before you waste any more time."

Louise stopped walking and turned around to face her familiar. "What, in Brimir's holy name, are *stats*? And why do they matter for magic?!"

"Good grief, what does this fancy school of yours teach? It's obvious from what I've seen you people are trying to class into some kind of Magician job, and for that you need two things - a decent Intelligence and high Magic Power. If you had an adventurer card you could simple read off your stats, but since you don't we'll have to figure out the problem with your spellcasting another way."

"Wait what do YOU know about spellcasting?"

"I know that if you're having trouble learning a spell, then that means your intelligence is not up to the task. If your spell is fizzling, then it means your magic power is too low. So, how exactly are your spells failing? Are you having trouble understanding them, or powering them?"

"Neither! I have the best grades in magic theory! And my spells don't fizzle! They explode!"

"...What?"

"It's true. That's why they call me Zero, all right? It's because every spell I've ever tried has ended in an explosion!"

"Did you say... explosion?"

Louise had to jerk a step back at Megumin's sudden invasion of her personal space. "Um... yes?" On hearing this, Megumin turned around and started muttering and shaking her head. "Megumin, what's wrong?"

"What's wrong? What's wrong? What's wrong with this school?! They have in you the single most talented magician I've ever met, with a natural affinity for the greatest type of magic in the world, and they have you wasting time trying to learn parlor tricks!"

"What... are you saying you know my element?"

"It is obvious! Your natural element is Explosion!"

"That makes no sense!"

"That's because this primitive land is still wallowing in ignorance of the greatest secret of magic! So listen closely, while I, the Archwizard Megumin, greatest spellcaster of the Crimson Demons, educate you! The secret is this: there are many types of magic in the world, but there is one that stands supreme! One spell which stands above all! And that spell is Explosion! Any magician is blessed if she

can cast this most sublime of spells! For it is the great universal truth - there is no problem in the world that cannot be solved by a sufficiently large Explosion!"

For a long moment Louise could only stare at the dramatic pose the crazy girl had struck. Then she scoffed, "I should have known better than to expect sense out of you! What does a commoner know of magic, anyway?"

"What does my being a commoner have to do with magic?"

"Are you saying you can actually cast magic?"

"Of course I can!" Megumin was now waving her weird staff in front of Louise. "Why do you think I'm carrying a wizard's staff around?"

"You're not just a commoner, but crazy! Give me that!" Louise grabbed the staff out of Megumin's hand, then froze. "Wait... I can feel my magic reacting to this.... this is a magical focus!"

"Of course it is!" exclaimed Megumin, snatching back her staff. "What did you think it was, a walking stick?!"

"Oh Brimir in heaven, can you really do magic?"

"Yes! Unlike you, apparently!"

Louise didn't even notice the insult, she was too busy hyperventilating. "Oh Brimir, I kidnapped a foreign noble! I'm dead! Mother is going to kill me! And then she'll hand what's left of me to the Crown to be executed!"

"What on earth are you on about now? What noble? The Crimson Demon clan is highly respected, but that doesn't make me noble!"

"But... it is written in the words of Brimir that magic is the mark of nobility, a sign of our divine right to rule!"

"Wait, are you saying in your religion anyone with magical skill gets to be a noble? I guess that explains why everyone here wants to class into Magician then. Say, will I get to be a noble if I convert?"

"You... you're not a follower of Brimir?"

"Never heard of him. Look, if this religion comes with a great perk like instant nobility for casters, I'll definitely consider signing on. But right now we need to focus on what's important - you, and the supreme magic that is Explosion!"

"So... what are you saying? That the only magic I can cast is Explosion which is why all my spells explode?"

"Perhaps. There is only one way to test it. Tell me Louise, have you ever really, truly *tried* to blow something up?"

"No."

"As I thought! Well, no time like the present! Pick a target and let's go! How about that tower over there?"

"You can't aim at a tower! Even if the Void Tower is not in use!"

"Oh Louise, don't you understand? It's all well and good to blow up an empty field. But to really *feel* it, you need something thick and hard that you can really pound! This is your first time, it needs to be special!"

Louise was feeling a bit uncomfortable at Megumin's word choices, but the idea had been planted in her head. All the towers of the Academy were masterpieces of magical reinforcement, even a square mage like her mother could barely scratch one. How much damage could she and a young girl really do? They'd be lucky to knock some dust off! At worst they'd get yelled at a bit. There was one problem though. "I don't know any chants for an explosion spell..."

"That's fine, we'll do this together! Just repeat after me! Ready?... **From the heart of the greatest truth of magic, and its sweetest lies, I call it forth! The alpha and the omega! The primal force that created the universe! I now call upon you, to return the undeserving to the cosmic dust from whence we came! Explosion!**"

What no one knew was that Louise was a Void mage. Void spells have a natural tendency to eat away spells of other elements. Louise' spell hit a fraction of a second before Megumin's, just long enough to temporarily disrupt every protective enchantment on the structure. When Megumin's Explosion hit, the Void Tower simply ceased to exist, along with several dozen yards of surrounding wall. Debris flew every which way, miraculously hurting no one. One ten-ton piece did go on to hit the Fire Tower with sufficient force to cause it to be evacuated for weeks as it was repaired.

"Oh no, no, no, no, this can't be real! Those towers are supposed to be magic resistant!" Louise moaned in horror.

Megumin spoke up from where she had collapsed from magical exhaustion, "Do you think we'll get in trouble for that?"

"Trouble?!" Louise laughed hysterically. "Why should we get in trouble? We didn't just blow up a part of the school! We blew up the **Void Tower!** The Tower sacred to the Founder Himself! That's beyond destruction of property, that's... that's... blasphemy!"

"Ah. Sounds to me like we need to run. You'll have to carry me though, I used too much magic and now I can't move."

"Why should I run? This was all your idea to begin with!"

"Do you think anyone will believe that? As you said, everyone thinks I'm just some commoner. But you are the infamous Zero, the girl who can blow up anything! When I tell them how you dragged me along to demonstrate your might.... how terrifying it was to hear your demonic chant... why, fear has left me paralyzed!"

For a long moment, Louise was left speechless. "You... you wouldn't!"

Megumin looked up at Louise, an intolerably smug look on her childish face, "Wouldn't I?"

"You little demon!"

"Crimson Demon. Now come on, move it already. We need to grab some transport and be out of here before anyone can figure out what happened. So pick me up and let's go!"

"I'm your master! You don't order me around!"

"I'm teaching you to be a good master and not abandon your familiar. Oh, I wonder the kind of face everyone will make when I tell them how you just left me here, helpless, while you celebrated your destruction of a sacred building...."

"Fine! I'll do it! I'll get us out of here! But Megumin, let us be clear - **I hope you burn in hell!**"

"Now is that any way to show your gratitude to someone who finally fixed the problem with your magic? Thanks to me you're no longer a zero," Megumin pointed out as Louise pulled her up and set her to leaning on Louise's shoulder.

"You know, I'm becoming more and more convinced I've ended up making a deal with my own personal devil. That's it, isn't it? You're a devil I've summoned from hell and you've given me what I wanted at the cost of everything else!" lamented Louise as she and Megumin stumbled their way towards the stables.

Megumin snorted. "Less theology, more walking. We've got a long way to go."

A\N: I know in the FoZ anime Saito got the language skill when Louise botched a Silence spell, but that just sounds both random and stupid. Having language be part of the Familiar rune makes way more sense.