



勇者

告白

かわいい子がいたんだ

パーティード

2  
水明 すいせい  
トナリ La-na





告白

勇者パーティーに  
かわいい子がいたので、  
かっついてみた。

2

水島 SUISEI  
イラスト Le-na





Raven

Happiness

Duke

Yuuga

Cecilia

Youki

Mikana

Sheik




An anime-style illustration of three characters in a bright, modern cafe. On the left, a young man with dark blue hair and a red scarf sits at a table, looking towards the other two characters. In the center, a character with long red hair, wearing a green plaid hat and a red robe, is leaning over the table, holding a small plate and looking down at it. On the right, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a purple witch hat and a yellow dress, sits at the table, looking towards the man in the center. The table is set with several plates of food, including what looks like pizza, salad, and a drink in a glass. The background shows large windows and other tables with people in the distance.

"Has there been any progress  
with the cleric?"

"....To be honest,  
there is no progress at all."



An anime-style illustration of two young women standing outdoors. The woman on the left has long, flowing blue hair and is wearing a light green, long-sleeved dress with yellow-orange horizontal bands. She has her hands clasped in front of her and is smiling gently. The woman on the right has shoulder-length reddish-brown hair and is wearing a light green dress with a red cardigan. She has a surprised or apologetic expression with her mouth open. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a building. A dark, jagged line separates the two characters, suggesting a transition or a split-screen effect.

"You don't need to feel responsible for it anymore."

"I'm going to be honest... I'm sorry!"



An anime-style illustration of two characters. On the left, a young woman with short, light-colored hair and a white headpiece with a purple flower. She is wearing a white dress with a large black collar and is holding a large, stylized, multi-colored cross-shaped object. On the right, a young man with dark hair, wearing a brown jacket with gold trim and a dark blue scarf, is looking at her. The background is dark and textured.

Sophia

Clayman

"As expected of Sophia. Your movement's agile."

**Author:** Suisei

**Illustrator:** La-na

**Translated by:** [RinkageTranslation](#)

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## Chapter 01: I tried to consult someone

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"Where... Where is this place?"

I found myself in an empty white space.

Come to think of it, who am I? Where am I from? ...I don't know.

"Youki-san."

I turned around after I heard a voice behind me. There stood a woman who was looking at me with a gentle smile on her face.

*Is Youki my name?*

"Erm... is that my name? Do you know me?"

"What are you saying? Youki-san is Youki-san, isn't it?"

"Youki... That's right! I'm Youki. Now I remember it."

I was reincarnated as the Demon Lord's underling or rather, a half-assed underling. I was originally a human in my past life, but currently I'm a demon. That was the reason why I have qualms about attacking humans and ended up shutting myself off.

"Youki-san is being strange. You're not possibly going to say that you don't know me, are you?"

The woman in front of me asked as she tilted her head.



I recalled my own name. If that's the case, then I should remember the name of the woman standing before me.

How did I get acquainted with this woman even though I have been secluding myself from the outside world?

I had been waiting in the room located in the middle of the Demon Lord's castle for a long time, but there had been no sign of any heroes showing up at all. To begin with, it would be hard for me to get to know anyone actually.

"...You've forgotten, haven't you? That's mean."

"G-Give me a second. I will definitely, absolutely recall it." [Youki]

Upon seeing that I was not able to answer her readily, the woman pouted. Since I wasn't really accustomed to woman, I became flustered at that sight. I tried racking my brain in desperation.

"You even confessed to me."

"Ah.....!?" [Youki]

All my memories came back to me at that single sentence from the woman.

The hero's party that was led by Yuuga, the hero, got badly bashed-up by me in the Demon Lord's castle room. At that time, I fell in love at first sight with Cecilia, who is the cleric in that party. I wound up ignoring the defence of the room that I was supposed to be guarding and confessed to her. The end result was that I suffered an honourable defeat.

"Cecilia! It's Cecilia!" [Youki]

"It felt like you just remembered, didn't it? It gave me a somewhat complicated feeling about it." [Cecilia]



"Aa, erm, I'm sorry. I got this weird kind of feeling. It's like, my mind was completely blank." [Youki]

I made an excuse as I scratched my head, trying to hide my embarrassment.

*I'm the lowest. It was unforgivable for me to have forgotten about the girl whom I am still in love with.*

"By the looks of it, you seemed to have forgotten about everything else apart from me." [Cecilia]

"Eh? Everything else apart from Cecilia?" [Youki]

"Here. Let's go, Youki-san. Then try to recall them." [Cecilia]

Cecilia and I held hands, and then began walking through the white space. As we ambled along, the memories of what had happened after I left the Demon Lord's castle started coming back to me. The memories of how I made my first friend, Raven, in this world. About the incident whereby I was set up by Celia-san, Cecilia's mother. Then I was reunited with my subordinates, Duke, Happiness and Sheik. After that, when we got thrown into a commotion after we bumped into Yuuga and Mikana, even though Cecilia and I were supposed to be on date together. How I found out that Happiness was the other party when Raven approached me for love consultation, and then Duke ended up getting involved as well. When we went to Dagaz Village under a request, we met Gai the gargoyle, and Tiel-chan who is infatuated with Gai.

*I wonder how far I should go on before I could remember everything.*

Even though I became immersed in the memories swirling in my brain, the fact that I was holding hands with woman I like made me also lose my sense of time.

"...I remembered everything." [Youki]



Cecilia halted her steps when she heard what I said. Our walk seemed to have come to an end, possibly because I have recalled everything. She turned towards me, while our hands remained connected.

"It appears that you have recalled them. Then, shall we go?" [Cecilia]

"Go where?" [Youki]

The moment I raised that question, Cecilia could no longer be seen beside me. My vision narrowed, and then went black. When I regained consciousness, I found myself standing on a grassland that stretched out as far as the eye can see. The evening sky above me was a crimson red colour.

"Cecilia?" [Youki]

I uttered her name spontaneously. I started looking for Cecilia, who disappeared when the scenery around me had suddenly changed. I managed to locate her immediately after enhancing my senses to the fullest. When I ran towards her, she appeared to be standing there as if she has been waiting for me.

"Cecilia..." [Youki]

I looked at her and threw my arms around her, as though I had given into my desire. As I felt the warmth of her body against mine, I slid my hand into my jacket pocket and fumbled around. Once I separated from her, I took a small square box out and opened the lid.

"This....will you accept this....?" [Youki]

Inside the box was a diamond ring with a simple design.

"Youki-san...this is?!" [Cecilia]

There was a mixture of shock and joy on her face. I expressed my desire in a trembling voice.

"I-I would like you to marry me." [Youki]

Although I couldn't seem to get the words out easily, I managed get myself to propose. The moment I said that, she clung to me by wrapping her arms tightly around me.

"...Yes." [Cecilia]

The reply whispered into my ear was the evidence that my proposal was a success. I thought my heart would burst with happiness, possibly because I have finally achieved my goal. I was too ecstatic in getting that favourable response that when I realized it, Cecilia's face was right in front of me.

"...Do you, want to kiss?"

Cecilia blushed as she looked away bashfully. My brain seemed to have ceased functioning for an instant. As I stood rooted to the spot, she closed her eyes and raised her face.





I was momentarily confused since I never had an experience in kissing anyone before, even in my previous life. However, I instantly came to my senses, having understood what just happened. I wrapped my arms around Cecilia's back and embraced her lightly as I brought my lips close to hers. I had never imagined that I would be able to kiss the person I like.

*It was truly like a dream.*

"Wha-?"

When I opened my eyes, Cecilia was no longer there. I was greeted by a familiar looking ceiling instead. I found myself lying on my back, facing upwards. The fluffiness of the bed below me was fully transmitted to my body. Upon examining the place around, I realized that I was surrounded by a common everyday sight as well. The luggage and even chair were placed on the table in a disorderly manner. In the corner of the room, sat Gai the gargoyle in the shape of Venus de Milo.

...After further analysis of all that were mentioned above, I have reached the conclusion that what I had experienced a while ago,

"Was just a dreaaaammmmm!?" [Youki]

This was the deepest despair I have ever felt ever since I was reincarnated. I tumbled off the bed because of the shock. And, due the momentum from when I fell off the bed, I received a blow to my head.



I tried recalling yesterday's incident while enduring the agonizing pain.

When Cecilia, Sheik and I were summoned to the castle, the King had wanted to grant us an award for repelling Gallis Empire's heinous hero, Mirror. Nonetheless, probably because I had lost my mind at that time, I made a stupid and absurd request concerning Cecilia and ended up receiving a long sermon from her. In addition to that, I had been given a task by Celia-san to adopt a firm attitude the next time we meet, and I was also forbidden from seeing Cecilia for half month.

*There was no way the things in the dream can happen when we couldn't even see each other. In the first place, how did the proposal scene suddenly come in when we are not even dating!? Hasn't it suddenly taken a huge leap!?*

"It was supposed to be such a happy dream yet, why did I have to experience it at a time like this...? It ended up becoming an unpleasant dream now." [Youki]

This is just the first day I am sitting through the punishment, so it was not possible for a dream like this to manifest itself conveniently at a time like this. I tried to give it a thought even though I have yet to compose myself.

Then, an answer came to me.

"Gaiiii!!!" [Youki]

I grasped Gai's body, the suspect in my mind and shook him.

*I would not be fooled even if you pretended to be asleep.*

"Mu, what is it, brat? You're being noisy. Could you be a little quiet... What happened?" [Gai]

"What the heck do you mean by noissyyyy!! You have used 《Nightmare Sleep》 on me, haven't you!?" [Youki]

*Gai had a puzzled look on his face but he must be playing dumb there. I'm sure of it. There is no doubt that he must have shown me that dream in jest.*

"Eei, calm down! Explain to me what the hell has happe-" [Gai]

"Don't feign ignorance! It's impossible for me to be experiencing that kind of dream at a time like this! You're definitely showing me that dream to harass me. You have used your magic, rigghht!?" [Youki]

"What are you talking about? I have not done anythi..." [Gai]

"Damn it, damn it! Harassing me like this! I will change your appearance to something strange in returnnnn!!!" [Youki]



"Would you quit itttttt!!!" [Gai]

I altered Gai's form using my usual earth magic. This time I will change him into something appropriate that will make ten out of ten people criticizing it as trash.

Ten minutes later.

I calmed down and listened to Gai's explanation. For the time being I repented on what I had done.

"...Do you have something that you need to say?" [Gai]

"Something really sad happened yesterday. So, I became suspicious unintentionally. I am reflecting on what I've done for now. So, please forgive me!" [Youki]

I made my sincere apology to Gai by lowering my head. It was my fault for jumping into conclusion. I can't afford to make enemies in my present situation.

"Why am I being doubted due to brat's selfish reason? Even to the degree of changing my appearance." [Gai]

Gai shook his head as if he was saying "*Good grief*". Taking everything into consideration after I have calmed down, I shouldn't have lash out at Gai.

"It's my bad. Yesterday I have done something that made Cecilia angry. Even though she has temporarily forgiven me, various things had happened after."  
[Youki]

Celia-san has prohibited me from seeing Cecilia for half month and I don't understand what she meant by a firm attitude even now.

"I am not interested in human's love affair so I can't give you any advice on this." [Gai]

"...despite being a lolicon." [Youki]

"Oi, what did you just say, brat? Did you call me a *rorikon* again?" [Gai]

Despite having a scary demonic looking face, he 'brainwashed' a young girl like Tiel-chan. Tiel-chan is usually an intelligent literary girl, but her image instantly crumbles as soon as Gai became involved in it. There's no doubt about it. I even believed that he might lay his hands on Tiel-chan eventually.

"How many times do I have to say it, brat! I am not a rorikon. I am indebted to that girl so..." [Gai]

"Aaa I got it. I got it. I'm going back to the subject since the conversation was derailed." [Youki]



Our conversation veered off in a strange direction because of that unnecessary remark I made so I tried rectifying it. The only thing that I wanted to know now is what I should do.

"Hmph. Well whatever. But like I've said earlier, I wouldn't know anything about it even if you asked me." [Gai]

Certainly, I guess it was useless to consult Gai about love when all he had been doing was sleeping in the ruins in the village's small shrine all this time.

*Then what should I do now? At this point I should seek advice from a successful man.*

I went to guild to look for one of my acquaintances there who is currently married.

"An? At that time, it's that. Just be quiet as you are hit and kicked. If you could endure it, a lap pillow and lots of heavenly things will await you." [Clayman]

"I was an idiot for even coming to get Clayman's advice." [Youki]

I had thought that I might be able to receive a possibly useful advice from Clayman who is in a lovey-dovey marriage relationship, but I have totally forgotten about it. Clayman and Sophia-san are not an average every day couple.

"You were the one who came troubling me for a love advice during work... seriously. What's so bad about that?" [Clayman]

"I can't use it as reference! That lovey-dovey method only applies to Clayman and Sophia-san!" [Youki]

*Argh, why are there only weirdos around me.*

It was hard since Cecilia, the sole person who possesses common sense, was not around. Although, even if she was around, I couldn't consult her about it. It was unimaginable to consult the very person whom I am in love with about my love problem.

"I don't know what happened but, there's nothing else you need right? It's fine even if you don't have any business in particular actually. Not having to work makes me feel at ease." [Clayman]

"Please be more moderate even in your self-indulgence. But, what should I do now. The other person whom I can depend on is..." [Youki]

Just as I was pondering if there was anyone else whom I could rely on, I felt someone tapping my shoulder from the back. Wondering who it was, I turned behind to find a disguised Raven standing there.



"Raven? Are you having your day off today?" [Youki]

"...Yeah. So I thought of going shopping today." [Raven]

Come to think of it, we did make a promise the other day. He possesses such a strong sense of obligation. It was unexpected for him to have come all the way to the guild just to faithfully fulfil his promise. Seeing that it's Raven, I might be able to consult him about it.

"I actually have something that I would like to consult you about. Would it be alright?" [Youki]

"Youki has helped me previously before. I'm not sure if I can be of any help but I don't mind it." [Raven]

Raven is also someone with common sense around here. Even though he doesn't have experience in love as well previously, he is currently experiencing a one-sided love. He might be able to give me a relatively good pointer. Otherwise it would be of help even if he could just listen to my problem.

"Then shall we change location? How about the inn that I am staying at now?" [Youki]

"...Got it." [Raven]

Hence I brought Raven, who seemed convinced, back to the inn. As soon as we entered the room, our eyes fell on Gai's newly 'improved' form. Since I had not put in serious effort as I had previously done, he may comment that it looks weird again. As I was thinking of that, I made myself comfortable on my bed while Raven sat himself on the chair.

"Hm? You have a new statue again?" [Raven]

Raven stared at Gai. I braced myself for the usual incoming negative comments.

"...Heh, that looks good." [Raven]

"Eh? Are you serious? I just did that haphazardly in a short amount of time though." [Youki]

The positive remark received has betrayed my expectation. It was supposed to be something that was made indiscriminately so this absurd revelation couldn't have been possible.

"...I think it's the best one among the others so far." [Raven]

*...I don't really get this world. Am I the weird one? That shouldn't be the case though... probably.*

"...Was it something that I said?" [Raven]

Raven had misunderstood, thinking he had said something wrong when he saw me brooding over something.

*It was no big deal. We're not here today to discuss Gai, so let's put it aside.*

"No, it's not something that you need to worry about, Raven. Besides, what I really wanted to consult you about is not related to this statue." [Youki]

"I see." [Raven]

*\*Phew\** Raven breathed out in relief.

Even though this was a trivial matter, he was so concerned about it. I really did have a great friend. The thought of me ordering Duke and the rest to throw him to a village after beating him to a pulp last time made me feel terrible. I wanted to sock my past demon self. In order to consult a dependable friend like Raven, I finally spoke out.

"Actually, I would like you to give me some love advice." [Youki]

"...From me?" [Raven]



"From Raven." [Youki]

He displayed a somewhat complicated expression before placing his hand under his chin as if he was thinking about something hard. His facial expression gradually became serious. Come to think of it, it was just a while ago when he asked me for love consultation. I wasn't sure if Raven and Happiness had met again ever since then but, would he be able gain experience about it within a short frame of time?

"...I was under your care the previous time. To be honest, I don't have confidence if I can be of assistance but, would you like to try discussing it with me?" [Raven]

It became a picturesque scenario when an *ikemen* declared such an *ikemen* sounding line, though, with an anime-like voice.

*...Wait, what kind of rude things am I thinking of now!*

I slapped my cheeks with both hands so I could get a hold of myself. Considering that he has already agreed on it, I should try explaining it to him.

"In truth, I have done something without considering the place and have angered the person I like. In the end, I was able to make up with her thanks to her mother, but her mother has prohibited me from seeing her for half month."  
[Youki]

"...that must be hard." [Raven]

Seeing that we are both in love with someone right now, what I am experiencing was apparently transmitted to him. However, the problem would be after this.

"The mother of this person then asked me to adopt a firm attitude the next time we meet. So, what do you think I should do?" [Youki]

"...This is a difficult. I've not encountered such situation myself before."  
[Raven]

"As I thought ...What should I do then?" [Youki]

I supposed the two of us are still beginners in matters related to love. No good idea comes to mind. Nevertheless, I wouldn't be able to bring myself to see Cecilia in my present state without any preparation. In addition to that, I don't even understand the meaning behind Celia-san's words. All these just made me feel pathetic.

"What about preparing a gift as a form of apology?" [Raven]

The beginner in love, Raven managed to squeeze an idea out after much thought. Speaking of which, my previous date with Cecilia the was ruined because of Yuuga. I found a nice necklace in that accessory shop, but, due to the commotion, I didn't manage to purchase it.

"Raven, that might be a great idea. During my last date with her, I did find something nice that I thought would be good to gift her as a present. I didn't get to purchase it due to a certain reason at that time but... Eh, what's wrong?"  
[Youki]

Raven gradually grew depressed as he listened to my story.

*Was it something I said?*

"...I see. Youki has already reached the stage whereby you have gone out on a date with the person you like. As for me, far from having a date with her, I don't even know when is the next time I can see her." [Raven]

Apparently, his relationship with Happiness has been stagnant ever since then. If only there was an opportunity for them to meet each other, at least.

"That's right! Shall we go buy a gift together now?" [Youki]

"Buy a gift... Me too?" [Raven]

"Yup. Raven should get something for Happiness too and then just give it her." [Youki]

Doing so will give him the opportunity to meet Happiness.



"...For no reason?" [Raven]

Certainly, there was no reason for Raven to be giving Happiness a present but, it could also serve as a medium to deepen their friendship.

"It'll be alright. Based on Happiness's personality, she would accept it, as long as it's not something strange. You wouldn't be able to tell it from her expression but, she'll treasure the things she likes. I could feel that she's happy with them."  
[Youki]

"...Really?" [Raven]

His solemn look brightened up slightly. Alright. Just another push.

"Really. There's no doubt in it since I've been acquainted with Happiness for some time now." [Youki]

"Present... Maybe I should buy one." [Raven]

"Alright! Now that it's been decided, let's go!!" [Youki]

Grabbing Raven's arm, I opened the door quickly and pulled him along.

The place we're aiming for is that accessory shop that I had previously visited with Cecilia. As we ran towards the shop, I was silently praying and hoping that the necklace was still there.

"Uwaa..." [Youki]

The moment we entered the shop, the sight that greeted us made our faces twitch. For some reason, the shop was crowded with mainly couples, leaving us as the only pair of male inside. When we looked around, all we could see were couples who were flirting as they shopped.

"...Youki, sorry. We just got here but, I feel like going back now." [Raven]

"I know how you feel, though..." [Youki]

Since Raven whispered it in a low voice, I replied him back under my breath. Even I don't want this situation to go on. Being the only pair of male in a shop crowded with couples would make me feel really out of place. But, seeing that we're already here, we should get a gift before going back.

"Since we're already here, we should just endure it. I've already decided on the item that I want so I'll help Raven pick up something." [Youki]

"Umm... I understand." [Raven]

"Then let's look around." [Youki]

Raven accepted my suggestion in a seemingly reluctant way. We then went around the shop, deciding to choose something quickly so we could leave this place as soon as we could. Raven began picking up accessories that interest him and examined them carefully in his hand.

*Could you not appear so engrossed in selecting the accessories with that ikemen look of yours!*

I watched over Raven for around ten minutes as I thought of such things.

"May I know what kind of products are you looking for?"

A female shop assistant who couldn't remain indifferent after looking at Raven who was at a loss, called out.

"..." [Raven]

"Ah.. um, sir?" [Shop assistant]

He used his hand to signal her, asking her to wait for a moment while he pulled out a pen and paper to write upon. Raven has a complex about his voice so the only people whom he speaks to are Duke and me. A written



communication is an important means of communication to Raven. Raven showed her a memo with the words 『Hair ornament』 written on it.

"So you're looking for hair ornaments?" [Shop assistant]

When the shop assistant repeated the request for confirmation, Raven responded by nodding his head.

"I understand. I'll first guide you to the counter." [Shop assistant]

She led us to the place where hair ornaments are displayed and recommended two to three different ornaments to him. He firmly placed his finger on his chin as if engaged in deep thought before pointing at one of the hair ornaments in silence. What Raven had chosen was a hair ornament with a feather motif. I wasn't sure if it was a sheer coincidence but, the design he selected matched Happiness perfectly. Yuuga might have no sense of taste at all when it comes to selecting accessories, but Raven didn't seem to have any problem in that area.

As I was putting my thoughts into such unrelated things, Raven returned after making a quick purchase. His expression has become slightly brighter, possibly because he had made a good purchase.

"I was able to buy a great gift because of Youki. Thank you." [Raven]

"No, no. I haven't done anything at all." [Youki]

The one who had guided him to the hair ornaments section and recommended the selections to him was the shop assistant while Raven was the one who made the final decision. The only thing that I had done was bringing him to this shop.

"...It's Youki's turn next. If I'm not mistaken, you have already decided on something, haven't you?" [Raven]

"Yeah, I'm good." [Youki]

I started searching for the necklace that I came across the other time. Thinking that it was probably still at the same place, I looked around there and found it in the end.

*Thank goodness it is still here.*

"*Whew*, I'm glad it's not sold yet." [Youki]

I picked it up immediately and paid for it. Upon returning to where Raven was waiting, I found him checking out a ring for some reason. Just as I was wondering if he was interested in it, I was suddenly reminded of the dream I had this morning. The dream of when I handed a ring to Cecilia to propose to her. It made me wonder when that scene would become a reality. It would be good if it wasn't in the too distant future.

"...You're planning to buy a ring too?" [Youki]

Raven shook his head in response.

"...Just looking." [Raven]

Raven murmured.

That might be so but, he was interested in it, wasn't he? Even though I was rooting for him, the other party whom he was going after was Happiness. It might be a good idea for him to adopt a more aggressive approach, but there wasn't much opportunity for them to see each other at all. Hopefully, with this gift, it might reduce the distance between the two of them. Although, I wasn't in a position to be worrying about others. Even though it was the consequence of my own actions, it would be bad if I don't take up a firm attitude and hand the present to Cecilia after half month.

"We're done here, so shall we go back? No, actually I'm hungry so let's have lunch somewhere." [Youki]

"...Yeah, we finished just in time for lunch. I managed to get a good purchase today. Thank you." [Raven]

"I'm glad that I consulted Raven. I'm definitely going to make sure to reconcile with her without any problem." [Youki]

The two of us left the shop while expressing our gratitude to each other. We should've gone home after going to a nearby bar or restaurant for lunch. That was supposed to be how it was planned but...

"...Eh, Swordsman? If I'm not wrong, the person with the boring look beside you was the one with cleric previously..."

Raven and I turned around simultaneously when someone called out behind us. The one standing behind us was one of the members from the Hero's party who was involved in the turmoil caused by Yuuga the other time; the girl mage, Mikana.

"What were two guys doing, entering a shop like this together? ...Swordsman aside, weren't you going after the cleric?" [Mikana]

Mikana gave us a suspicious look when she caught the two of us leaving the accessory shop together. There seemed to be a grave misunderstanding. Regardless of how many times I had been dumped by girls in my previous life, I had never recalled myself awakening to homosexuality. Not to mention, Raven is in love with Happiness so he wouldn't be interested in something like that too.

"Oi, please don't get any strange ideas. We're just helping each other in choosing our presents." [Youki]

"Present... for whom?" [Mikana]



"For the person we like of course." [Youki]

*Crap!*

The moment those words escaped my mouth, I realized that it was already too late. Mikana, who was standing before us started examining us alternately with a huge grin stretched across her face.

"Hmm~ In any case, I have already known that you're interested in that cleric, but I didn't know that Swordsman has someone he likes too~" [Mikana]

*"Why did you tell her that?"* Raven looked at me as if he was conveying those complaints to me indirectly.

There was nothing else that I could do even if you were to look at me in that manner. What's done cannot be undone. What we should do now is to figure out a way to escape Mikana's probing.

"During the time when we were still travelling together in a party, unlike that idiot Yuuga who can never refuse a woman's advance out of goodwill and ended up creating a harem unconsciously, Swordsman is someone who has prioritized sword training to women. Rather, Swordsman is usually someone who avoids people, so it's unthinkable for him to have someone he likes." [Mikana]

"..." [Raven]

"As usual, you don't speak up. Well, it's my fault for laughing at you when we first met." [Mikana]

Mikana withdrew her gaze with an apologetic look. It seemed that this person had ended up laughing when she first heard Raven's voice. Although, she appeared to be considerably remorseful now for what she had done.

"Raven, are you still angry at Mikana?" [Youki]

I asked him softly so as not to be heard by Mikana.

"I'm not angry. It's just that..." [Raven]

"It's just that?" [Youki]

"She might make fun of my voice, or laugh at me, or be surprised again."  
[Raven]

"I see. So it has become something like a trauma." [Youki]

Even though I knew that Raven was concerned about his voice, I did not realize that it was so severe. I hoped that he would be able to overcome it somehow but, we should first do something about our current situation.

"At any rate, how was it possible for someone ordinary with a boring look like you to be acquainted with both cleric and swordsman?" [Mikana]

"Haa!? What the heck are you talking about all of the sudden!?" [Youki]

"I mean, it's rare to find a plain commoner who is acquainted with two members belonging to a party that has defeated the Demon Lord, you know? As I've said earlier, Swordsman is someone who tends to avoid people as much as possible, and it was the same for Cleric too. She has been courted by countless men during journey, but I believe that she has always declined them gently."  
[Mikana]

"Eh!? Cecilia has been courted by countless man during that journey!? This is my first time hearing it." [Youki]

"Is that what you want to retort about? Rather, what is the relationship between Youki and Cecilia?" [Raven]

Probably because he became curious about our conversation, Raven asked me quietly. Even though I would like to give him an answer, it might not be appropriate to be having this kind of discussion in front of the accessory shop.

Not to mention, we might cause another commotion if Mikana and Raven's identities were exposed.

"I'll explain to you about my relationship with Cecilia later. It might be better for us to leave this place now. It would indeed be too conspicuous if we were to continue our discussion in front of the shop." [Youki]

"True. We wouldn't want to make the same mistake as Yuuga and her."  
[Raven]

"Then it's decided. As we've planned earlier, let's go to a restaurant. I'm starving." [Youki]

"Yeah." [Raven]

Well now, since we have already decided on what to do, let's hurry up and leave this place.

"Hold it, why are you guys ignoring me while having a private conversation there?!" [Mikana]

Mikana looked sulky, possibly because she was dissatisfied that Raven and I were whispering among ourselves.

*The main problem is, what should we do with Mikana? To be honest, I don't want to be hanging around her any more than I have to. I'm bad with this type of woman so I have a feeling that I might end up blurting out things that I shouldn't, creating unnecessary problems instead. At this point, we should take our leave naturally without making her feel any sense of discomfort.*

"Well, Raven and I will be going off to have our lunch now. So that's all."  
[Youki]

I spun around and waved my hand while Raven gave a light bow before coming along with me. With this, I'll be able to grab my lunch and get away from Mikana at the same time.

"Haa!? Hold it right there!" [Mikana]

Nevertheless, there are times when things in this world don't seem to go the way you want them to. Our shoulders were grasped hard when we were in the midst of heading towards the restaurant.

"What is it?" [Youki]

"What do you mean by 'What is it?'. We're not done yet. Despite that, why are you guys talking about going to a restaurant all of the sudden!?" [Mikana]

"That's because we have already decided to go get lunch together, even before we bumped into you, right?" [Youki]



When I prompted Raven beside me for acknowledgement, he nodded his head in silence.

"Uu, but we're not done talking ye..." [Mikana]

"Have you forgotten about the turmoil that happened the other time? Are you planning to cause the same disturbance to the shop again?" [Youki]

I said with a sigh. It took 3 hours to quell the commotion the previous time. During that time, the throng of people that crowded the entrance of the accessory shop seemed to have interrupted the business of the shop. The female shop assistants were not able to concentrate at all on their work, as they were just ogling at Yuuga.

"Uu..." [Mikana]

"Even if we don't intend for it end up that way, we would stand out even if we don't want to if we were to continue having our discussion in front of the shop like this. I don't want to go through that again." [Youki]

The conversation came to a stop and silence reigned. She should have understood what I wanted to say by now.

However, at that very moment the sound of a stomach rumbling broke the silence. It was a quite loud, growling noise.

"Who's the one?" [Youki]

By the way, it wasn't me. When I looked at Raven, he shook his head as well. In other words...

We directed our gaze to Mikana. Her face turned bright red as she cast her eyes downwards. Probably because she realized that the two of us were looking at her, she raised her head and scowled at us.



"What!? Even I can feel hungry, alright! Is there a problem with that!?"  
[Mikana]

For some reason, she misdirected her anger at us instead. Raven and I hadn't said anything in particular, though.

"Come to think of it, you guys are going to a restaurant, right? Then I'll come along with you. We'll be able to continue our conversation there and you'll be able to get your meal too, so it'll be killing two birds with one stone." [Mikana]

"Oioi, don't just decide it for us." [Youki]

"Since we're all in agreement, let's go quickly. I know of a good restaurant in this area." [Mikana]

"Oi, wa-,wait a minut-" [Youki]

"Just give it up, Youki. No one can stop Mikana once she goes into that state." [Raven]

Mikana advanced ahead, disregarding my protest completely. When I tried stopping her, Raven tapped my shoulder and slowly shook his head. I might not be Clayman, but my current plight made me wonder how I got thrown into such a troublesome predicament. *I don't get it.*

"Hurry up or I'm going to leave you behind!" [Mikana]

Mikana turned around and beckoned us with a furious look on her face.

"It'll be fine even if you leave behind us, actually." [Youki]

"...There's no other choice than to go along with her." [Raven]

Raven and I felt our shoulders droop with disappointment as we went after Mikana.

"Rest assured. I'm a regular patronage of the restaurant that we're going to. The food's tasty and the atmosphere's really good. You'll definitely like it too."  
[Mikana]

"Yeah, I got it. I'll be looking forward to it." [Youki]

Rather than looking forward to the meal, I was cursing her deep down in my heart as I desperately tried to think of a plan so that we could escape from her. She seemed like a blabbermouth, so she was not someone whom we would like to consult with about our love life. If we were to blurt anything important out by accident, there was a possibility that she might make use of that blunder to 'break our minds'.

"...Youki." [Raven]



Raven who was walking next to me murmured. Did he manage to come up with a good plan?

"What is it?" [Youki]

"...What is Youki's relationship with Cecilia? [Raven]

"You're asking that now!?" [Youki]

"Yeah." [Raven]

I could understand that he was curious about it, but I had a feeling that it wasn't the right time for this. Raven might unexpectedly be someone who does things at his own pace. Well, seeing that I knew who Raven likes, I guess it would be fair for me to explain it to him.

"She's someone whom I desire, but we're just friends now." [Youki]

"So the one whom Youki likes is Cecilia? That means, the person whom you have angered this time was..." [Raven]

"It's Cecilia." [Youki]

"I see. Were you alright?" [Raven]

"What do you mean by that?" [Youki]

"No, Cecilia is usually kind to everyone, but when she's angry... No, it's nothing." [Raven]

*Did he recall something? He suddenly stopped in mid-sentence and shook his head. ...I wonder if something happened when they were in the party.*

It didn't seem likely for Raven to be the one to have done something wrong. The two other members might be the ones who were guilty of it, or rather, it was highly possible that Yuuga was the one who had done something in the past.

"Raven, I have angered Cecilia many times now. Once she cools down, she'll usually just direct a cold gaze at me. So I'm fine." [Youki]

"...Then, are you alright in your love aspect?" [Raven]

*Am I ...alright?*

I became anxious the instant I gave it a deep thought. I have a feeling that I have been behaving like a fool most of the time in front of Cecilia. If I were to go on this way, she wouldn't grow tired of me, would she?

*This is bad.* My mind became flooded by all the negative thoughts the more I contemplated it, making me feel depressed all the more.

"Youki!"

The moment I went silent with a look of unease on my face, someone uttered my name into my ear. That voice broke into my negative thoughts and brought my consciousness back instantly.

"...I'm sorry for causing you unnecessary worry." [Raven]

"It's fine. I was just lost in my thoughts." [Youki]

"I see. I'm really sorry. It's because I had said something strange earlier."  
[Raven]

"Hahaha." [Youki]

I attempted to gloss over it with a bitter smile. No one else, aside from Cecilia herself, would know how she really felt about me, so there is no use thinking about it. I tried to talk myself out of it. Although, the atmosphere became gloomy for some reason after that. I tried to ease the tension by switching to my chuuni mode which hasn't been triggered in a long while.

"Raven, I'm fine now so rest assured." [Youki]

I whispered bac...no, I replied him in my normal tone as I struck a pose.

"...I have a feeling that you're not really alright though, in a different sense now." [Raven]

"...What is it?" [Youki]

*Have I done something? I don't recall it. I'm not feeling down anymore, but the tension in the air became palpable. I'm not really in a state which he would need to be worried about.*

"It's nothing. At least Youki is back to being lively." [Raven]

"Is that so? Then let's not worry about it and go back to our main subject."  
[Youki]

Raven tilted his head. In the first place, I wasn't planning to discuss about my relationship with Cecilia with him. There was something much more important that I had to consult him at the moment.

"Don't you get it? Then I'll tell you! The question is, how do we get away from Mikana's probing right now!" [Youki]

"...Indeed." [Raven]

Raven held his head down, looking dejected. He finally realized the situation in which he was in.

"Most of my things about Cecilia had already been exposed to her, so I don't really mind it. But, Raven's different, right? What are you planning to do if she were to start barraging you with questions? Or give you unneeded advice? Furthermore, what if she were to find out that Happiness is the person whom you like?" [Youki]

Raven's complexion turned pale. Compared to me, he should have a better grasp of Mikana's personality. There was no doubt that he understood how troublesome it would be if his secret was revealed to her.

"...Wouldn't it be fine so long as Youki kept quiet?" [Raven]

"That's naive of you. She's the type of person who would be extremely persistent once her curiosity is aroused. I can easily imagine her 'preying' on you next if I were to keep quiet." [Youki]

"...To be honest, I don't have confidence that I would be able to remain silent if Mikana were to press on." [Raven]

"That's why we need a plan but... that's right! Hmph. Raven, rejoice. I came up with a good plan now thanks to this intense atmosphere." [Youki]



A seemingly unfitting smile spread across my face. As expected, being in my *chuuni* state is the best. I was able to keep my head clear when I was in this condition. The only downside to this was that I tend to make even more unnecessary body gestures. I ended up striking a supposedly cool pose.

"...Really?" [Raven]

"Leave it to me! Then let's immediately get to the point on what we should do." [Youki]

I explained the strategy in mind to Raven. After that, we tried to catch up with Mikana when she complained that we were too slow. After several minutes of walk, we finally arrived at the place recommended by her.

"We're here. Not only does it have an amicable and stylish atmosphere, the employees are kind, and the cuisine's unrivalled. Come on, let's go in." [Mikana]

Upon entering the establishment, I realized that the place is indeed as described. The interior looks stylish, and a tantalizing scent permeated the air the moment we stepped inside. Nonetheless, this doesn't seem to be a place where two men would come together. The ambience of the store resembles more of a place where couples come for a date. It doesn't look at all like a place where people would come in just for a simple meal! As I thought, she must have introduced this place to us so she could probe into our, or rather, Raven's love story in particular.

"Welcome, it'll be for three people, right? Please take your seat here."

I gave Raven a knowing wink when we were guided by the employee to our seats. He nodded in response when he noticed that gesture.

*Mikana, I will not let you to have your way.*

We began our strategy as planned.

"Well now, there are a lot of things that I would like to know from you guys."  
[Mikana]

"Excuse me. I would like to make an order please." [Youki]

"Right now!? Wait, listen to me..." [Mikana]

I paid no heed to Mikana's complaints and selected ten dishes from the menu that was brought over by the employee in a hurry. Following that, Raven also chose eight different dishes by pointing at the items in the menu with his finger.

"Wait, hold on!! How much are you guys planning to eat!?" [Mikana]

"I'm famished. That much is fine since we're men. Right, Raven?" [Youki]

Raven nodded.

*I don't usually eat that much food though.* I retorted back to myself in my mind. This was just a part of our strategy.

"Hmmm. Well it's fine. Ah, I would like..." [Mikana]

All Mikana ordered was a drink. I guessed she didn't plan to 'binge-eat' like us.

*Wasn't she hungry?*

Our plan would backfire if she had decided not to order any food just so she could concentrate on interrogating us.

Several minutes later, Raven and I were chewing our food thoroughly, eating as slowly as possible. There wasn't even an interval in between for us to say anything.

"...You guys, I have a feeling that you're not planning to tell me anything at all." [Mikana]

Mikana looked at us in amazement. I dug into my food heartily while Raven ate in a well-mannered way. Nevertheless, we did not stop what we were doing, taking as much time as we could over each bite. That was the plan that I came

up with. Since we were not able to speak while we ate, we could remain silent the entire time. This strategy was perfect – if I do say so myself. By using this method, we would be taking up all the time Mikana had, making it impossible for her to question us at all and then we could go our separate ways.

“Hmmmm, is that so? Just when I thought I’ll let you in on an interesting story about Cecilia.” [Mikana]

My hand stopped in that instant, even though I hadn’t planned to let what she said stop me.

*A story about Cecilia?*

*A story about Cecilia that I don’t know of? I want to hear it...*

Once that thought crossed my mind, there was no stopping me. I had originally planned to savour the ten dishes I’d ordered as slowly as I could, but I wound up finishing them in less than 20 minutes. In the end, I couldn’t win against my desire. So, as a result, the strategy failed.

“...Thanks for the food.” [Youki]

I felt stabbing pains in my abdomen due to overeating after finishing all the ten dishes ordered. Raven wore a stunned look on his face as he looked at my state.

*I understand what you're trying to say but, I think it was natural for me to have wanted to know more about the person I like. ...Although, that might just be an excuse for the failure in my own strategy.*

"Well, since Swordsman is still in middle of eating, I guess I'll have you tell me what I wanted to know first." [Mikana]

There was a triumphant look on Mikana's face. Even if you could make me spill the beans about myself, I would definitely not disclose the matter about Raven. Raven, on the other hand, was desperately eating his meal as he looked alternately between the two of us.



An anime-style illustration of three characters in a bright, modern cafe. On the left, a young man with dark blue hair and a red scarf sits at a table, looking towards the other two characters. In the center, a woman with long red hair, wearing a green plaid hat and a red sweater, is leaning over the table, holding a small plate and looking at the food. On the right, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a purple witch hat and an orange tunic, sits at the table with her hands clasped, looking at the man. The table is set with several plates of food, including what looks like a salad and some meat, and a glass of green juice. The background shows large windows and other patrons in the distance.

"Has there been any progress  
with the cleric?"

"....To be honest,  
there is no progress at all."

"So, I wonder if there has been any progress at all with the cleric after that turmoil? That's the first thing that I would like to know." [Mikana]

Mikana asked as she sipped her drink. Was she postponing the matter with regard to Raven? If that were to be the case, then I should start blathering about all of my unfortunate stories, so as to turn this atmosphere into being unsuitable for any love talk.

*I call it, 'A complicated conversation that would make one excuse themselves upon listening strategy'.*

"Ah, there is actually no progress at all. Our so-called date the last time was ruined by your childhood friend, too." [Youki]

"Haa!? You've not done anything at all?! Are you a freaking idiot!? For that cleric to have gone on a date with you would only mean that you should have made a significantly favourable impression on her." [Mikana]

There was a mixture of amazement and shock on her face. She drew a big sigh. Her brutal frankness hurts, but I should just be frank.

"Moreover, I have done something stupid recently and made Cecilia angry. Her mother has forbidden me from seeing her for half month." [Youki]

"Uwa, you're amazing in a way. For you to have angered that cleric." [Mikana]

Mikana's face looked slightly pale upon hearing that. Apparently, she seemed to have recalled the time when Cecilia was furious. That reaction of hers made me curious though. I should try enquiring the full story. Besides, I might be able to derail the conversation so we would not go into love topics.

"Hey, I had actually angered Cecilia many times before now, so I don't really understand the reason behind your and Raven's reaction." [Youki]

"In other words, doesn't that mean that you have not incurred the cleric's true wrath yet?" [Mikana]

"No, she should be seriously angry the previous time. That's the proof of just how stupid the blunder that I made was." [Youki]

There was no doubt that Cecilia was extremely furious at that time. Certainly, the impression given by Cecilia's fury appeared different than normal; however, it wasn't a cold gaze that would make one's face turn pale upon remembrance.

"That's strange. The way the cleric was angry when Yuuga had done something wrong was supposed to be utterly ghastly." [Mikana]

Raven was nodding his head the entire time he was eating, agreeing with what she said. As I thought, the one who messed up was Yuuga. He must have done considerably stupid things.

I wasn't in the position to be saying this about someone else, but I was concerned of what he had done.

"What has Yuuga done to make Cecilia angry?" [Youki]

I had a feeling that it wasn't something that I should listen to, but a human – or rather a demon – like me, could not win against the curiosity. Besides, I might need it as reference so I can avoid making Cecilia angry. Upon hearing my query, Raven held his head while Mikana's face turned bright red.

"Yuuga was an idiot. He entered cleric's room by mistake when she was in the middle of changing, mistook the time for the open-air hot spring and barged in on cleric when she was still inside... incidents like those happened over and over again during the journey." [Mikana]





"Hey, do you know where Hero is today? I'm gonna half kill him... No, I'll just fucking kill him." [Youki]

The moment I stood up, Raven who was supposed to be in the midst of eating instantly held me down. He pressed a written memo against my face, asking me to calm down, but how the heck could I compose myself after listening to all that?! Apparently that guy seemed to possess a 'Lucky Lewd' ability. As expected of a protagonist bastard who was bestowed the title, 'Hero'. He had not only seen Cecilia changing her clothes, but also peeped at her when she was taking a bath. There was no way I could remain silent after knowing all that.

I shook off Raven's restraint and stood up. My face might resemble the Hannya mask currently.

"Wa-Wait a minute. Calm down! There is no way a commoner like you could kill Yuuga, right?! Besides, I'm not done talking yet, so just shut up and listen to me." [Mikana]

"...Tch, fine." [Youki]

I clicked my tongue and sat myself once again. Raven was probably relieved after looking at my state so he resumed eating.

I am presently a 'human' known as Youki. As such, it has become quite problematic since it is technically impossible for a normal adventurer to defeat a



hero who has overthrown the Demon Lord. If it was the demon Youki, then he could easily beat that harem hero to a pulp.

"I can still sense an ominous aura emanating from you though ...Well, it's not like it's the first time for Yuuga to become the object of intense animosity from men anyway. I'll go on with the story." [Mikana]

"So Cecilia was enraged then?" [Youki]

"Yes. But it was just the normal level of anger." [Mikana]

"Ha?" [Youki]

"I think it was just 10 minutes of preaching... The cleric's sermon fundamentally comes in different patterns." [Mikana]

"Speaking of which, my encounter with her the last time also started with a sermon... Eh? If that's the case then there's no need to be so fearful of her, isn't it?" [Youki]

When I looked back over the past incidents, it was undeniable that there were times when her sermon scared me, but I have yet to experience one that would make my face turn pale if I were to recall it.

"Cleric will usually forgive Yuuga after a lecture. It's mortifying but, I have not expected that it was possible for a human to reprimand someone without shouting. That was the reason why, when Yuuga made a grave blunder, it was seriously dreadful." [Mikana]

Raven who has successfully cleared most of the dishes, leaving only three plates on the table, also nodded beside me.

"What on earth did he do?" [Youki]

"Yuuga has been capturing the hearts of all those girls unconsciously every time we stopped by any town or village during our journey ...Although, I am also one of them, who fell for him." [Mikana]

"There isn't any problem with that, is there?" [Youki]

It is a common setting in my previous life for a hero to have a harem of girls. Considering that he's such an *ikemen*, strong and has great prestige, it was not surprising for him to have 'raised the flags' wherever he goes. In addition to that, there's also the 'childhood friend flag'.

"It's a huge problem! Since he befriended all the girls wherever we went, we were able stay in each and every village or town for only a maximum of three days. Above all, whenever we stayed in the inn, all the girls who have their eyes on Yuuga would barged into the place!" [Mikana]

"No, no, no. I mean all of those were that hero's fault. So I don't think there should be any problem if he were to take full responsibilities for it." [Youki]

"We were troubled precisely because that Yuuga was such an idiot!" [Mikana]

"What do you mean by that?" [Youki]

"Unlike cleric, Yuuga is unnecessarily kind at the wrong time. He wasn't able to decline a girl's invitation." [Mikana]

"I see. In other words, if you stayed over in a place for too long, he would end up promising dates with numerous girls, hindering your journey's schedule." [Youki]

Mikana nodded in response.

*Even though he's a hero, he was holding his party back. It's laughable. Rather than demons, the hero of a party had instead become the obstacle in the journey. What kind of hero is he?*

"Regardless of how many times I have already warned him, the same thing would repeat itself whenever we reached a new town in just less than one day. When we realized it, he has already got along with a large number of girls in the town." [Mikana]

"...Could that, be the reason?" [Youki]

Was Cecilia angry because Yuuga was being friendly with innumerable girls? If she was enraged at Yuuga because she was feeling jealous, then...

"Judging by your expression, are you possibly misunderstanding something? Certainly that was the reason but it wasn't really because Yuuga was getting along with all the girls." [Mikana]

"Ah... is that so?" [Youki]

"To begin with, if that cleric really is interested in Yuuga, the two of them would've dated already long time ago." [Mikana]

"That is... certainly true." [Youki]

"...Good grief. I'll go on with my story then, alright? So, thanks to Yuuga, we weren't able to have a smooth journey or even get sufficient rest whenever we stopped by the villages and towns. All these continued on until one particular day. A group of girls finally caught up with Yuuga, causing a huge delay in our journey's schedule." [Mikana]

I had a feeling that Cecilia wasn't the only one who was angry at that time. Mikana and Raven might be pretty pissed at him too. Rather, that should be how it was. I supposed Raven must have not been able to voice his thoughts out even if he was angry.

"Cleric was furious because he was being irresponsible in his relationships with women. Even though it was just a normal lecture in the beginning, it gradually worsened when Yuuga started spouting something unnecessary several times." [Mikana]

A stony expression was affixed to Cecilia's face during the entire two-hour sermon she gave Yuuga. Mikana and Raven were stunned as they observed the scene at that time.

"That's why if you don't restrain yourself more, and wound up incurring the cleric's real wrath... it would be really dreadful." [Mikana]

"I-I got it." [Youki]

Come to think of it, was I saved by Celia-san the other day? There was a possibility that I might get the same treatment as Yuuga if Celia-san hadn't stepped into the room. Although, even if I did end up in the same situation as Yuuga, it was rightfully so. That incident was entirely my fault so I had decided to accept all the repercussion and face her wrath head on.

"Well, it's time for me to listen to Raven's story now." [Mikana]

However, the sound of a stomach rumbling could be heard once again at that moment. I had just finished up 10 plates of dishes and Raven was still in the

middle of his meal so there was no way that sound could've come from either of us.

"...That's because all you had was just a drink. Your stomach has already let out a loud growl a while ago." [Youki]

"You're being noisy. I'm on diet. I'm currently on a diet, alright! Do you have a problem with that!?" [Mikana]

Mikana misdirected her anger at me instead as she blushed. Getting our secrets out must have been the only thing she was thinking of, so her own hunger might have slipped her mind. Nevertheless, this couldn't have happened at a better time. Her stomach growled at such perfect moment that I had to stifle a laugh by covering my mouth with my hand. If Mikana were to catch me laughing, she would definitely cause even more annoyance.

Just when she was desperately looking for an excuse, Raven pushed the two remaining plates of dishes which he has yet to eat towards her. 『I can't take it anymore』 was what written in the memo – in other words, Raven has reached his limit. Apparently while Mikana and I were having our conversation, Raven was waging a war against the eight plates of dishes on the table by himself. It was supposed to be a perfect plan so I had not expected it to lead to such... a result.

"...Please eat them."

"Uu... then I'll accept your offer." [Mikana]

Mikana devoured the food at an amazing speed. I guess that's just how hungry she was.

"Raven, are you okay?" [Youki]

Raven brought his hand to his mouth as he held his full belly, looking quite unwell due to overeating.

*I wonder if there are any medicines for indigestion in this world. If there are, I would buy them immediately.*

"...I'm alright. I'll be fine after a short break, probably." [Raven]

"You have a surprisingly small appetite despite being a knight." [Youki]

"No, that amount of food are usually nothing to me. But, the instant I realized that the matter about Happiness would be exposed to her, I lost all my appetite."  
[Raven]

"You must have a really weak mental fortitude. Did you hate revealing it to her that much?" [Youki]



"...Once Mikana found out about it, there is high possibility that it might be exposed to Yuuga too. If that happened, Yuuga would definitely be taking some kind of action." [Raven]

"I see. It would surely become troublesome." [Youki]

That hero is also known as a 'flag maker'. Not only a 'love flag maker' but also a 'trouble flag maker'. Raven must have not wanted to involve Happiness in it.

"Besides... it was simply, embarrassing. To be talking about the person I like."  
[Raven]

Raven explained, his face blushed as he scratched his cheek.

*Raven... your heart's too pure.*

I was suddenly driven by an overwhelming urge to support Raven's love life with all I've got as well.

"Youki, why are you being silent there?" [Raven]

"Raven... give it all you've got to achieve your happiness." [Youki]

"I'm happy that you're cheering for me but... what's up all of the sudden?"  
[Raven]

"There's no hidden meaning behind my words actually. All I wanted to tell you was that I'll be rooting for you." [Youki]

I brought our conversation to an end, disregarding Raven, who appeared puzzled at my words. In the meanwhile, Mikana finally finished her meal when Raven and I were having a quiet discussion. She seemed to be waiting for us to finish our talk.

"So... in the end, what's Swordsman's love story about?" [Mikana]

"There's none." [Youki]

"Haa!? Why is that!?" [Mikana]

*I will definitely not reveal Raven's secret.*

"I will protect the purity of Raven's love!" [Youki]

I made my declaration, loud enough only for Mikana to hear. Before I knew it, my *chuuni* switch was already flipped.

"Why did I suddenly become such a villain-like character in your mind!?"  
[Mikana]

"Am I wrong?" [Youki]

"You're wrong! Even I would like to lend Swordsman a hand. Besides..."  
[Mikana]

"Besides?" [Youki]

"T-Things haven't gone well recently between me and Yuuga so, I'm also feeling troubled on what I should do. I had thought that you might... be able to give me some advice about it." [Mikana]

"" ..."" [Youki & Raven]

Her voice became softer with each word, until it was barely audible.

*Oioi, are you really consulting us about love?*

Raven and I were dumbfounded by the sudden development.

## Chapter 02: I tried to help the girl mage with her love problem

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Let's organize our current situation.

Raven, who was sitting next to me, was still stunned, while Mikana appeared embarrassed now, after voicing her thoughts. Wasn't she just getting hyped up in trying to pry the story out of Raven just now? Where did all her enthusiasm go to?

There could be a chance that Mikana wasn't the kind of character I had in mind. She had given me the impression of a slut when I first met her in the Demon Lord's castle, but I could be wrong. In actual fact, though it might sound absurd, it was possible that she was sincerely in love with Yuuga. A bitch who held the highest position in Yuuga's harem. I had previously thought that she was such a person.

"...What the heck's troubling you?" [Youki]

This situation would be convenient to us. If we were to change our subject, we would be able to avoid the discussion about Raven. Thus, I decided to help Mikana with her love problem.

"Recently, no, after a certain event, Yuuga has not spoken much to me anymore." [Mikana]

"But weren't the two of you on a date the other day?" [Youki]

"The date that caused the riot the other time was actually done against Yuuga's will. Since the weather is nice, I would like us to go out shopping just like old times. That was what I said to him." [Mikana]

Come to think of it, they did mention something like this the previous time. Moreover, the moment he saw Cecilia, he had completely ignored Mikana and went into the shop with Cecilia. Even though I knew that he was in love with Cecilia, I felt that he was being too cold towards Mikana.

"...I was aware that I was hated by him, and I knew the reason behind it too."  
[Mikana]

"W-Wait a minute. If you knew the reason, then why not just do something about it?" [Youki]

"If I could do something about it myself, I wouldn't have consulted you guys about it!" [Mikana]

Possibly because it was a touchy subject to her, she got irritated and misdirected her anger instead. It must have reminded her that she was disliked by the person she loves.

"For it to be something that you couldn't solve on your own, what actually have you done?" [Youki]

"...Swordsman should be able to figure it out, right?" [Mikana]

Mikana directed the question at Raven all of the sudden. Raven who was supposed to be in dazed a moment ago, had unknowingly recovered. He nodded his head to affirm Mikana's query.

"So I'm the only one who doesn't know anything about it?" [Youki]

"There's no way you knew about it. That incident happened before I got acquainted with you." [Mikana]

"I don't remember myself getting acquainted with you, though." [Youki]

Raven and I are friends, but Mikana is definitely not my friend. I guess I could say that our relationship is more or less on the borderline between strangers and acquaintances.

"...Oh right. That's true. Then we can start getting to know each other from now on." [Mikana]

"Yeah, we'll get acquainted with each other from now then." [Youki]

The '*acquainted*' part was emphasized for some reason. Normally, a discussion about love is something that you would have only with your friends. However, I had a feeling that it would be a better idea to maintain the relationship with Mikana as it is. I'd rather not be friends with her, and it was probably the same with Mikana as well. If so, then she shouldn't have sought my advice on her love problem at all. That was what I thought. Nevertheless, even though it might be impossible for us to be friends, it wouldn't be a bad idea to listen to her problems as fellow comrades with love issues. I might be able to use it as a reference for myself.

"Then I'll explain it to you... but before that, I'd like to ask you something. Can you swear to never tell anyone else what we are about to discuss now?" [Mikana]

"Seeing that it's an important discussion, I will not disclose it to anyone else. I promise that I'll keep it a secret." [Youki]

"Hmm, well, I will confirm it with Swordsman, just in case... He's someone whom I can trust, right?" [Mikana]

Raven strongly nodded. I guess he must have trusted me quite a bit. If so then it is something that made me happy. He was my very first friend in this world, so I had decided that I would believe in Raven too.

While I was making that determination in mind, Mikana started explaining the reason to Yuuga's cold attitude.

"This information is not open to the public so you might not know about this, but... we, suffered crushing defeats numerous times at the Demon Lord's castle."  
[Mikana]

"I-Is that so?" [Youki]

It was an information that I had full knowledge of... Since I was the principal offender, it wasn't a shocking declaration to me. However, it might look suspicious if I do not go with the flow by pretending to be surprised.

*Although, no way. Could that actually be the reason?*

"It wasn't even a Demon Lord. We were crushed by just one demon." [Mikana]

Mikana and Raven appeared to be dejected. They must have recalled the time when they were defeated over and over again. It made me feel guilty since I was the one who had pulverized them.

"I-Is that demon really that strong?" [Youki]

It would be suspicious if I did not show some kind of reaction. Distraught, I pretended to be astonished. What a clown I am. It was low of me to be doing this even though I was the culprit.

"He is strong. It even made us wonder why a demon like him was merely guarding the room in the middle of the Demon Lord's castle. Rather, he looked more like a Demon Lord to us." [Mikana]

It seemed that I might have appeared like a Demon Lord in the Hero party's eyes at that time. I guess it couldn't be helped since the real Demon Lord was defeated in just one battle, and that was even after Cecilia was removed from the party. ...I wonder if Cecilia had thought that I was the Demon Lord as well. It might not be relevant now, but I should try asking her the next time.



"He has higher magic attack than me, stronger recovery magic than cleric, and was even more agile than swordsman. His battle sense was also higher than Yuuga. All of us were overwhelmed by just a single demon." [Mikana]

"A-Are you serious? Was there really a demon like that?" [Youki]

It was unpleasant even though I understood it myself.

*How pathetic. Why must I listen to the legend of myself?*

My replies became completely monotonous, but Mikana went on with her story without paying any mind to my impression.

"Moreover he was totally looking down on us. Even though I was prepared for death when we were defeated the first time... when I came to, I realized that we were thrown to a nearby village. Not to mention, he had courteously healed all the injuries we had suffered in the fight, too." [Mikana]

"H-Heh... is that so? How should I put it, that's quite a kind enemy, isn't it?" [Youki]

W-What should I do? My eyes were swimming as I spoke. It felt awkward, so I ended up averting Raven's gaze.

"Hmph. It was the greatest humiliation to me. He was sympathizing his enemies!" [Mikana]

"I-Is that right? Y-Yeah, I mean, I guess so. You guys were fighting seriously but he simply healed your wounds and threw you all to a nearby village." [Youki]

I gradually averted my gaze and glugged down the water.

"What I felt wasn't just humiliation. He had shown us an overwhelming difference in power after fighting us just once! We were utterly annihilated without much resistance. I've never been defeated in such a way before until then!" [Mikana]

Mikana gnashed her teeth. It seemed to be considerably mortifying for her to be defeated by me. Certainly, I think I did recall saying something like, *"Fuhahaha. What a weak magic!"* before nullifying her magic easily several times. My tension went up whenever I saw Cecilia, so when they came my chuuni switch was flipped.

"That must be a terribly powerful enemy. But since you had defeated the Demon Lord, that would mean that you had defeated him too, isn't it? You're quite capable, to be able to beat a demon like him." [Youki]

That might be a shameless remark, but if I had not made such a comment, it would appear peculiar instead.

"...I guess so." [Mikana]

For some reason, Mikana became distressed. Raven appeared downcast as well, making the atmosphere around us gloomy. I had a feeling that I touched a sensitive subject.

"Erm, it seemed that I had said something that I shouldn't... I'm sorry." [Youki]

Did my previous reckless and selfish actions traumatize them? I had not expected it to lead to such an ambience. It seriously made me feel like prostrating to them.

"You don't need to apologize. It was just that, I recalled the time when we defeated him... or rather, when we drove him away." [Mikana]

"Ah, is that so?" [Youki]

Well, that was because they didn't actually defeat me. Since Mikana and Raven were not present there, Cecilia was supposedly to have beat me by herself.

"Yes. What happened that time might be the cause. I did something really terrible. I wonder if that's the reason why Yuuga was so cold towards me."  
[Mikana]

Mikana's face seemed forlorn as she looked at the ceiling. Tears could be seen welling up at the corners of her eyes...wait, what kind of atmosphere was this? It wasn't the time to laugh or joke around. The mood had become so serious that I couldn't find anything to say. She wiped off her tears after being immersed in her memories for a couple of seconds, and gazed at me intently.

"You might get angry after listening to what I am about to say. Especially if you like cleric too, similar to Yuuga..." [Mikana]

"Erm..." [Youki]

"In exchange for the permission to pass through the Demon Lord's castle, that demon gave us a condition. He would allow us to go only if we were to leave the cleric in his room. That was his condition. So, I persuaded Yuuga and swordsman to accept it." [Mikana]

"Eh..!?" [Youki]

I might have appeared really surprised at Mikana's confession in their eyes. However, what really shocked me was different than what they had in mind.

*Was that the real cause of Yuuga's current behaviour towards Mikana? If that was the case, then I was the one who was totally at fault, wasn't it!?*

I became overwhelmed with a heavy sense of guilt. At that time, all I wanted to do was to obtain the opportunity to confess to Cecilia, so I had not expected that it would put a crack in their relationship. Besides, how should I respond to this story now? From their point of view, I was supposed to be an outsider who had no knowledge of this incident at all. As Mikana said, since I was in love with

Cecilia, it was a given that I would be furious after hearing that they had deserted her. Nonetheless, that very demon who had caused it was me. It wasn't possible for me to get angry, considering that I was the one who had indirectly caused Mikana's current predicament. Furthermore, even if I wasn't actually angry, I couldn't bring myself to face Mikana now, too.

The two of them seemed to be waiting for my reaction. It might appear unnatural if I were to be silent for too long. I should go on with the conversation by pretending to be calm.

"...If you had done that with the intention of letting Cecilia die, then I would not forgive you. But, if you have a reason for it, then I would like you to let me know." [Youki]

"Reason... was it? I, the reason why I suggested to accept the demon's condition was to protect Yuuga's honour." [Mikana]

"The Hero's honour?" [Youki]

It surprised me when Yuuga's name suddenly popped out of nowhere. A question came to my mind at the same time. What is going on?

"We had everything planned out properly before entering the Demon Lord's castle for the first time. ...We thought we could win. However, we were defeated as soon as we challenged him. We were healed, thrown to a village, and then we challenged him again. The same process was repeated over and over again." [Mikana]

"...What was your previous plan?" [Youki]

"The enemies' information. We had compiled the details of all the past battles against the demons and Demon Lord that happened, and tried estimating their strength. So we should be able to win... there was never a time when a reckless challenge was made." [Mikana]

Come to think of it, all the higher-up demons in the castle had went outside at least once to make a sortie.

...with exception to me, who secluded myself in my room.

"Victory was right before our eyes. All the citizens in Clariness Kingdom had thought so... and we felt the same way too. We had not anticipated that demon like that would appear. His real strength was unfathomable. There wasn't a clue as to why he had never made his appearance before in all the previous fights. We did not foresee the Demon Lord to have such a trump card hidden up his sleeve." [Mikana]

*I wasn't a trump card!*

I had the strong urge to tell her that I was just a shut-in. Naturally it wasn't something that I could say. It was not possible for them to obtain any information about someone who had not stepped outside even once before.

"...So, how is that related to the story about Cecilia?" [Youki]

"I have just told you a moment ago but, we're not the only ones to have high expectation in our victory. The citizens did not doubt that victory was already in our hands too. Nevertheless, before we even reached the Demon Lord, we were already obliterated by an unknown demon in the middle of the castle... there was no way we could hand in such a report." [Mikana]

"...I see." [Youki]

I guess she had thought that it would cause confusion among the citizens, and also decrease the soldier's morale if that news were to reach them.

And...

"They would lose their confidence in the Hero's party... is that it?" [Youki]

Mikana looked away awkwardly. So, I had hit the mark, but it wasn't quite right at the same time?

"...Youki." [Raven]

Raven who had been in silence all this while suddenly spoke up when I was in the middle of pondering over it.

"What is it?" [Youki]

"In other words, for the sake of maintaining the people's trust in the Hero's party, Mikana decided to sacrifice Cecilia...?" [Raven]

It would be reasonable to interpret it as such, but judging by Mikana's first words and her character, that didn't seem to be it.

"Perhaps, it wasn't for the sake of the party itself, but rather, she was actually trying to protect Yuuga." [Youki]

"What do you mean by that?" [Raven]

"The hero's party that carried the weight of expectations of the citizens on their shoulders was annihilated. If such news were to reach the people, the one who might be blamed for it would be the hero, Yuuga." [Youki]

That was how heavy the burden of the hero's title was. It was likened to carrying the hope of the country. Moreover, Yuuga is the type who would often make enemies unconsciously. The disappointment would be far greater as well, since he has numerous over enthusiastic fans.

"At that time, you were weighing the options as well. Isn't that right?" [Youki]

"...Yes." [Raven]

Mikana who averted her gaze earlier, looked at us once again.

"When I realized it, the endless loop had already lasted for one month. I had reached the limit. I couldn't fake the report anymore." [Mikana]

"Fake the report?" [Youki]

"Didn't I say it before? It would be bad if the people were to find out that we were defeated. So, I manipulated the information so as to ensure it is not exposed. But as expected, there would be a limit to how long I could do it – especially if it had already lasted for one month. But, there didn't seem to be any sign of us winning him at all... That's why!" [Mikana]

"So that's why you suggested to accept that demon's condition?" [Youki]

"Yes. When he made that proposal, I ended up smiling unconsciously. It was a really tempting proposal since we were at our wit's end. Despite challenging him countless times, we still couldn't move ahead. So, it wasn't a level-headed decision... Haha, what kind of excuse was I making. I tried to desert the cleric, a member from our party whom we had been through thick and thin with. I did it even though I knew that there was a possibility that she could be killed."

[Mikana]

Possibly because she found herself deplorable, or that she was feeling guilty about Cecilia, tears could be seen streaming down her face halfway through her explanation.





Raven fixed his gaze on Mikana as he listened to her. I couldn't believe that my attempt to create an opportunity for my confession had led to such a tragedy.

"...Youki, please don't put all the blame on Mikana. I didn't reprove her suggestion as well at that time. I am... guilty of it too." [Raven]

Raven tried to stick up for Mikana by persuading me. This incident was completely my fault, so I had not blamed anyone for it. In the first place, I was in no position to condemn anyone at all. Although, it would appear strange to them if I had not gotten angry, considering that I was supposed to be in love with Cecilia. Having said that, I still didn't want to be angry at Mikana, so I decided to use a different approach to solve this.

"...Since you're telling me all these now, you must have been seized by a sense of guilt after that, am I right?" [Youki]

What kind of actions had Mikana taken after abandoning Cecilia?  
In some cases, there would be other choices that could be taken to rectify it.

"...Isn't that natural!? After we defeated the Demon Lord, I ran back to the room where we left cleric as fast as I could. That fight had drained all my physical strength and magic power, but even so, I couldn't care less about it!" [Mikana]

It seemed that she had ignored the state of her body and pushed herself by running back to that place to ensure Cecilia's safety as soon as possible.

"Then, was Cecilia safe?" [Youki]

"She was safe. After looking at my face, she said, "Mikana-san, thank you for your hard work.". Even though I had deserted her, she was still..." [Mikana]

Raven and I listened to Mikana's story in silence. This wasn't the time for us to intervene. It seemed that Raven was of the same opinion as me.

"Then, cleric rushed over to me and used her recovery magic. When I tried to thank her, I lost my consciousness..." [Mikana]

Recovery magic might be able to heal injuries, but it couldn't restore one's physical strength. After leaving my room, she had to fight against the other higher-up demons and Demon Lord, so her fatigue must have been accumulating. Not to mention, once she came to know that Cecilia was safe, she was abruptly released from her emotional stress, causing her to faint on the spot.

"So you haven't said anything to Cecilia since then?" [Youki]

"Yes. It felt awkward after that, so I haven't gone to meet her to apologize or thank her at all. I couldn't bring myself to say anything as well during the last uproar." [Mikana]

"Then are you fine with the current state of things? Are you planning to stay silent and not say anything to Cecilia at all from now on? Are you fine even if Yuuga were to continue hating you for it?" [Youki]

"I don't know... I don't know what I should do." [Mikana]

For the sake of protecting Yuuga, her beloved childhood friend, she had persuaded them to accept my condition... And, as a result, Yuuga ended up hating her, and she felt that she was indebted to Cecilia. Apologizing to Cecilia would be the quickest route, but it didn't seem possible judging by her current condition. It might be better for me to consult Cecilia about this first. Although, I would need to wait for another half month to do that. It might be irresponsible of me to say this, but I guess there was nothing else that I could do at this point.

"Why not spend some time to think over this for a while? Do you really want to leave the problem as is?" [Youki]

"...I understand. I'll ponder over it and draw my own conclusion. Then, I'll take my leave here. It was a shame that I wasn't able to find out about swordsman's love circumstances... but thank you for listening to my story." [Mikana]

Having said that, Mikana left the place. Raven and I were the only ones left at the table, but after what happened, we didn't feel like continuing our conversation about love anymore. Thus, we decided to dismiss our meeting, and we left the restaurant separately.

## Chapter 03: I encountered the hero

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"Fufufu... Finally! Half a month will have passed tomorrow!!" [Youki]

My tension was near the maximum when I woke up in the morning. If anyone were to be near me at the moment, they would definitely be annoyed. That was how high my tension was. After listening to Mikana's problem and getting into a 'binge eating contest' with Raven, a half month passed in the blink of an eye. Without realizing it, tomorrow is finally the decisive day fixed by Celia-san.

"I've been waiting for this day for a long time!" [Youki]

I finally came to understand the huge difference between 'not seeing someone' and 'couldn't see someone'. I don't want to go through this feeling again. That was seriously what I thought. However, it would all end today.

"Kukuku... I will be a God tomorrow!!" [Youki]

I ended up blurting out a chuuni-like line while I was changing in front of the mirror due to my high excitement level. I do understand that I should be restraining myself, but this is a room which I am renting. It's my own private room. Since I'm not in a public place, it shouldn't really matter. I could release all the increasing tension inside my body as much as I wanted to.

After getting dressed, I flashed my signature pose and spouted all the incomprehensible lines floating through my head that a normal person just wouldn't understand.

"I deny an existence like you!"

"Die by my magic!"

"I will definitely save the world!"

"It's regrettable... but you can't win against me."

Far from relieving the built-up tension, it had increased at an even faster rate, becoming uncontrollable.

This is bad. I couldn't stop myself.

"It would be the worst day for you today..."

"... What have you been babbling about since a while ago, brat?" [???

While I was engaged in a one-sided exchange with myself, I suddenly heard a voice calling out. When I turned around, I found Gai looking at me with sympathetic eyes.

...Yeah. Due to my escalating tension, I had totally forgotten about this stone statue that has been sleeping here all this while.

"Aaaaaaa!" [Youki]

That was embarrassing. It was super embarrassing. My excitement subsided abruptly, giving me a strong urge to punch my earlier self. Regardless of how exciting it would be, to be able to see Cecilia again tomorrow, I was still being too over enthusiastic.

A strange atmosphere ended up enveloping the room because of me. I might die if I were to remain in this room in this state. Thus, I tried escaping the room immediately from Gai who was still looking astonished.

"...Uooo!?" [Youki]

Upon opening the door, the sight of a girl standing there made me draw back in surprise.

"Hello. It's been a long time." [???

The girl who was standing outside was Tiel-chan. She greeted me normally, looking unfazed even though I had bolted out of the room all of the sudden. Seeing that she was dressed in her everyday clothes instead of her maid uniform, it was probably her day off today.

"Yeah, it has been a long time. I was just about to leave, but... do you need anything?" [Youki]

"I'm here to deliver the message from madam. Come to the mansion tomorrow in the afternoon." [Tiel]

Though Celia-san said that the duration would be half a month, I was still a little worried and was wondering if it would really be alright for me to go there. However, with this, my concern was alleviated, and I could visit Cecilia tomorrow without any hesitation.

"Thank you for coming all the way here to deliver the message even though it is your day off... By the way, what's that baggage you're carrying on your back?" [Youki]

What concerned me the most since a while ago was the baggage resembling a huge [furoshiki](#) on her back. How did she manage to carry such a huge thing despite having a frail body?

"They're books." [Tiel]

"Books?" [Youki]

"Yes." [Tiel]

"The entire load?" [Youki]

"That's right." [Tiel]

"..." [Youki]

"..." [Tiel]

I wonder... I had a feeling that Tiel-chan was trying to appeal for something from me through her eyes. It was likely that she was supposed to have come here to deliver the message from Celia-san, but her main purpose must be to meet that lazy ass lolicon gargoyle.

"Erm, I'll be leaving now but... do you want to come in?" [Youki]

"Yes, thank you very much!!" [Tiel]

Tiel-chan expressed her gratitude with the splendid bow she learned from Sophia-san. "Aren't you a completely different character from a while ago!?" ...was what I wanted to say, but I wanted to get away from Gai as soon as I could. As if we were swapping places, Tiel-chan entered the room while I dashed outside, aimlessly.

"Sigh... I won't be able to go back to the inn for a while. No, I don't want to go back there." [Youki]

That was embarrassing. It was super embarrassing. Ah, I wish I could crawl inside a hole and never, ever come out. My tension was at the maximum when I woke up in the morning, but it has hit rock bottom now. Besides, even though I had bolted out of my room by impulse, I don't have any plans with anyone today. Not to mention, I had left my guild card in my room, so I couldn't accept any request. I couldn't return there to take it back as well. Or, I could, on the

other hand, find Clayman and pass my time by listening to his nonsense rant... but I don't want him to use it as an excuse to slack off.

"It can't be helped. It is fortunate that I brought my money with me, so I can just wander around here." [Youki]

A full-fledged man wasting his time. There would be such a day off at times too. That was what I thought at that time. However, the outcome after loitering around by myself in the early hours... was dreadful.

While I was walking, my shoulders accidentally bumped against a strong looking beastman, causing him to shoot a fierce glare at me. It was scary.

When I entered a random shop, I was greeted by a gloomy scene of a couple flirting with each other. They then pointed their fingers at me, ridiculing a single man like me.

*It wasn't as if I like being single, dammit!*

When I went to my favourite cake shop (so I could eat something sweet, to compose myself due to the pent-up irritation), I noticed that the shop assistant was replaced by a nice guy with a muscular body. The sight of him in a frilly white apron had an immense 'destructive power'. It seemed that the usual shop assistant was bedridden after catching a cold, so her brother was supposedly looking after the shop in her absence. Although, I wished he could stop posing while he was carrying the cake! The contents had slightly become a mess after. I wanted to complain about it, but it would be troublesome if that muscle man were to start posing again, so I endured it and ate it as is.

And then I was at the stall, compensating a child back for accidentally bumping into him, and causing him to drop his kushiyaki in the process.

"Why am I so unlucky today..." [Youki]



"Here you go! Two kushiyaki for nii-chan!" [kushiyaki seller]

"T-Thank you... Here." [Youki]

I passed two kushiyaki to the child who was still crying as a service.

"Uuu, sniff... Thank you onii-chan." [child]

"Be more careful and look ahead before you walk the next time, alright? If you can't, then don't eat when you walk. You should do so only after you reach home." [Youki]

"U-Un." [child]

"See ya." [Youki]

The child then ran off as is, with the kushiyaki still remaining untouched in the bag. I guess he was planning to eat them only after he reached home. Although, it made me anxious, wondering if he would drop them once more. If he were to fall and drop them again, even I wouldn't be able to help him anymore.

"Even so, I am certainly unlucky today. I wonder why... the hec- ouch!" [Youki]

While I was having such thoughts in my mind, I ended up being negligent and collided with someone again. The person whom I had crashed into got away from me hastily without saying anything.

"What's up with that guy? He left without saying anything... something's fishy." [Youki]

A bad feeling came over me, prompting me to search my pockets. Upon doing so, I realized that my wallet was gone. My wallet was certainly still with me when I paid for the kushiyaki a while ago.

"That asshole!" [Youki]

*It is a pickpocket this time!?*

I sure have had a serious case of bad luck today. He could not have run off too far yet. I began running towards the direction that the guy headed to and surveyed my surroundings. I guess he had not expected me to notice it missing so soon. He ran off again when he realized that I was chasing after him. The pickpocket ran into a dark alley. It was naive of him to think he could get away from me by entering such a complex place.

"《Lightning Flash》" [Youki]

Using reinforcement magic to strengthen my legs, I leaped up and launched at him with a flying kick.

"Ora-!" [Youki]

"Guhe-!?" [pickpocket]

The pickpocket was blown off while uttering a strange cry. However, for some reason, another human came flying here as well, smashing directly into the pickpocket I kicked, causing both to fall to the ground with a thud.

"What the-!? Why did a person fly here all of a sudden? Well, whatever. What's more important is my wallet..." [Youki]

I retrieved my wallet from the thief's pocket and examined the contents inside. After confirming them, I stowed it away in my pocket. Since I had

recovered my stolen wallet, there was no reason for me remain here any longer, so I turned around quickly to leave the place. However, at that instant, a sudden sense of bloodlust that was directed at me, made me jump back. When I entered my battle stance and turned around, what greeted my sight was...

"Hey, you there! Return his wallet back to him at once!"

Yuuga, the hero standing there, with his sword pointed at me. There was an unknown girl accompanying him. I ended up encountering the one person whom I did not want to meet the most. Not to mention, a strange misunderstanding had occurred. For the time being, I guess I should persuade him to solve this misunderstanding.

"But that person's a pickpocket and this is my stolen wallet." [Youki]

"I see. So you're not returning it back, right? Then I'll make you return it by force!" [Yuuga]

"No, could you listen when someone's talking to you?!" [Youki]

Since my effort at persuasion failed, I wound up engaging in a fight against Yuuga as it was. There was no way I could just receive his attacks in silence, so my resistance gradually became showy as it prolonged. As a result, the townspeople reported to the knights about the commotion, and both Yuuga and I ended up being taken into the knight's custody.

*But I have not done anything wrong at all.*

While I was being taken away by the knights, a certain unfinished line that I had uttered this morning suddenly flowed through my head.

*"It would be the worst day for you today..."*

That very line that I had directed to myself in the mirror had magnificently become a reality. I should seriously restrain my chuuni self for the time being.

"I'll listen to the details at the headquarter." [knight]

"It will be the same as what I've told you earlier..." [Youki]

I replied wearily to the knight who seemed enthusiastic about the interrogation. After all, considering that Yuuga is a hero, it was likely that they would just listen to his testimony and pin the blame on me. When I snuck a look at Yuuga, I noticed that the girl accompanying him had the look of a maiden in love. I could hear the knight thanking them for their cooperation as he lowered his head. It seemed that I had totally played the role of a 'bad guy' here. Well, whatever. It was something that couldn't be helped as well that I became negligent. I gave up and went along with the knights to the knight's headquarter.

"Here, we'll begin our questioning inside. It seems like your first offense, so we might release you as soon as you come clean." [knight]

"Like I said before, I was just retrieving my stolen wallet." [Youki]

"Rest assured, we'll get the testimonies from the two unconscious individuals."  
[knight]

*How could I rest assured in this kind of situation?!*

"I'm seriously jinxed." That was what I thought when I was taken to the knight's headquarter.

The moment I entered, the sight that greeted me was Raven running towards us in a hurry.

"C-Commander Raven!? For Commander to be in such a hurry, did something happen?" [knight]

Raven showed the knight a memo at his query; 『What happened?』 Even though the knight was the one who asked him, he raised another question as a response to the knight's question. Since the notes were written beforehand, I guess this was something that might happen. The knight must have been used to something like this already. He answered Raven, looking unperturbed.

"Actually, there was a commotion in the plaza. This person seems to be an important suspect who had caused the uproar at the site." [knight]

As the victim in this, I have no recollection whatsoever of having done anything that would instead make me the perpetrator.

『Please tell me the details.』

After showing us the memo, Raven guided me and the knight to the room. Thereon, the process Raven took to handle this was a quick one. Once he got the full story from us, we went straight to the site. He gathered testimonies from the people around and woke up the unconscious pickpocket who then confessed to his crime. In addition, Raven also carried out an impartial investigation concerning Yuuga being the culprit of this problem, and helped clarify that I was actually the victim of theft.

I, who had fallen into despair was finally cleared of my name. Although, I have actually not done anything wrong from the start. Following that, I was guided to Raven's office and took it easy after sitting myself on a chair.

"You sure had a terrible experience." [Raven]

"Seriously. But, I'm saved thanks to Raven." [Youki]

I wonder what would happen if Raven had not come. Even if I had not done anything wrong, it would still not be resolved that soon too.

"...Yuuga had really done something's that inexcusable. I'm sorry." [Raven]

"You don't need to apologize. I was able to clear my name because of Raven." [Youki]

When I was taken into custody by the knight, I was actually cursing myself for having such terrible luck today. In the end, it still didn't change the fact that I was indeed involved in the uproar as well by engaging in a scuffle, so I was given a strict warning. I wasn't really the one who started it, though... That specific information was disregarded, since it would be much more troublesome if Raven had not turn up.

"Seriously, thank you very much. You have rushed over here to help me even though you were in the middle of your work." [Youki]

"...I saw the group of knights taking Youki into custody from the window. I thought that something might have happened." [Raven]

There were mountains of documents piling up on Raven's work desk. It seemed that he had halted his work just to help me. I seriously couldn't thank him enough for that.

"...So, what's going to happen to Hero?" [Youki]

"He's going to be given a stern warning, the same as Youki." [Raven]

"Who is going to be placed in charge of that?" [Youki]

"...I was told by my subordinates that I should be the one to do it as the commander here." [Raven]

Though he is hopeless, he is still a hero. The thought of reprimanding a hero could be too daunting so none of them wanted to do it... probably. Besides, they wouldn't want to make it look like the Hero was the one in the wrong, and they would like to carry it out impartially. If they were to think of it that way, the only one who could do it was Raven.

"They have discreetly pushed the job to you, huh?" [Youki]

"...Sigh." [Raven]

Raven let out a deep sigh. Is he alright? Could it be due to his accumulated fatigue... no that shouldn't be it.

"...Raven, can you even converse with Hero?" [Youki]

"...Not possible. It's not that I was made fun of. It's just that, he told me that it was unnecessary to be concerned about something like that. That's all." [Raven]

"I see." [Youki]

The person himself was concerned about it, so that was not the right way to conduct yourself towards him. The only reason he was concerned about it was because he was troubled by his own voice. Yuuga probably did not mean any harm, though.

"Then, what are you going to do now? Are you planning to release him just like that?" [Youki]

"...I'll manage it somehow through written memo." [Raven]

"I guess so. Though, I don't think that it would be convincing to do it through writing." [Youki]

"It'll be alright. I've done it before several times when we were still travelling as a party last time." [Raven]

"Then it's fine." [Youki]

"Raven! I've heard that the knights have arrested Captain. Where is he!?"

The door suddenly flung itself open and Duke came barging into the room as he shouted. It seemed that he had rushed here after receiving the information.

"Oioi. Calm down, Duke. Rather, you're supposed to refer him as commander, not just Raven. He's your superior." [Youki]

"Have you done something to be detained like this? Could it be that, you have resorted to crimes after receiving too many rejections from Cecilia-san..." [Duke]

"I've not resorted to any crime! Anyway just listen to me!" [Youki]

"Is that true? Well it's fine. Also, my only superior is Captain. Well, I'll refer to him as Commander Raven when we're in public... so why were you arrested?" [Duke]

"I'll say this first, but I've not done anything wrong." [Youki]

"Yeah, yeah. I got it." [Duke]

It took some time to explain it all over again to Duke who still didn't seem to believe in what I had said. In the meantime, Raven left the room after telling us that he would try to persuade Yuuga. Wait, persuade? Aren't you supposed to give him a stern warning instead? I managed to catch a glimpse of his expression



before he left the room, but it didn't appear too well. Hence, all I could tell him was, '*Do your best.*'

"Based on the story, I don't think that Captain was in the wrong. Hero was the one who had attacked Captain without first listening to what Captain has to say."  
[Duke]

"Isn't it? I'm not wrong, right?" [Youki]

"Well, it WAS a disgraceful blunder that a normal human managed to steal Captain's wallet, though. This wouldn't have happened if Captain didn't get your wallet stolen." [Duke]

Duke seemed to believe that I was innocent too, but what he just said somehow made me feel miserable. Duke was right. It was pathetic that I got my own wallet stolen.

"It was just a joke, okay?... Why such a long face?" [Duke]

"No, well... I had nothing but bad luck today." [Youki]

At the thought of all the incidents that happened since this morning, I couldn't even heave a sigh. Even though tomorrow is the long awaited reunion with Cecilia, why was I dogged by all the misfortune today? Could it be a trial that needed to be overcome in order to meet Cecilia? ...No, that shouldn't be it.

"Captain, um... sorry." [Duke]

I felt even more depressed at my own misfortune.

While Duke was consoling me, Raven returned to the room. It has only been several minutes since he left though.

"That's surprisingly fast." [Youki]

"The person himself seemed to have deeply regretted it. I've written everything beforehand so all I did was show him the memos, asking him to reflect on himself. All the words of caution have also been written in advance."  
[Raven]

"Oioi. Is that alright? He could have not taken a look at them at all and might appear as such just for the sake of it." [Youki]

"...That won't be possible. If he does that, he'll get a preaching from both Cecilia and Mikana." [Raven]

Did something similar happen during their journey? In any case, I felt that it was slightly too lenient.

"Captain, I'll go. I don't give a damn if he's a hero or not. I'll whip him into shape." [Duke]

"...Duke, you're already infamous among the group of knights. Any more than this is indeed..." [Raven]

"Hold it right there! I just heard something that I couldn't ignore. What do you mean by infamous? I have heard nothing about that." [Youki]

Leaving aside the matter about Yuuga, I need to hear this out carefully. If my former subordinate were to make any blunder, I should admonish him as his captain.

"No, I wasn't... infamous." [Duke]

It was plain as day that he was averting his gaze. It was obviously suspicious. He must be hiding something. When I tried to press on for answer, the sound of

someone knocking on the door could be heard. Raven sounded the bell on his desk. Thereupon, the door opened and a girl in armour entered the room.

*...Was that bell a substitute for his reply?*

"C-Commander, please excuse me." [???

*Is she Raven's subordinate?*

As soon as she entered the room, she glanced around restlessly. She narrowed her eyes momentarily when she looked at me and looked disgruntled when she saw Duke. However, a look of relief washed across her face right after. The girl then grabbed Duke's arm and dragged him out of the room by tugging him along by his arm. That action of hers was kind of cute.

"Commander, please excuse me!" [???

She gave a bow and exited from the room. Duke left without saying anything. Did Duke become a lolicon too?

"Raven, who's that girl earlier?" [Youki]

Disregarding the cause, Duke was originally my subordinate. Hence, it is a captain's duty to correct his subordinate's mistakes.

"Girl... Ah, do you mean Irene? Duke and Irene usually work together. She was probably searching for Duke who had slipped away during training. Also, she's an elf. She might look young but her actual age is... Since it's a personal information, I can't divulge it. But, at the least she's not as young as what Youki thinks."  
[Raven]

"She's an elf?" [Youki]

*Could she really be an elf? The elf race that is said to exist among the different races in another world. That elf!?*

I had thought that I was dogged by misfortune today, but not only was I able to see an elf, I was also saved by Raven. Was my luck improving?

"But aren't elves specialized in magic or archery?" [Youki]

"...There are circumstances there too." [Raven]

He couldn't say it. As a man, I shouldn't be prying into a woman's circumstances since we just met and have not spoken to each other yet. If that's the case, then I would like to know how Duke is doing as a knight. My eyes abruptly landed on the pile of papers on the desk. Come to think of it, Raven's work was interrupted, too, due to Yuuga and me. Since I was already released from detention, there was no reason for me to stay here any longer.

"Well, from that girl's point of view, I am just a stranger. Besides, if I were to poke around a girl's situation out of curiosity, I would receive another preaching from Cecilia again. Raven, it's time for me to leave. You've been of great help to me today." [Youki]

"...Yuuga was the one at fault. So what I did is natural. See you then." [Raven]

"Ou, help me relay it to Duke too." [Youki]

Having said so, I parted with Raven and left the knight's headquarter... but;

"Ah, you finally came out!" [???

"Ge-!" [Youki]

For some reason, I was 'ambushed' and caught by Yuuga.

"You finally came out. Eh, weren't you the one who was with Cecilia previously? We seemed to have met each other several times now." [Yuuga]

"I have met you many times." [Youki]

"We have, haven't we? I didn't notice it since the alley was dark." [Yuuga]

Even though I could discern that it was Yuuga at the time, it didn't appear to be the same for him, though, even if he did recognize me, I don't think I would have greeted him too.

"I'll take my leave then if there's nothing else." [Youki]

I had a feeling that it would wind up being troublesome, so I should leave this place as soon as I could. However, Yuuga didn't permit me to do so.

"Ah, wait a minute. I actually wanted to apologize for the misunderstanding. Is it, not okay with you?" [Yuuga]

Yuuga flashed me a killer smile that would instantly make women fall head over heels for him. Naturally it wouldn't work on me since I do not swing that way. However, if I were to decline Yuuga's request, he might persist in pestering me about it. If we were to make a racket in front of the knight's headquarter, we would end up troubling Raven again. There was no other way than to endure it and accept his invitation.

"I understand. Sure." [Youki]

"Seriously!? Then shall we change our location? I know of a good restaurant." [Yuuga]

"Yeah, yeah." [Youki]

I reluctantly followed Yuuga who walked ahead of me. It seemed that Raven had handed Yuuga the disguise set I lent him. Probably because he was being considerate towards Raven, he put them on as he walked around the town. It was a huge relief since it had prevented more commotion from occurring. Even though he was in disguise when we were on the 'double date' the other time, I couldn't comprehend why he came out without one today. It was actually bewildering that he has not caused any uproar before he got into the fight with me.

On our way there, a profound silence enveloped us the entire time. Yuuga appeared to have wanted to say something, but I guess I was emitting an aura that was figuratively screaming, "Don't talk to me!", so he held back and kept quiet.

After walking for several minutes, we finally arrived at the place. It was the same place recommended by Mikana the other day.

"We're here! Not only does it have an amicable and stylish atmosphere, the employees are kind too, and the food's totally tasty!" [Yuuga]

I thought the introduction sounded familiar, but wasn't it similar to what Mikana said? It seemed that Yuuga had been to this place before with Mikana. He must have remembered the words she said at that time.

"Oh! Is that so? I'm looking forward to it." [Youki]

Despite the fact that I had been here before, I told what seemed like a barefaced lie. Nevertheless, since I couldn't tell him the truth, I just kept quiet about it.

"What's so fun about coming to such a fashionable shop with another guy?". That was what I was thinking of at that moment, but seeing that we were already there, I figured I might as well just go in.

"Welcome. It'll be for two people, right? Please take your seat here."  
[employee]

We were guided by the same employee as the other time to our seats. Yuuga appeared to be troubled as he looked at the menu, probably contemplating on what to order, but since I didn't feel like having a prolonged conversation with him, I didn't plan to eat anything. All I requested for was a cup of drink.

"I'll get this shop's recommended drink." [Youki]

"...Anything else?" [employee]

"Yes, could you please wait for a moment? My friend hasn't make his selections yet." [Youki]

Yuuga was still looking through the menu.

*Could you make your decision soon?!*

"No... I mean, does this customer has anything else to order?" [employee]

"Me? I'm fine with just a drink." [Youki]

"I see." [employee]

There was a strange look on the employee's face as she tilted her head. After that, Yuuga eventually ordered the same thing as me before the employee left.

It was something that I found out later on, but when Raven and I were 'binge eating' in this shop the other day, our behaviour made us stick out like a sore thumb, leaving quite an impression on the employees here. As a result, it seemed that I was unexpectedly labelled as a 'compulsive eater customer', so her

suspicion was aroused when I ordered only a drink this time. It was a really trivial story, though.

"So what I wanted to say was that I'm really sorry for what happened just now. I ended up causing trouble because I was jumping to conclusions." [Yuuga]

"Nah, I don't mind it at all, so it's fine." [Youki]

I had initially assumed that we would be surrounded by an awkward atmosphere the entire time, before our drinks were served, so I did not expect Yuuga to apologize in a monotone manner for some reason.

*Was this truly an apology?*

"As a hero, I couldn't believe that I had attacked an innocent civilian. I'm sorry." [Yuuga]

Probably because he felt really bad about it, he lowered his head as he apologized.

I heard it from Raven, but Yuuga was in the midst of rescuing that lady when he encountered me. The guy who was forcibly making advances on the girl had taken her to the alley, so it seemed that Yuuga had misunderstood me as that guy's accomplice. There was the matter regarding the wallet, too, so he wound up attacking me. What I had done was for myself, but Yuuga was doing it to help a lady. Despite possessing a cheat ability, this was the regrettable difference between me and the ikemen hero, I suppose. It feels melancholy. Well, strength-wise, I am stronger, and since this incident has ended without any injuries, I guess it was fine.

"I'm not injured anyway so it's really alright. The misunderstanding seemed to be resolved too." [Youki]



"Is that so? I'm relieved. And, sorry for changing the subject, but what's your relationship with Cecilia!?" [Yuuga]

He leaned forward over the table and threw the question at me.  
Is that what someone who was apologizing just a while ago should ask?  
Apologizing to me might have been the lesser concern to him. Rather, could this actually be the main subject?

"We're just friends." [Youki]

I told him as it was in a serious tone. However, it seemed to be a huge shock to Yuuga even though I said we are just friends.

"That's not possible. How could it be possible for Cecilia to have a male friend?!" [Yuuga]

He lamented as he held his head. It was just a male friend. Why did he need to have such a reaction?

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Here's the shop's recommended drink. Please, take your time." [employee]

The employee served the drinks when Yuuga was sinking into depression.

*Nice timing, employee-san!*

I guzzled the served drink. It was a refreshing beverage with a citrus flavour.  
Yuuga gave me a questioning gaze as I was drinking.

"...What is it?" [Youki]

"Are you really just friends with Cecilia?" [Yuuga]

"If you're so sceptical about it, try asking Raven. Since he's a friend." [Youki]

After all, he wouldn't be convinced anyway regardless of what I have said. I threw this issue to Raven since I thought that he would believe it if he were to hear it from a third party instead.

"Are you friends with Raven too!? Come to think of it, when I was scolded by Raven a while ago, he did mention the name 'Youki' several times. Is that your name?" [Yuuga]

"That's right." [Youki]

"I see. Then I'll ask Raven the next time." [Yuuga]

"Please do so. You should be able to trust that person, right?" [Youki]

If you were to include this issue, I have owed a great debt to Raven. I wouldn't be able to keep our friendship on an equal footing if I don't return the favour.

"Yeah, I'll do so." [Yuuga]

"Then there's nothing else, right? I'll take my leave...." [Youki]

I gulped down my drink and stood up, attempting to pay the bill and leave the shop.

"W-Wait!" [Yuuga]

But, for some reason, Yuuga stopped me. I had a bad feeling about it, but I'll just listen to what he wants for now.

"Is there anything else that you still need?" [Youki]

"A-Actually, I need your advice on something." [Yuuga]

An advice? Yuuga wanted an advice from someone whom he has essentially met for the 'first time' and also someone who could possibly be his love rival? No, it was really strange, wasn't it?

"Why me?" [Youki]

"Uu... a-actually." [Yuuga]

"Actually?" [Youki]

"I don't have any friends whom I can consult this topic with." [Yuuga]

I came to understand the ikemen hero's sad circumstances. It nearly made me cry a little.

"I'll lend an ear for the time being. What kind of advice are you looking for?" [Youki]

"How to improve my relationship with Cecilia..." [Yuuga]

I had thought of listening to his request out of sympathy, seeing that he doesn't have any friends. However, it was stupid of me to have even asked that question with that kind of thought in mind. What the heck was this guy asking? Just how thick headed is he? He's already a fool. A person wouldn't usually consult his possible love rival about his love trouble, would they? If he had really believed what I said earlier, that Cecilia and I are just friends, then it would really be bewildering. Although I did just say that we are only friends, I hadn't recalled saying that I wasn't interested in her. He should at least understand that. The fact that he wanted me to advise him on how to improve his relationship with Cecilia

was actually laughable. After all, he has been acquainted with Cecilia far longer than I have.

"Um... you two are in the same party, right? Sorry, but I actually met Cecilia not too long ago. Hero-sama should be the one who has known her for a longer time, so you should know it better than me, right?" [Youki]

"The last time I saw you two together, you seemed to be getting along with her better than I did." [Yuuga]

Even so, don't ask my advice about this! Honestly, I don't want to counsel my own love rival. Can I throw this problem to Raven too? I was conflicted for several seconds.

The result was, Raven, I'm sorry.

"Hey, if that's the case then wouldn't it be better for you to consult your other party members?" [Youki]

"...I've caused inconvenience to Raven just a while ago. It was the first time, you know, for Raven to have scolded me using such long written notes." [Yuuga]

I had a feeling that long written notes wouldn't really be forceful enough. Nevertheless, judging by Yuuga's state, it was likely that he had received quite a lecture. Although, if Raven won't do it, there is still Mikana. He probably wouldn't consult Mikana about it, though.

"What?!" It seems that Mikana would likely refuse it after that loud exclamation.

"Mikana, no I can't ask her. Mikana doesn't seem to like Cecilia." [Yuuga]

While I was envisioning the scene of when Mikana declines his request, Yuuga suddenly blurted out something unexpected. I have not heard it from Mikana that she dislikes Cecilia.

"Hey, did the person herself say that?" [Youki]

"...Are you also friends with Mikana?" [Yuuga]

"No, she's an acquaintance." [Youki]

"I see. You see, Mikana is my childhood friend. We've always been together in the past and she has always supported me. But she tried to abandon Cecilia. I couldn't forgive that. Just because she hates Cecilia, she suggested to forsake her..." [Yuuga]

"Just shut up for a while." [Youki]

The moment I heard those words, my irritation reached its climax. Seriously, both Mirror and Yuuga... why do all the individuals who bear the title "hero" make me feel that annoyed? It is often said that ignorance is a crime. It might be nosy of me, but this is something that Yuuga should know. Otherwise, Yuuga would just do as he believed, and Mikana, who was suffering from the feelings of guilt, would be the one to be tormented by it. When it comes right down to it, this happened due to the seeds I sowed. For the sake of creating a happier tomorrow, I should make the distinction here.

"C-Calm down. Did I happen to say anything that could have rubbed you the wrong way?" [Yuuga]

Upon sensing the change in my mood, Yuuga tried soothing me in a hurry. He didn't seem to understand why there was a sudden switch to my state of mind.

"...You don't get it?" [Youki]

"E-Erm. Are you possibly still angry that I had attacked you all of the sudden?" [Yuuga]

I heaved a huge sigh and scratched my head irritably. I have already understood it, but he is indeed a considerable nincompoop. It was hateful when the person himself wasn't even aware of how his conduct and speech had aggravated someone. I guess he didn't think that there was anything wrong in what he said... No, that wasn't it. This guy thinks that Mikana was the one in the wrong. Therefore, he was convinced that he had not done anything wrong. He is dumber than a box of rocks.

"That's not it! ....The reason why I was angry, was because what you had just spouted was way too self-centered!" [Youki]

"What do you mean by self-centered?" [Yuuga]

Yuuga asked me with a look of puzzlement on his face.

"Could you put in a little effort and be more observant of your surroundings?! Just reflect back on what you have said a while ago, compare it to recent changes around you and you should understand it." [Youki]

"Even if you tell me to observe the changes around me, I don't get it. After our journey ended, I'm still as busy every day..." [Yuuga]

Yuuga answered, looking confused. It appears that if I don't call a spade a spade, he wouldn't understand it. It's not like he's still a child. I want him to understand it a little. It seemed that this guy has been brought up as quite a pampered kid. There was no other way than to explain it.

"The other day, I came here with Raven and Mikana." [Youki]

"Eh, is that so? But you looked as if you were here for the first time just now..." [Yuuga]

"I have heard of what happened in the Demon Lord's castle. You guys had a really tough fight against a demon whom you have no information of at all. That you then accepted the demon's request and left Cecilia behind." [Youki]

There was a strained look on Yuuga's face.





He must have recalled the memory of when he lost to me. It seemed to be a humiliating memory to both Mikana and Raven too. I felt really bad about that.

"Why did the two of them tell you.... Mikana was the one who said to keep it a secret between the four of us." [Yuuga]

Mikana probably couldn't endure it anymore. The distance between her and the person she loves grew further apart, and she wasn't able to apologize to Cecilia. Her sense of guilt was the only thing that was gradually accumulating, and it eventually exploded. When we met Mikana, we were initially discussing about Raven's love problem... However, due to my disruption, the conversation went off track and she ended up telling me that story.

"No idea, but Mikana was in tears when she recounted the story." [Youki]

"Eh?..." [Yuuga]

I didn't want to say it to protect Mikana's honour, but it would be better if Yuuga knows about it. It was necessary to let him understand his own wrongdoing. I was the one who had indirectly made him commit this mistake. That was why, I must solve this misunderstanding between these two people.

"She was feeling really guilty about what she had done to Cecilia. She wanted to apologize but she wasn't able to do it due to the awkwardness." [Youki]

"That's a lie! That's because Mikana had...." [Yuuga]

"Deserted Cecilia? That might be so, but was Mikana the only one who was responsible for it?" [Youki]

She is his childhood friend whom he has been together with for a long time, so there should be a reason to why he kept doubting her until now. It might be possible that he has an unshakable conviction... but that shouldn't be all.

"But, Mikana was the first one to have suggested to accept the demon's proposal. That's why.... Anyway Mikana was the one who's at fault!" [Yuuga]

"Quit your bullshit! Raven has said it himself. He was also guilty of it for not stopping her. So, he has asked me not to put the blame only on Mikana. He was covering for Mikana!" [Youki]

Raven wasn't shielding Mikana because he was sympathizing her. He was also responsible for it... It could be said it in that way. This fellow persisted in saying that Mikana was the one deserving the blame, but he didn't try to see his own faults.

"Why? Mikana was the one who encouraged us to accept it, wasn't it? So why did Raven..." [Yuuga]

"How about you? Are you not going to stick up for your childhood friend? For your comrade? Was she really the only one who was at fault?" [Youki]

"I... Mikana..." [Yuuga]

I think he actually understands it. That he was to be blamed for it too. He tried to say something but no words came out.

Then I will say it for him.

"You're also at fault. It's as simple as that. You have finally accepted it. But you didn't want to admit it, so you decided to put all the blame on Mikana. That was why you didn't stick up for Mikana. You're just saving your own skin!" [Youki]

"That's wrong! I wouldn't do something like that." [Yuuga]

Yuuga began losing his composure as he held his head. Despite knowing the fact, what the heck was this guy saying?

"Face reality yourself. If you can't do that then...that would be pretty lame of you." [Youki]

The fact that he couldn't protect the person he likes was blamed only on his childhood friend, and he didn't want to admit his own faults. Those were not things that a hero should do.

Could my words be affecting him? He regained his composure and cast his head down. His shoulders were trembling... Was he crying? For me to have caused a hero to cry was...dangerous. It was dangerous in many ways.

I hastily leaned forward. When I looked at his face, I could see tears streaming from his eyes. I had made him cry.

"I am...the worst. I've placed all the blame on Mikana... I ran away from my responsibilities even though it was also my fault that we deserted Cecilia... It's because, I couldn't defeat that fellow." [Yuuga]

I couldn't bear pouring more salt on the wound of someone who was crying...but I will do it. Saying it would be for his own good too.

"Hey, was that your first setback? Or rather, wasn't that your first defeat? That is why... it's that, you know. You don't really know how to take responsibility for it, so to make things easier, you just forced everything on Mikana. Isn't that right?" [Youki]

Tears were still streaming down his cheeks as he listened to my words. I'm the worst. This is how people would see me from an outsider's perspective. I had a feeling that I would make an enemy of over half of Clariness Kingdom citizens for making the hero cry. I restrained myself from saying anything further

and watched him with a complicated look on my face as he continued to shed tears for several minutes.

"...Hey. Can you lend me an ear for a while?" [Yuuga]

Yuuga who has stopped crying asked in a small voice. I couldn't decline him since this conversation came at a time like this. If he has indeed regretted it, even just a little, then it might be a story that is worth listening to.

"I don't mind it." [Youki]

"Thank you. Then I'll start..." [Yuuga]

The story that Yuuga began to narrate, little by little, was concerning Mikana and his childhoods. How they have been together since they were kids, what kind of games they played, and where they went... they were basically childish reminiscences.

"You know, when Mikana knew that I was chosen as a hero, she instantly said that she would go along with me... She began working hard in studying magic. Her effort paid off in the end and she was chosen as one of the party members." [Yuuga]

You should have realized it already at that point that she is in love with you, you damn slow-witted asshole. I have the strong urge to punch him. I restrained my trembling right hand with my other hand and continued to listen to his story.

The story went on about how he was scolded when he did stupid things, and how he was chided if he was being too picky. Judging from the story up until now, it seemed that he has always been reprimanded since his childhood. To sum it up, the whole story essentially sounded like how an older sister was taking care of her younger brother. Even if you were to listen to it over again, the narrative

of their childhood since a while ago was on how Mikana has been suffering due to Yuuga.

"...Hey, in the end, what did you actually want to say?" [Youki]

He had asked me to lend him an ear for only a while, but I ended up listening to his recollections for roughly ten minutes. I wish he could get to the main point soon. I would like him to tell me his plans.

"...I guess, I wanted to know what I should do. I have done nothing but caused trouble for her since our childhood...and I did a horrible thing to her... I was wondering, what I should do for Mikana." [Yuuga]

Did he start cherishing Mikana a little after being immersed in his memories? I wasn't sure why he was asking me that, but in short, he had no idea on what he should do. Could that be it?

"You know, I think when a person who scolds someone, she or he is doing it because they care for the other party." [Youki]

"Eh?" [Yuuga]

"So, I think it's fine if you go apologize...and have her scold you again as usual. If by chance, she does not reprimand you....then, well, we'll think of another way again." [Youki]

"I understand. I will go apologize to Mikana...and I will make sure to receive a scolding from her." [Yuuga](3)

If anyone else who knew nothing about it heard what he said, they might be wondering what he was talking about. However, I think this was the best way to mend the relationship between Yuuga and Mikana. I wouldn't say that this plan would definitely succeed, though.

"Ou, do your bes..." [Youki]

"But doing it alone makes me worried. Sorry, but come along with me!"  
[Yuuga]

"Come again?" [Youki]

At that moment, Yuuga's reaction was extremely fast. He placed the money for both drinks on the table, grabbed my right arm, and dashed out of the shop. We ran through the town at the same speed as when I used the strengthening magic on my feet, and we reached an isolated house before I realized it. It was neither a noble's mansion nor a tattered house in the alley, but a two-storey house.

"Haa, haa... don't go grabbing my arm and run all of the sudden!" [Youki]

"No, but I couldn't gather up my courage if I came alone. All you need to do is wait outside." [Yuuga]

"Who do you think you are?", I really wanted to shoot that remark at him. However, if he were to say "I'm your friend", it would be detestable, so I held myself back. Well, I was the one who put a crack in their relationship and also the one who mended it. So, I guess it would be fine to just wait for him.

"Got it. But I will be staying here. I will not go inside and will go back once you enter the house." [Youki]

"That alone is good enough. Thank you ...Ah, that's right! I'll introduce myself once again. I'm Yuuga. Pleased to meet you!" [Yuuga]

He turned around and said that right before he entered the house. I wasn't that 'pleased to meet him', but if it would give him the courage, then I guess I might as well give him a reply.

"...Youki. Best regards." [Youki]

"I see. Then Youki-kun, thank you. I was able to realize my own mistake thanks to you. I will return the gratitude the next time." [Yuuga]

He flashed me an ikemen smile... Wait, that sounded like a line that comes from a rival character who's just turned over a new leaf, right?! Oi!

After thanking me, Yuuga turned around and stood in front of the door.

However, I had forgotten about something at that time. I had forgotten that Yuuga is a hero, and a protagonist... so he has the 'lucky lewd' ability. Thus, what greeted his sight when Yuuga opened the door without knocking and marched inside, was the scene of Mikana changing her clothes.





He's done it now.

I, who had instantly grasped the situation, hid myself before Mikana noticed me. I peeked inside to observe the circumstances.

"Kyaaaa—....eh Yuuga!? Why did you suddenly enter before knockin...."  
[Mikana]

"Mikana, sorry!" [Yuuga]

Yuuga grasped both her shoulders firmly and apologized as he looked straight at her in the eyes.

*Mikana was in a half-naked state, you know? If you messed up, you might get arrested by the knights. ...It was a complete out.*

"No, like I said..." [Mikana]

"Don't say anything. Just listen to me!" [Yuuga]

Let me just tell you this. Yuuga is an absolute retard. Was that fellow really planning to reconcile with her?

"I have realized it. I have done a horrible thing to Mikana. To be more precise, someone made me realized it." [Yuuga]

What the current you were doing to her was the worst, though. Rather, could you take notice of Mikana's state?! You were holding your half-naked childhood friend down and interrupted her when she tried to say something.

"Even though Mikana has been supporting me for a long time, I have...I'm really sorry. I think what I have done is not something that is easily pardonable just by apologizing. But, if you were to forgive me...." [Yuuga]

It seemed like Mikana was blushing after Yuuga made his apology. Eh, the mood looked good, didn't it? If he were to move on at this pace, she might forgive him.

"I want you to scold me!" [Yuuga]

Ah, Mikana's expression reverted to normal. Rather, it was becoming worse... It was a complete failure, wasn't it?! At that moment, I deeply regretted it from the bottom of my heart. I didn't advise you to do something like that!

"Fufufufu... so you want to be scolded, don't you? You barged in all of the sudden while I was changing, and grasped onto my shoulders. Just when I thought that you were planning to apologize... What? Have you awakened to masochistic desire now?" [Mikana]

"Wai-, Mikana!? That's not it! I want to apologize to..." [Yuuga]

Mikana laughed eerily as she held onto her staff.

"I'll give you one even without you telling me so, you pervert Yuuga!"  
[Mikana]

An explosion resounded from the house. I ran away.

*\*Bam\**

*\*Bam\**

The sounds of the explosions reverberated through the surroundings. This wasn't my fault, right? Well, once Mikana's anger dissipated, they would probably

be able to reconcile. Since her half-naked state was seen by someone she likes, she shouldn't be that angry about it. Um. Yeah, it should be alright. I ignored Yuuga's screams and pleas for help behind and ran off.

After escaping, I returned to the inn. When I tried entering the room, I heard voices coming from the inside so I opened the door a little and peeked through the gap.

"Guardian Deity-sama... your appearance is so dignified." [Tiel]

"Oi, girly. You're sticking too close to me. And don't rub against my cheek."  
[Gai]

Tiel-chan was flirting with Gai. That reminds me, she did drop by my place. I had totally forgotten about it due to the string of bad luck and the encounter with Yuuga. It seemed amusing, so I decided to observe it a little longer.

"Aah! Please excuse me, Guardian Deity-sama. I'm sorry to have done such a rude thing to you. Please hold on a moment. I'll wipe all the parts that I have touched." [Tiel]

"You don't need to do that. ...Don't move your body too much. The injuries you sustained when you protected me haven't fully recovered, right?" [Gai]

"But... cough, cough." [Tiel]

Didn't her condition improve after taking Sheik's medicine? She shouldn't have carried such heavy baggage if she hasn't fully recovered.

"Girly. Your body is initially weak already so just be obedient." [Gai]

"...Yes." [Tiel]

Seeming depressed, Tiel-chan started reading the book she brought with her. Probably because Gai couldn't bear to see Tiel-chan looking so dejected, he said, "You can come closer if you don't touch and cling onto me."

Upon hearing that, a smile bloomed across her face. She kept the book inside the furoshiki and began to move. Then she sat down next to Gai and said, "Thank you very much, Guardian Deity-sama." before resuming her reading.

What kind of lovey-dovey atmosphere is this?! I'll definitely be the third wheel if I entered now, wouldn't I?

I couldn't even enter the room which I have rented. Realizing that I had fallen into such a mysterious situation, I ended up wandering around the town until Tiel-chan went back.

## Chapter 04: I went to the house of the girl I like

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"Owaaaa-!?"

I raised a cry and jumped out of the bed. The usual scenery spread out before me when I looked around. There was no doubt that this was the room of the inn I am renting. There was just one thing that was different.

"Oi, Gai... Why the heck are you holding your hands over me?" [Youki]

Gai, who was supposed to be sleeping in the corner of the room, was next to my bed. I could feel magic emanating from his hands. He seemed to be casting his magic on me.

"Mm, you've gotten up already, brat? After all the trouble I went through to show you a good dream." [Gai]

"You didn't need to show me that! I knew you were the culprit! Why did you show me that dream, you lolicon statue!?" [Youki]

I pressed Gai for an answer to why he was doing this, even though I had been considerate when he was flirting with Tiel-chan in the room yesterday.

"You have been looking after me in many respects. So this is just a little thank you from me." [Gai]

"Haa!? You're not someone who would..." [Youki]

Do something like this. That's right. It's strange. Gai is not someone who would usually do something like this. I couldn't say that out loud. It was likely that something must have happened.

『Dignified Appearance』

I suddenly recalled what Tiel-chan said yesterday. If I recall correctly... she was complimenting Gai even though his appearance left something to be desired. And yet, she was rubbing her cheek against Gai's and nestling close to him.

"Oi, could it be that you...?" [Youki]

"My new appearance seems to be favourable to that girl. So this is my thanks." [Gai]

Apparently, Gai used 《Nightmare Sleep》 on me as a token of his gratitude. He did not convey any thanks despite being praised by Raven the other time, but it was different when it came to Tiel-chan. As I thought, this guy is definitely a lolicon. There was no doubt about it. In the first place, it didn't really matter if he was a lolicon, or if he loved Tiel-chan. He might not be a human, but even demons have their own preferences, so I have no intention to say anything... but.

"Thanks? What thanks?! Why the heck did you use magic on someone without their permission!? Giving me such a dangerous dream!" [Youki]

"...Mu, I don't really know what you saw in your dream, but at the very least, it shouldn't be a nightmare. I strengthened your unconscious mind and desire, brat. Generally speaking, you should have experienced the things that you wanted to do the most in your dream." [Gai]

"Stop bullshitting me! Don't use magic to probe into the unconscious mind of someone who has been dumped by the opposite sex! Thanks to that I had a really intense dream!" [Youki]

Yes. What I had seen in my dream was very dangerous. Guys who have been 'dumped' have negative thoughts accumulating in their mind. And if you were to add one's desire on top of it, it would be really bad.

It was a dream of Cecilia, who was wearing a bathrobe sitting on the bed with me as I proposed. Seriously, if I had not woken up, I think really would have been dangerous.

"Hmm... the power was just right for the girl, but it didn't seem to work for you, brat. As a result, my magic might have been too strong, so it ended up giving you an intense dream" [Gai]

"Why are you analysing it calmly?! In the first place, what you're focusing on is strange! Besides, why did it work for Tiel-chan but fail on me?! If you're going to use it on me as a token of gratitude, then at least make it work!" [Youki]

Could it be because Cecilia, the one with the most common sense, was not around? I had a feeling I wound up playing as a straight man in her stead. ...My reasons for wanting to see Cecilia has increased. I will reach my limit soon if I'm alone for any longer.

"...I had intended to repay you back, but it seems like I have done something unnecessary." [Gai]

"It was too much! You don't know how many times I kept slapping my own head in my dream, telling myself that something was definitely strange in there." [Youki]

"I see. So you woke up from your dream of your own free will. It seems that my magic still has a long way to go." [Gai]

Gai, who didn't seem to be convinced with his own magic, shook his head as he reflected upon himself. What he ought to reflect upon should not be the result of the magic!

"How should I know! Good grief... I'm going back to sleep. Don't use 《Nightmare Sleep》 again!" [Youki]

The string of bad luck and Yuuga's consultation yesterday has left me exhausted. I'm still sleepy.

"Aa, I understand. Mm? Hold on, brat. If I'm not mistaken, today..." [Gai]

I can hear Gai's voice, but I'll ignore it. In the first place, Gai and Tiel-chan's flirting played a part in contributing to my weariness too. How many times do you think I had to come back to the inn yesterday? After returning and peeking into the room, I found myself outside, wandering around the Imperial Capital aimlessly numerous times. This process repeated itself over and over again. This sounds so much like a rijuu's story! Both of them eventually fell asleep, with their bodies nestled together. I woke Gai up, being careful not to disturb Tiel-chan. Gai then woke Tiel-chan up while I went outside and waited for Tiel-chan to go back. Why must I, the owner, have to be so mindful just to go back to my own room?!

"Oi brat, wake up. If you continue sleeping like this..." [Gai]

Gai seemed to say something, but I couldn't hear it. I was already on the verge of falling asleep. However, I have an important thing to do today. I'll just take a short nap and get up as soon as I can. I made such a resolution in my mind just before my consciousness began to fade, and I fell asleep soon after. ...Well, I can easily imagine myself missing the appointment at this rate.

Nevertheless, I am not a protagonist. I am not an ikemen, nor am I a hero. I'm just someone who was reincarnated. So, there's no way I would oversleep.

"...If this were the usual love comedy, I would go, 'Why didn't you wake me up?!' ...Wait, it would probably be the scene where Gai gets angry." [Youki]



I muttered as I prepared myself before leaving. Even though I had fallen asleep twice, I still got up at the usual time.

"Well, that would be the story IF Gai were the one to wake me up from my sleep." [Youki]

I turned towards Gai who was in the corner of the room. Even after I spouted my sarcasm, there was no reaction from him at all. It seemed that he was fast asleep.

"You should be the one to wake up!" [Youki]

I smiled wryly when I recalled the words Gai said just before I fell asleep. To begin with, it didn't matter at all even if I was worn out from yesterday's event. As today was an important day, I would not commit a blunder as stupid as oversleeping. The necklace that was meant to be a present for Cecilia was inserted into my pocket. It would be uncool if I were to forget to hand the present to the person I wanted to meet. I will show you my sincerity.

Then let's go! ...was what I thought until my gaze landed on the mirror. Was it because of the stupid things I had said to myself in front of the mirror yesterday? When I threw a furtive glance at Gai, he seemed to be sound asleep and it didn't appear as if he was getting up anytime soon.

*Should I lift my spirit a bit?*

I flipped my chuuni switch and struck a pose.

"I will make a declaration here...Today will be the best day for you!" [Youki]

I pointed towards my own reflection in the mirror. When I said that it would be the worst day for me yesterday, it had indeed become the worst day for me,

so I tried saying the opposite thing today. With this, it...should turn out to be a great day for me today.

Seeing that I had done what I should do and that I was already done with my preparation, I left my room and made my way to Aquarain's mansion, leaving Gai who was fast asleep in the room. Since I still have some time before noon, I decided to buy myself snacks to eat instead of a proper breakfast, and take a leisurely walk towards the mansion.

And then, various events happened.

First of all, when I passed by the vicinity of the cake shop, a female employee stopped me and handed me some cakes. I was initially baffled by her abrupt action, but after listening to her story, it seemed like she had seen how her brother was serving the customers yesterday. She was supposed to be resting due to her cold, but she was worried about her brother, so she had gone to the shop to check out the situation. Because of that, she understood that her brother had messed up the contents of the cakes due to his unnecessary body posing. Hence, she gave me the cakes as an apology. Although I was honestly happy, I suddenly caught sight of her brother, the root of this problem inside the shop. Did he notice me? He flashed me a grin, revealing his rows of shiny white teeth as he gave me a thumbs-up.

*...He couldn't possibly be interested in me, right?*

That was one possibility that I didn't even want to consider, so I left the shop with the cakes immediately. Upon leaving the shop, the guy who had been flirting with his lover (and making fun of me) yesterday called out to me. Apparently, he had ended up quarrelling with his lover after that and broke up with her. Since we are both single now, he wanted to say hello to me. It wasn't as if I like being single, so there was no need for him to do that, but I hesitantly shook hands with him and bid him farewell. Anyhow, since he looks like a fairly stylish man, it would only be a matter of time before he gets a new one. I don't

like making friends with these types of people, but having more acquaintances didn't seem like a bad idea.

The next one whom I bumped into was the strong looking beastman. That wolf beastman with sharp eyes, claws, and canine teeth did indeed seem to be strong... but he was apparently an old friend of Clayman. Apparently when I bumped into him yesterday, he was not actually glaring at me. He was observing me as he had sensed that I have an unusual presence. I was initially afraid of him finding out that I am a demon, but it seems like he was simply referring to my ability. He then invited me to go to the guild to accept a request with him next time. Although I almost accepted it unintentionally, the look he had on his face when he was laughing was the scariest one I had seen. If I really were to accept a guild request with him, I would definitely need Clayman to come along with us.

And now suddenly, I am surrounded by a group of people in butler clothing. ...What is it this time?

"We would like to apologize for the trouble caused by our young master the other day. I, as the butler of the household will apologize on behalf of our master." [butler]

"Apologize... for what? And who is your young master?" [Youki]

When the butler-san explained to me, I found out that it was pertaining to the kushiyaki child this time. It appears that the child is a young master from a quite well-off family.

"When we took our eyes off young master even for a while...he went off by himself. Deeply apologies about it. This is our token of apology." [Butler]

"Th...Thank you very much." [Youki]

"Then please excuse us." [Butler]

After saying so, he handed me a somewhat large bag and left with the group of butlers. As I wondered what a rich family would offer as apology, I opened the bag with meager expectations.

There were roughly twenty kushiyaki inside.  
...I'm happy about it, but I can't finish this myself.

"Since they are rich, there must be something more...that they could give. Why must they return the kushiyaki tenfold? ...Wait, it's almost noon. I guess I should go now." [Youki]

Bearing the necklace as a present, as well as the cakes and kushiyaki in hand, I headed towards the Aquarain household.

Upon arriving at the mansion, I was able to pass through without any trouble just by mentioning my name. It seemed that the gatekeepers were informed of my arrival beforehand. Come to think of it, there were that two other gatekeepers who turned me away the other time. Sophia-san seemed to have 'educated' them, but I wonder what would happen if I were to commit a serious blunder in the mansion. Would Sophia-san be 'educating' me as well?

Let's stop it. It was frightening just thinking about it. Leaving that aside, why was there not even a single servant around? It made me feel quite uneasy walking around in such a huge mansion alone.

"...Captain."

While I was being overwhelmed by the feelings of anxiety, I suddenly heard someone calling out from behind, so I turned around.

"Ah, Happiness. Thank goodness... I didn't see anyone around so I was feeling slightly worried." [Youki]

"...Why?" [Happiness]

Happiness asked, looking expressionless as usual. Considering that this is such a huge mansion, I had thought that whenever visitors drop by, there would be someone who would welcome them. If it were Sophia-san, I had expected her to go greet the guest at the door immediately.

"No, well, even if you asked me that, how should I put it...I thought that there will usually be someone who would come and welcome me." [Youki]

"...Who do you think you are?" [Happiness]

"No but, even if you say that...aren't you here to guide me?" [Youki]

"...Bingo." [Happiness]

It was hard to react when Happiness played the fool with a deadpan expression. It would have been better if she had shown some emotion. Raven is definitely going to have a hard time. It is likely that Happiness will remain expressionless as she thanks Raven after receiving his present. It won't be possible for him to read her expression, so he might misunderstand it and fall into depression himself.

"...I will guide you." [Happiness]

"Ah, I'll be counting on you. Though, I can actually find my way to Cecilia's room even by myself." [Youki]

"...My job." [Happiness]

"Yeah, you're just carrying out your responsibility, aren't you? I got it. I was just saying it." [Youki]

"...Then it's fine." [Happiness]

After such exchange, I decided to have Happiness guide me there obediently. By the way, I could read even Happiness' expression to a certain extent since I have known her for quite a long time. Although, I do not understand everything about her as well, since there were some areas that even I do not know what she was thinking about. Sheik's thoughts are even more difficult to comprehend, though.

While I was having such ruminations in my mind, I followed Happiness from behind. For some reason, my palms started feeling sweaty as we proceeded to our destination in silence. I will be able to see Cecilia soon. The moment this thought crossed my mind, I began to feel nervous. This is bad. I got this tense even though I have not seen her for only half a month.

"...[Hetare](#)." [Happiness]

Happiness who was leading the way, threw a quick glance here and murmured in a barely audible voice.

"Oi, hold on there! Who are you calling hetare?" [Youki]

I grabbed Happiness' shoulder and spun her around. There was no way I could remain silent when I was suddenly called a hetare.

"...What?" [Happiness]

Happiness averted her eyes from me; in an unnatural way. Was this fellow planning to feign ignorance?

"Didn't you just call me a hetare?! My hearing is sharp, so I was able to clearly hear what you said." [Youki]

Humans are especially sensitive to negative remarks about themselves. Well, I am a demon, though.

"...Too self-conscious." [Happiness]

"No. It wasn't me being self-conscious. You definitely did say that!" [Youki]

Seriously, I couldn't understand why she was still so stubbornly denying it till now. Although, I couldn't really refute what she said. On seeing my irritated state, Happiness seemed a little relieved and heaved a sigh.

"...Feel more relax now?" [Happiness]

"What are you talking about?! Rather, don't change the subject..." [Youki]

"...Nervous." [Happiness]

I finally noticed it after she said that. It seemed that Happiness had provoked me deliberately to ease my tension. For my former subordinate to be so mindful of me...I failed as a captain.

"Happiness, sorry it's my bad. Thanks to you, I'm back to my usual self."  
[Youki]

"...Then it's good." [Happiness]

Having received my thanks, she gave a curt reply, turned around and started walking again. Somehow, looking at Happiness' back made me feel that all my former subordinates are companions that I could depend on. As such, owing to Happiness, I was able to reach Cecilia's room in an extremely relaxed condition.

*\*knock knock\**

Happiness knocked on the door.

"...Ojou-sama. Captain is here." [Happiness]

"Please come in." A reply could be heard from the other side of the door after that.

Upon hearing Cecilia's voice, panic rose like bile in my body; since it was the first time listening to her voice after half a month. Just as I took a deep breath, Happiness elbowed me in my side.

"Uaa!?" [Youki]

A strange cry escaped my mouth due to the sudden pain.  
"Pull yourself together." When I looked at Happiness, it appeared as if she was conveying such message to me indirectly through her eyes.  
It was a rough method, but I appreciated it.  
Happiness opened the door and went inside. I followed in after her.

"It's been a long time, Youki-san ...though, it's actually only half a month so it's not exactly that long." [Cecilia]

Upon entering the room, Cecilia, who was sitting on a chair, looked over here as she smiled. Had she been reading until now? There were several books piled up next to her.

"No, it felt like it has been half a year since I last saw you, to me..." [Youki]

"It's exactly half a month, you know. Youki-san says something amusing as usual... Please take a seat. It will be hard to chat while you're standing." [Cecilia]

"Aa... thank you." [Youki]

Cecilia closed the book that she had been reading and placed it in a bookshelf.



I wasn't interrupting her reading, right? I'm seriously a coward to have even come to that conclusion. However, while such negative thoughts were running through my head, Happiness gave me another look and elbowed me once again, telling me indirectly that I should be happy that I have finally managed to meet Cecilia, and that I should dismiss my negative assumptions.

*...Alright. I'm fine.*

"...Please excuse me." [Happiness]

Nonetheless, Happiness gave Cecilia a salutation and left the room, leaving me alone with Cecilia. I wished I had something to start the conversation, but I couldn't think of anything to say. For the time being, I should hand her the 'gifts' that I had received as apology earlier.

"Ah, these are as apolo... no I mean, these are gifts for you." [Youki]

I gave Cecilia the box of cakes and the bag containing twenty kushiyaki.

"Gifts? Thank you, Youki-san.... Cakes, and twenty kushiyaki?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia thanked me and confirmed the contents, but upon inspecting it, a question mark floated above her head. I did think that the combinations were strange as well. The number of kushiyaki inside was odd, too.

"Erm, I don't think two people can finish up that many kushiyaki. Are these for the servants too?" [Cecilia]

It seemed that she assumed I had brought the servant's portion as well, probably because there were twenty kushiyaki inside.

"Hahaha... The cakes and kushiyaki are just something that I received from someone else." [Youki]

"...Can you explain it to me in detail?" [Cecilia]

Since she wanted me to explain, I began recounting the incidents that happened yesterday and today. The part about Yuuga was not included though, since it was likely that it would end up being a troublesome discussion.

"...So something like that happened. Isn't the end result fine? You managed to get to know many people too, correct?" [Cecilia]

"Uu...well, that's true." [Youki]

Does that mean, she might have thought that I only have very few friends? Though if that was the case, then it would be quite shocking. A lonely person without friends wouldn't be likable, right?

While I was having such miserable feelings, Cecilia who seemed to have sensed that I was developing an inferiority complex, explained.

"Youki-san, please don't get me wrong. What I meant was that, Youki-san has blended in with the community in Minerva." [Cecilia]

"...Eh?" [Youki]

"You're not only getting along with me, or Duke-san and the rest, but also the people in Minerva... You've gotten used to it, right? To this world." [Cecilia]

I listened to Cecilia's words and pondered about it. It should be around three months by now after I stopped secluding myself in the Demon Lord's castle. Even though I was excited about being in another world in the beginning, I was feeling uneasy about it at the same time. However, numerous things had happened since then; I went on a date with Cecilia, I participated in consulting Raven on his love

problem, I beat the crap out of the hero from the empire. I might have grown up a little after going through such experiences.

"The Youki-san who was at the Demon Lord's castle at that time said he wanted to die.... What about now?" [Cecilia]

"That's... I want to live. I'm enjoying myself now. Most importantly I have a goal." [Youki]

That goal is for Cecilia to reciprocate my feelings. Cecilia has been my main purpose in life ever since that day. ...It'll be alright. I will not wind up as a stalker. After all, I have already received the permission from her parent, Celia-san. Although, I have a feeling that we are still nothing more than just friends.

"A goal... it's great, isn't it? If you have a goal, you'll have the strength to live on. I should learn from Youki-san and set a goal for myself, too." [Cecilia]

"No well, even if you were to learn from someone like me..." [Youki]

"You don't need to be so humble, you know?" [Cecilia]

She flashed me a sweet smile that made me feel that she sincerely meant what she had said. That smile had completely knocked me out. I couldn't even look her directly in the face.

"Erm, that... thank you." [Youki]

I thanked her for the time being. ...I didn't want her to see me getting all embarrassed or looking pathetic. I should switch the subject.

"I didn't say anything that deserves a thanks, though. While we're at it, would you like to have the cakes? I will prepare some tea." [Cecilia]

"Sure, I'd like to have some ...Wait, Cecilia can prepare tea? Isn't that a servant's job?" [Youki]

"Sophia-san taught me how to do it. I felt that, it would not be a disadvantage for a woman to learn something like this." [Cecilia]

There was a smile on Cecilia's face as she said that while she prepared the tea.

"I would be blessed if I can have her as my wife." That was what I thought when I was watching her from behind, but another question arose in my mind.

"Is Cecilia good in cooking?..." [Youki]

"I can cook... but mostly the basic ones. And, I was the one who's usually in charge of cooking when we camped out during our trip." [Cecilia]

My desire to have Cecilia as my wife had become seriously stronger. Judging by flow of the conversation, it seemed that she could probably do almost any kind of housework. ...On the contrary, I wondered if there was anything that she couldn't do.

I should try probing her.

"Hey, does Cecilia have anything that you can't do, or that you're bad at?" [Youki]

"Something that I can't do? Let's see... for instance, swordsmanship. I'm not particularly good at martial arts." [Cecilia]

"I see. Well, Cecilia is a cleric. That's not something that you need to be concern about, isn't it?" [Youki]

I had not asked anything about the battle aspect. The short silence that I received in response was unexpected. Anyway, I guess you could say that Cecilia has a lot of '[girl power](#)'.

"...Even though we had already defeated the Demon Lord, there are still many vicious demons out there. Youki-san, if you have the time, could you help train me the next time?" [Cecilia]

"Eh, you mean in martial arts?" [Youki]

"Yes!" [Cecilia]

"I don't mind it, but do it in moderation, alright?" [Youki]

The image of that macho cake shop employee suddenly invaded my mind. He was raising his thumb up, as if telling me to leave it to him. ...Absolutely not. There was no way it was possible. I don't want Cecilia to end up becoming muscular, so I'll teach her using strengthening magic. I made a firm vow in my heart.

"Youki-san, the tea is ready." [Cecilia]

"T-Thank you." [Youki]

The cakes and tea were prepared on the table. I sat myself on the chair and took a sip of the tea.

"The tea prepared by Cecilia tastes good." [Youki]

I don't usually drink tea, but even I could tell that Cecilia's tea was delicious. Just drinking it soothed my mind. The cake and tea seemed to go well together.

"It's not comparable to the one Sophia-san made yet... but hearing you say so makes me happy." [Cecilia]

Cecilia who was facing me as she ate her cake looked bashful. It made me think that the gesture of hers looked so cute. Though I will not say it aloud since it would be embarrassing.

"It feels like it has been a long time since I last spent my holiday with someone so peacefully like this." [Cecilia]

"Hahaha... I had caused quite a commotion as well recently. This is very calming." [Youki]

It felt like all my accumulated stress in this past half month would be blown off just by taking my time, having tea time as I slowly chatted with Cecilia.

*...By the way, why did I come here for today?*

I tried recalling it as I took a sip of tea. Having tea time is fine, however, I couldn't help but feel that I had forgotten about something important. There were cakes and kushiyaki on the table. These shouldn't have been the only things. I had a feeling that there was something else that I should give to Cecilia. I dug my hands into my pockets and rustled around.

*Ah...I remembered it!*

I came here today to give the necklace to Cecilia, as a show of sincerity. That was dangerous. I was about to go back just like this after enjoying my tea time. It might be because of the string of trouble that accompanied me lately whenever I had lunch with someone. It had been a long time since I last spent a comfortable afternoon, so I nearly forgot about my main purpose. Atmosphere-wise, it shouldn't be a problem if I give it to her now. I should hand her the necklace

here and wipe off the blunder I made before. As Celia-san had said, I should adopt a firm attitude.

However, an uncomfortable feeling washed over me all of a sudden. Cecilia aside, as expected, it was strange that I had not seen any other servants except for Happiness. ...They wouldn't possibly be peeping or eavesdropping, would they? Handing a gift to a girl for the first time is a very important event to me. If it was possible, I would like to gift this to her alone without being seen by anyone else.

Thus, first of all, I should try and find out if someone was eavesdropping on our conversation in this room. There was no such convenient magic that could detect someone's position, nor could I search around for people's presence like some kind of master, too. So, the only thing I could do was to strengthen my five senses using magic. After enhancing my sense of smell and hearing, I searched around to see if there was anyone nearby. Although, doing something like strengthening my sense of smell in a woman's room might... there was a dangerously pleasant smell. While I was having such perverted thoughts running through my head, I explored the surroundings. It didn't seem as if there was anyone in the vicinity. However, there were familiar sounding voices coming from the outside.

"Youki-san, is there something wrong?" [Cecilia]

"...I thought of getting some fresh air." [Youki]

I stood up from my chair and opened the window. When I strengthened my sense of sight and looked towards the surrounding of the gate, I could see Yuuga and Mikana there.

*Why the heck did they come to the mansion for?!*

I enhanced my hearing, so I could listen in to their conversation. What were they talking about?

"Mikana, we have arrived at the mansion. Let's go see Cecilia right away."  
[Yuuga]

"Hold on Yuuga! You do remember the reason you're here, don't you?"  
[Mikana]

"Isn't it obvious! I... I mean we deserted Cecilia even though she is our companion. She might be alive now, but that still doesn't change the fact. So, we are here... to be scolded by Cecilia, right?!" [Yuuga]

"That's not it, you idiot!" [Mikana]

Mikana gave a slap to Yuuga's head when he stuck his chest out proudly. What she did was something that was rather impolite to a hero but.... it might not matter between those two. Even so... what the heck was that fellow, Yuuga saying there?

"What did you do that for, Mikana? It hurts... But, you're scolding me for my sake, aren't you? Thank you. As expected of Mikana." [Yuuga]

That might be the only guy in existence who would thank his companion who had just slapped his head by flashing her an ikeman smile.

"Ahhh for Pete's sake! Who was the one who had brainwashed Yuuga?! If I were to ever find out who it was, I'll definitely not let him off easily!" [Mikana]

Mikana appeared to be at her wits end as she looked at Yuuga who was rubbing his head.

This is bad. I was guilty of that. There were some areas in which Yuuga would have an intense conviction, but I had not expected him to have picked up only that particular part from our conversation yesterday. At this rate, it wouldn't be surprising even if he was seen as a masochist.



"Let's go, Mikana. To Cecilia..." [Yuuga]

"To apologize, alright? It will be up to cleric if she decides to give us a reprimand. Of course, she will also be the one to decide if we would be forgiven."  
[Mikana]

The optimistic Yuuga and meek looking Mikana then entered the mansion. They should be heading towards this room... It will definitely end up being troublesome. I would like to be alone with Cecilia, even for just a short while. And, I would like to give her the necklace. My wish would not be fulfilled since they will be coming to this room soon.

Thus, the solution to what I should do was pretty simple.

"Cecilia, I have a request." [Youki]

I closed the window and turned towards Cecilia.

"What is it? If you'd like a second helping of tea, it is still available." [Cecilia]

Certainly, that was something that I would like too. I had finished up all of mine since it was too tasty. But, this is not the time to be having a leisure tea time.

"No, that's not it. I'm sorry but... please come along with me!" [Youki]

I pulled her from her seat by grabbing her hand, and sprang out of the room with her. I could tell that she was confused even without looking at her. I understood it well that what I was doing was somewhat pushy, but I will explain it to her later. Considering the size of this mansion, there should be a place where we could be alone.

As I ran down the long corridor, I heard voices coming from a distance again.

"Haa haa... Youki-san, it surprised me when you suddenly started running like this. Where are you planning to go to? Besides, Sophia-san will be angry if she were to see you running around in the mansion." [Cecilia]

"I'm really sorry, Cecilia. But, could you wait here for a while?" [Youki]

"Eh? Wait a moment, Youki-san!" [Cecilia]

I ran to the source of the voice, without realizing that Cecilia was calling out to me. Hiding myself in the corner of the hallway, I peeped at the two individuals there; Raven and Duke. They seemed to be deliberating if they should enter the room (If I am not mistaken, that should be the servant's break room).

"How long are you going to keep standing here? Just go in and hand it to her quickly." [Duke]

Duke urged Raven, looking irritated. ...Ah, did he drop by the mansion to hand the present to Happiness? Duke appeared to be accompanying him.

"...but, will it be all right? Wouldn't she feel that it's strange if I were to gift her something suddenly?" [Raven]

"You've been saying the same thing since a while ago, haven't you!? You're really indecisive despite being a man." [Duke]

"...but, what should I do if she doesn't like it? I can't do it. I felt like going back now." [Raven]

He seemed troubled as he looked at the hair ornament. Seeing that we've gone through a great deal of trouble in purchasing that, I personally hoped that

he would be able to gift it to her. I will definitely not allow him to leave just like that.

"Haah!? You were the one who wanted me to come along with you after saying that you have something to give her. Do you think I will permit you to go back just like that now?! Didn't we work our butt off yesterday just so we can have our break on the same day today? Are you planning to let all our hard work go to waste!?" [Duke]

Was he trying to finish off the accumulated pile of documents on his desk yesterday just so he could take a day off today? ...It made me feel really bad for increasing his workload.

"...That's certainly true. Alright, I'm going in!" [Raven]

Did he finally steel himself? Raven reached out for the doorknob, but his hand stopped midway. Upon closer inspection, his hand appeared to be trembling.

"Ahh for God's sake! At this rate, Happiness' lunch break will be over!" [Duke]

"...Sorry." [Raven]

Duke lamented as he shook Raven's body. I would have liked to have kept observing the development of this situation; but I had things that needed to be done, too. I returned to where Cecilia was, without being noticed by either of them.

"Ah, Youki-san. Why did you suddenly ask me to... Wait, where are you going this time-!?" [Cecilia]

"Sorry, this is not the place." [Youki]

I forcefully grasped Cecilia's hand and started running off to look for a place where I could be alone with her. I had initially considered going out to the courtyard, but that place appeared to be occupied already.

"Sheik-kun, please listen to this. I paid Guardian Deity-sama a visit yesterday. Then you know, I was surprised to see Guardian Deity-sama's appearance. Guardian Deity-sama has taken such a dignified looking form. Of course, his previous form was also very dignified looking, but Guardian Deity-sama's look yesterday was even more... Sheik-kun, can you hear me!?"

"...Guuguu."

The ones in the courtyard were Tiel-chan, who was earnestly talking about Gai, and Sheik, who was blowing snot bubble as he slept. He was probably worn out after listening to Tiel-chan's passionate speech about Gai. It had been a long time since I last saw someone blowing a snot bubble.

"Sheik-kun, please wake up." [Tiel]

Tiel-chan, who seemed to have reverted back to her usual intellectual self, continued shaking Sheik, bringing him back forcibly from his dream world.

"Uuu~, Tiel-chan I'm sleepy..." [Sheik]

"What are you saying? It's only noon now, you know? It's still too early to go to sleep... That's why, let's discuss more about Guardian Deity-sama!" [Tiel]

It appeared that her switch was flipped again. It would seem that Tiel-chan switch was more frightening than my chuuni switch.

"I had enough already~ Tiel-chan needs to go back to work soon too~"  
[Sheik]

"It's fine. I still have my lunch break... Then I'll start, alright? The Guardian Deity-sama yesterday..." [Tiel]

Sheik started nodding off again once Tiel-chan begun her story from the beginning.

This place was no good too. Far from being alone with Cecilia, we would be forced to listen to Tiel-chan's story about Gai instead.

"Youki-san, Sheik-kun and Tiel-chan are....." [Cecilia]

"This is not the place. Next!" [Youki]

"Eh? Shouldn't we greet them at least... Wait, where are we going again?!" [Cecilia]

Damn it. Where should we go? ...The guest room might be empty. No, it must definitely be empty. I came to my own conclusion and made my way to the guest room.

Upon arriving at the guest room, the place appeared to be occupied as well. Voices could be heard coming from inside the room. They were Celia-san and Sophia-san's voices.

What were they talking about? I cracked open the door to peek in.

"Youki-san, it's not good to eavesdrop on... Eh, Mother and Sophia-san?" [Cecilia]

"Shhh. I'm curious about their conversation. I want to know what they are talking about. It'll only be a while." [Youki]

I was in a hurry, but it couldn't be helped since curiosity got the better of me.

Cecilia seemed to be curious about it too, but she didn't want to listen in to their conversation. As expected of Cecilia. She's different from me

Now, what were they talking about?

"Come to think of it, Sophia, is your daughter doing well? I haven't seen her for a while now so I got slightly worried." [Celia]

I was hit by a shocking fact all of a sudden.

Clayman and Sophia-san have a child?

"I'm currently educating her so as to make sure she definitely wouldn't turn out like my husband. So, it's fine." [Sophia]

"Ara, is that so? But Sophia-san's husband is an interesting person, isn't it? Wouldn't it be fine even if she ends up resembling him?" [Celia]

"It would be really troublesome instead if she were to end up getting all the wrong traits from him." [Sophia]

Sophia-san was hurling insults at her own husband calmly, without any expression on her face. Well, certainly, I do understand her feelings of not wanting her daughter to inherit Clayman's laziness.

"...By the way, what are you doing, Youki-sama? You've been standing there since just now." [Sophia]

Sophia-san's eyes met mine through the door gap. Crap, it seemed that she had already realized that I was here since the beginning. It totally slipped my mind that she used to be an A rank adventurer.

"Let's escape. I've been found out by Sophia-san." [Youki]

"That's why I told you not to peek. I think it would be useless even if we were to esca... Wait, we're running again?" [Cecilia]

We had nearly encountered someone every time I tried to find a place for us to be alone. This kept happening repeatedly, but we eventually ended up in what looked like a study room.

"Haaa haaa... Damn, I can't find it." [Youki]

"Huu huu... Youki-san, are you looking for something in the mansion? I can guide you." [Cecilia]

"Looking for..." [Youki]

I was looking for a place where I could be alone with Cecilia, but... are we not alone now? We have pretty much exhausted ourselves after running around the place, and it would be bad to make Cecilia come along with me any longer than this. It might be a dusty study room, but this place should do it.

"Cecilia, this..." [Youki]

I took out the box containing the necklace from my pocket and handed it to Cecilia.

"This, can I open it?" [Cecilia]

"Yeah..." [Youki]

At my response, Cecilia opened it and took out the necklace.

"This necklace, if I'm not mistaken, this is from the accessory shop where we met Hero-sama and Mikana-san..." [Cecilia]

"So you still remember it. Even though I wanted to buy it at that time, I lost the opportunity to do so, thanks to that Hero causing that huge ruckus. It's a present for Cecilia. This is to make up for the mistake I made the previous time... no, that's not it. I mean it's to get my act together, or rather..." [Youki]

"...Fufu." [Cecilia]

I couldn't quite put my words together so I wound up saying it in a fluster. Upon seeing my state, Cecilia laughed lightly.

"Youki-san, thank you. I will cherish this necklace." [Cecilia]

Cecilia appeared pleased somehow. I made a small guts pose. ...If I were a protagonist, this should be where I make my confession as well, right?

Right at the moment when that thought crossed my mind, someone opened the door to the study room. There stood Yuuga, Mikana, and Duke. For some reason, all the members were there.

...As expected, I knew it would end up this way.

"Cecilia, I finally found you! Eh? Why are you alone with Youki-kun in a place like this?... Youki-kun, what the heck are you doing with Cecili—" [Yuuga]

"Yuuga, I understand what you wanted to say, but just calm down. Commoner, you're pretty good, aren't you? I've got a better opinion of you now." [Mikana]

Mikana smacked Yuuga's face with her hand, forcibly silencing him as he was kicking up a fuss.

Nice block! I've got a better opinion of you now, too!



Raven, who was standing behind, appeared to be depressed while Duke was consoling him by patting his back. I haven't even reached that stage yet... That must be what he was feeling depressed about, I guess. Ah, Happiness approached Raven.

"...Are you not feeling well?" [Happiness]

She seemed to have misunderstood it, thinking that he wasn't feeling well. When Raven waved his hand, making a gesture as if telling her that there was nothing wrong, Duke moved away from them silently.

Nice judgement!

In other words, he wanted to give the two of them a quality time together. Raven, however, was giving Duke the puppy dog eyes...

"If you're going to make a racket, please do so in the courtyard." [Sophia]

At Sophia-san's words, all of us moved to the courtyard. Since this was a rare opportunity for everyone to get together, I handed out the kushiyaki to everyone. After distributing them, Yuuga and Mikana went over to Cecilia to have a talk with her.

"Cecilia, I have finally realized my own mistake. So, please scol- ...It hurts!"  
[Yuuga]

Mikana hit Yuuga on his head before he was done with his words. This fellow's personality was worse than the last time, wasn't it?

"Whew...He's seriously an idiot! Now then." [Mikana]

Mikana faced Cecilia after silencing Yuuga. It seemed that she wanted to put an end to it.

An anime-style illustration of two young women standing outdoors. The woman on the left has long, flowing blue hair and is wearing a light green, short-sleeved dress with yellow horizontal bands. She has her hands clasped in front of her and is smiling. The woman on the right has long, straight brown hair and is wearing a light green dress with a red cardigan. She has a surprised or apologetic expression with her mouth open. The background shows a large tree on the left and a building on the right, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

"You don't need to feel responsible for it anymore."

"I'm going to be honest... I'm sorry!"

"I'm going to be honest... I'm sorry!" [Mikana]

Mikana lowered her head to Cecilia. Cecilia didn't seem to understand it initially, but she might have guessed it based on Mikana's words in the end.

"Mikana-san, if this is related to what happened the last time, it's fine."  
[Cecilia]

"But you're our companion, and yet we..." [Mikana]

"There wasn't much of a choice at that time... Above all, I'm still alive. You don't need to feel responsible for it anymore." [Cecilia]

"T-Thank you... erm, Cecilia!" [Mikana]

Mikana usually addressed Cecilia as 'cleric', but it was different this time. Well, Cecilia didn't seem to mind it, and Mikana's problem would be resolved with this, too. I'm glad. While I was feeling relieved, I felt someone tugging on the hem of my shirt. Wondering who it was, I turned around to find Happiness who was usually expressionless, appearing somewhat perplexed at the moment as she held onto a hair ornament. It seemed that Raven had successfully handed the gift to her.

"...This." [Happiness]

"Isn't this a hair ornament? What's wrong with it?" [Youki]

I pretended to know nothing about it. It might be a bad thing, but I would like to know Happiness' answer.

"...I got it." [Happiness]

"From whom?" [Youki]

"..." [Happiness]

Happiness blushed as she looked down. I had not intended to make it such a difficult question, though.

"Well, it's fine if you don't want to answer. Since you have received it, why don't you try putting it on?" [Youki]

"...Un." [Happiness]

Was she hesitating about whether she should put it on? No, she was probably feeling embarrassed. I would feel bad for Raven if she didn't wear it, but I couldn't just force her to put it on. What should I do?

"Waaa~ Happiness-ane! You got a hair ornament~" [Sheik]

Sheik, who was stuffing his cheeks with two kushiyaki came over in high spirits.

"I think it would look good on you~ Try putting it on~" [Sheik]

As expected of the spoiled child, Sheik! There was no stopping him anymore once he started behaving like this. Probably feeling the same way, Happiness looked around before putting on the hair ornament. ...She was possibly trying to confirm if Raven was in the vicinity.

"...How is it?" [Happiness]

"It suits you~ I think it'll be good even if you wear it all the time~ " [Sheik]

"You heard him. I think it looks good on you too. You've received something really nice there. I'm glad for you." [Youki]

I joined Sheik, who was clueless about the whole thing and praised her. It did suit her in actual fact, so it wasn't a lie.

"...Thank him." [Happiness]

It seemed that Happiness wanted to express her gratitude.

Good for you, Raven.

He was last seen looking dejected as Duke consoled him... but, well I should keep this a secret to avoid ruining the anticipation.





"Youki-san."

"Eh? Cecilia? Are you done with the talk already?" [Youki]

"Youki-san was the one, wasn't it? The one who gave the advice to Mikana and Hero-sama." [Cecilia]

It looked like she had found out about it. I wasn't planning to hide it anyway, so it didn't really matter, though.

"It was my fault that their relationship became awkward. I gave the counselling, preaching and made unnecessary remarks too." [Youki]

"You've helped Mikana out. Although, Hero-sama has become slightly strange... Mikana was complaining about it." [Cecilia]

It was Yuuga's fault for getting the terribly wrong impression. To begin with, I was just preaching him normally, so I did not expect it to turn out this way at all. There was no harm done in particular, so there shouldn't be any problem.

"Well, isn't it fine?" [Youki]

"It's not fine at all... Hero-sama became like that." [Cecilia]

"If you really want to, then just leave it to me. I'll think of a good idea."  
[Youki]

"If that's the case, then I don't mind it... Even so, it feels lively here." [Cecilia]

Cecilia muttered as she looked around. Is this situation what you call lively? Everyone was just having idle chat while eating kushiyaki.

"Ever since I met Youki-san, I have been experiencing nothing but fun and interesting things. Please treat me well from now on, Youki-san." [Cecilia]

"Eh?... Ah, un. Please treat me well, too." [Youki]

Cecilia's words sounded like an exchange between two couples who were married for many years.

"Who am I kidding... It would be good if I get accustomed to it." [Youki]

I muttered to myself as that foolish thought went through my mind. I came here around noon, but possibly due to all that running around in the mansion, it was already evening when I realized it. It was almost time for me to go back. The moment that thought came to mind, a tinge of loneliness came over me. However, when I recalled that I was able to come see her, I felt better again. After I was given a light punishment by Sophia-san for eavesdropping, I received a tentative passing mark from Celia-san. I could drop by this mansion again to see Cecilia.

While I was thinking of such things, I finished the last bite of the kushiyaki.



## Chapter 05: I listened to the Guardian Deity's wish

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Ten days have passed since that day. Since my ban had been lifted, I had gone to see Cecilia several times within that timeframe. I did not pay her a visit today, however. Instead, I went to the guild to report to Clayman on a request that I had completed.

"Hey, how many more requests do I have to take before I get promoted to A rank?" [Youki]

"Hah? Why are you asking that all of the sudden?" [Clayman]

Clayman asked in return as he processed my work in an exasperated manner.

"No, that's because I managed to achieve B rank from an F rank easily. But, I have done quite a fair amount of B rank quests already, right?" [Youki]

"Stop being so demanding! It's actually rare to find someone who can even achieve B rank in just less than six months." [Clayman]

"But I want to be an A rank adventurer as soon as possible." [Youki]

"When it's impossible, it's impossible. I mean, just think about it. Once you become an A rank adventurer, you'll be receiving more troublesome jobs. At the same time, there will be more troublesome processing work that needs to be done as well. As a result, my workload will also increase; making it even more bothersome. Do you understand?" [Clayman]

"For now, I understand that Clayman is just being lazy as usual." [Youki]

This guy... So he didn't want to raise my rank for his own sake? Is it acceptable for an assistant guildmaster to be behaving like that?

After that, I tried to carry on for a little longer to talk it out with Clayman, but he changed the subject every single time. In the end, I wasn't able to bring up the subject about my promotion to A rank.

"Damn it... I want to take up A rank quests as soon as I can." [Youki]

I muttered as I was on my way back to the inn from the guild. Clayman had said that my promotion would increase his workload, but that shouldn't be the only reason for his refusal. He did mention that he had rarely seen someone who could achieve B rank in less than six months. That would mean that the number of people who achieved A rank would be even fewer. Thus, there was no doubt that it would be very conspicuous if someone managed to do so. Clayman might have refused promoting me to A rank for the sake of my own well-being. Although, it might also be true that he had refused to do so because he was afraid that it would increase his workload.

"Well then. What should I do today?" [Youki]

I went back to the inn and mulled over my plans for the day, as I walked towards my room. I didn't feel like taking up any guild request, since if I had intended to do so, I wouldn't have returned to the inn. That said, I didn't have any appointment with anyone today. I entered the room, feeling distressed as I couldn't decide on what to do.

"I'm back, wait there's no one around... no, there is." [Youki]

The stone statue, which had received a high appraisal from all of the visitors, was present. I had simply changed his form as payback for giving me such a dangerous dream after he cast 《Nightmare Sleep》 on me the other day. However, his appearance ended up receiving overwhelming approval instead. Considering the result, it could no longer be considered revenge anymore.

Nonetheless, I couldn't figure out what had gone wrong so I gave up in frustration in the end.

"Gai, are you awake? Or rather, get up!!" [Youki]

Since I couldn't decide on what I should do today, I woke Gai up just to kill time. When I gave the stone body a light tap, I could hear a soft echo resounding through the room.

"Mu... What is it, brat? You're surprisingly early today." [Gai]

"Well, I lost my purpose of leaving today, I guess." [Youki]

I couldn't bring myself to tell him that I left the guild without taking up any job, since I failed to negotiate with Clayman.

"Hmph, so you went even though you had no plans... Anyway, that means you're free now, right? I have something that I need to talk to you about." [Gai]

"I don't mind it. Is there anything wrong?" [Youki]

"It might be easier to show it to you before I explain... Mnn!" [Gai]

The instant Gai raised a strained cry, the layer of soil that masked Gai's appearance burst into a cloud of dust and scattered around the room.

"Uooi!? What the hell are you doing?!" [Youki]

I complained to the perpetrator as I shielded my face from the sudden burst of dust assaulting my eyes. Since the clouds of dust enshrouding the room couldn't be dissipated, I opened the window for ventilation. After ensuring that the room was fully ventilated, I turned towards Gai to question him about his action.

"Wha-!?" [Youki]

What greeted my sight was Gai in his original appearance. It had been a long time since I last saw him looking like this. It was his demon form after he lost both pair of wings and one of his arms due to Mirror, the hero from Gallis Empire. However, what caught my attention in particular, were the cracks that spread from the portions where his wings and arm were missing.

"...The damage I received at that time was more serious than I thought. My body is gradually crumbling away." [Gai]

"Why didn't you say so earlier? You must have noticed it, right?! Does Tiel-chan know about it?" [Youki]

"Even if I were to tell her, what can she do? That would only serve to prolong the moment of her sorrow. That's why, I've decided to tell her only at the very last moment." [Gai]

Was it because he wasn't afraid of dying? He was saying it nonchalantly as if the matter was totally unrelated to him.

"There should be a way to restore your body, shouldn't it? Even Tiel-chan was working hard at Cecilia's mansion because she was desperately looking for the means to cure you!" [Youki]

"Sigh... It's unfortunate but I don't have much time left. The crack will spread and my body will crumble into pieces in probably five days time. That's why, brat. I'd like you to take care of Tiel for me." [Gai]

He was worried about Tiel-chan even though there was a possibility that he might die in five days time.

"Gai, you..." [Youki]

"Don't get the wrong idea! It's not because I'm that 'rorikon' or something, alright?!" [Gai]

"No, I understand that." [Youki]

Gai glared at me. I would've have teased him that way normally, but I wouldn't be doing such things at a time like this.

"Then it's good. I'll be more direct about this. Tiel is probably is in a condition where she could collapse at any time. That's why, I want you to save her." [Gai]

Even though Gai was on the brink of death himself, he gazed at me with a serious look on his face as he lowered his head.

"Tiel-chan is... Wait, are you serious?!" [Youki]

"I could tell, since I've been watching over her since her childhood. Her condition is obviously strange when she came by recently." [Gai]

"Since her childhood... Exactly how old was Tiel-chan actually when you first met her?" [Youki]

"I have known her ever since Tiel's grandmother started believing that I was the Guardian Deity of that village. She often brought the young Tiel along when she came to my place. They would leave food as offerings and put their hands together to pray, even though I am merely a demon who had taken that village as my residence." [Gai]

For some reason, he appeared forlorn when he recounted what happened in the past. Although Gai was nothing more than a freeloader to me, I would be still troubled if he were to disappear.

"...Leave the matter about Tiel-chan to me. I will ask Cecilia and Sheik about her condition." [Youki]

"I see. Sorry for troubling you. With this, I won't have any more regrets..." [Gai]

"But, I will also try to save you. No, I will definitely save you!" [Youki]

I decided to flash him a smile that I was proud of and struck my usual pose, causing the initially serious atmosphere to shift 180 degrees. At the sight of me – who had flipped my chuuni switch – Gai was rendered completely speechless. Come to think of it, it was the first time Gai had witnessed me turning into a total "chuunibyou". If that's the case, then it would be a good time as any to brace myself to face any complaints that he might throw at me.

"Brat, what's gotten into you all of a sudden? Did you hit your head somewhere? No... most importantly, did you just say that you're planning to save me? My body could only last at most five more days, so it's definitely impossible." [Gai]

"How would you know that it's impossible if we've not even tried it yet?! Do you have to make me spout out such a cliched line, Gai?" [Youki]

Good grief. I shook my head in annoyance.

"It has already become troublesome the moment I consulted you about it, brat... but, certainly, what you said might be true. However, does that mean that you'll find a way to restore my body within five days?" [Gai]

Though I had ended up blurting out something that got me entangled in a mess, I wished he wouldn't look down on me. One shouldn't make light of my mentality once I entered my chuuni mode.

"Ah, leave it to me... If you're gone, this lonely room will only get even lonelier. Besides, I still need you to assist me in creating a masterpiece, so I'll be troubled if you're not around. I will definitely find a way restore your body."  
[Youki]

"Heh, well I'll be waiting for it, but I won't be expecting anything. I'm going to sleep. Even if it's just a little, I might be able to prevent my body from collapsing if I remain still. Brat, even if you couldn't find a way to save me, you don't need to feel bad about it... I'll entrust Tiel to you." [Gai]

Gai fell asleep after saying so.

"Well then. What should I do?... I guess it would be best to ask Duke about it since it's a matter relating to demons. I think he said that he will be patrolling the town today." [Youki]

He might be together with Raven or that elven knight that I had caught a glimpse of the other day.

"First of all, I should find out where he's at. If that elven knight is with him, I guess I could make up some sort of excuse to pull Duke away... but before that."  
[Youki]

Using my magic, I changed Gai's appearance into something that would be fine even if it was seen by someone. I didn't do it indiscriminately this time. I tried moulding the shape while imagining the appearance of a cool looking samurai.

"Look forward to it once you wake up." [Youki]

Though I knew that I wouldn't receiving any response, I delivered such words to him and left the room. I turned around momentarily when I closed the door. I

could see the new Gai with a samurai appearance through the gap between the door and frame.

And also...

"Geh!" [Youki]

...a room that appeared devastated, with piles of dust scattered all over the place. I should clean the place up once I return.

For now, let's look for Duke.

"I don't know where he is though." [Youki]

There is no such convenient magic that would enable me to look for a specific person in this world. I couldn't use the same method as the time when I was in Cecilia's mansion either, since it would be impossible to look for someone by strengthening my senses in the middle of the town. It's not like I'm a dog, so I can't possibly distinguish the scent when there are too many people.

"The fastest way would be to grow my wings and look for him from the sky, but..." [Youki]

I would cause an uproar in the town if I were to do so. Although, that might not be a bad idea, actually. All the ruckus would probably lead the knights here. Thus, Duke would also come to subjugate me. Wait, am I stupid or something?

"I wish Raven's here at a time like this." [Youki]

I turned around as I thought about it, hoping that I might luck out, but what greeted my sight there was a squalid crowd of pedestrians consisting of humans and demi-humans.



"There is no way it would turn out that convenient for me. It can't be helped. I have no choice but to look for him by foot." [Youki]

I had no idea where to start my search, but Gai's life was on the line, so this little bit of trouble was nothing to me. I looked ahead and started running to search for Duke. Nonetheless, even after spending around 3 hours running around in the Imperial Capital, I still couldn't find Duke, who was supposed to be patrolling the town. Although, it seemed that Duke was not the only one who was assigned to keep a lookout over the town as I had encountered other knights as well. I tried enquiring them on where Duke might be patrolling, but somehow, I still couldn't find him even after heading to those places.

"Huff...huff... Seriously where the heck is that guy?!" [Youki]

Since I had been running around the entire time, I paused for a moment so I could catch my breath. Then I searched my surroundings again for any sign of Duke, but to no avail. A sense of exasperation was starting to get the better of me after all my failed attempts, but I endured and tried to ponder over it calmly. Seeing that I still couldn't find him after so long, the only possibility left was that he was inside one of the buildings.

"Could he be having lunch? No, it's already past noon. Then, could he be at the knight's headquarters?" [Youki]

It was a waste of time to deliberate about it any longer. For the time being, I decided to go take a look at the knight's headquarters, so I started running towards the place without a moment's delay.

"If worse comes to worst, I'll ask Raven for permission to wait there until Duke returns." [Youki]

While grumbling under my breath, I finally arrived at my destination.

"Ah!" [Youki]

However, upon entering the building, I noticed Duke at the reception desk having a conversation with someone. The elven knight whom I had met the other time could also be seen beside him.

I walked over to Duke and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Nn... Isn't it Captain? What's up?" [Duke]

"Utterly horrible. I've been searching high and low for you..." [Youki]

"You were looking for me? Is there any problem? Wait, could you hang on for a while then? I still have reports to make." [Duke]

After saying so, he returned to his conversation with the receptionist. It didn't seem as if it would take a short time, so I took a seat on the couch nearby to wait for him. My fatigue had been building after running around the Imperial Capital for three hours, so I leaned back on the couch to rest myself.

"Ahh... I'm tired." [Youki]

"Umm..."

As I was leaning against the couch lazily, someone called out to me. It was the elven knight who was accompanying Duke.

"Erm, if I'm not mistaken, you're the one with Duke..." [Youki]

"Ah, I-I am Irene. You're an acquaintance of Duke-san, right? I've always been under Duke-san's care... and today, too." [Irene]

For some reason, she seemed flustered even though she was simply introducing herself. Was it because I looked scary? It could be just the way she is, but whatever the reason, she seemed like the kind of girl who it would be fun to tease.

I should try it.

"Yup, I'm Youki. Nice to meet you. I'm Duke's captain, since he used to be my former subordinate." [Youki]

"A-Are you a captain?! Youki-san is an amazing person, isn't it? B-By the way, you're a captain of...?" [Irene]

"I can't say. Or else your life will be in danger." [Youki]

"Eh?!..." [Irene]

"If you were to know about it, Duke might have to disappear from your sight, too." [Youki]

"Eeeeh!?" [Irene]

I tried desperately to hold back my laughter when I saw her becoming even more agitated. Duke is one smooth operator as well for being able to work with a girl like her. He's definitely not to be underestimated.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Capta... What's going on here?" [Duke]

"Ah, D-D-Duke-san...I-I, I didn't hear anything about you at all. So, so please don't disappear from my sight!" [Irene]

On seeing her shaking Duke's arm, I couldn't contain my laughter anymore, so I covered my mouth with my hand.

"Captain, you were teasing Irene, weren't you? What on earth did you tell her?" [Duke]

"...I guess I'm busted." [Youki]

"It's hard not to notice it from the way you're holding back such unnatural laughter. How long do you think I've known you?" [Duke]

I couldn't see Duke's expression due to the helmet, but he must have had an amazed look on his face. Duke was right. He understood my personality well, probably because we have known each other for many years.

"Hahaha... Well, that's true. My bad, my bad. I may have gone a little overboard with my joke." [Youki]

"Seriously... You hear that, Irene? I don't know what Captain has told you, but they're all lies." [Duke]

"Eh?... Is that so? So Duke-san will not disappear from my sight, right? I'm glad... Eh? Then, what is he a captain of?" [Irene]

"It's something like a nickname. You don't need to mind it." [Duke]

Duke calmed Irene-san down and explained it to her. Once the talk ended, Irene-san lowered her head towards me before she headed off somewhere.

"For the time being, I still have to write my report, so I can't leave my desk. But, this is better for you, right?" [Duke]

"Well, yeah. The matter about our discussion cannot be disclosed. If I remember correctly, Duke is well-versed in demon ecology, right? ...I have something to ask about Gai." [Youki]

"I'll try to answer whatever I can as long as it is within the scope of my knowledge. What happened?" [Duke]

While I explained to him about the incident that happened this morning, I prayed silently, hoping that what Duke knew would save Gai.

"...That's how it goes. So, do you know if there's any way to cure Gai's body?" [Youki]

"That's easy. It'll be solved if you feed him with magic ores." [Duke]

"I see... Eh?!" [Youki]

I was so completely taken aback by that reply that my voice quivered. I didn't expect that there would be a solution right after my explanation.

"What's with that strange cry? Even so, seeing the symptom has already worsen to the point that the body starts cracking, it is certainly dangerous. It wouldn't be strange even if the cracks spread further, causing the body to crumble instantly." [Duke]

"That means, if we don't find magic ores to feed Gai soon, it'll be really bad, isn't it?" [Youki]

"That's right... But, it's strange. If he's a gargoyle, he should know about magic ores." [Duke]

"That's because he's a gargoyle who had only been sleeping the entire time in the dungeon and the village. He must have been clueless about those things, isn't it?" [Youki]

Since he had been doing nothing but sleeping, he shouldn't have known anything about it. I guess he didn't have any other gargoyle companions when he was still residing in the dungeon. If he had one, they should have shared their knowledge with him.

"Still, even if this is about demon ecology, this is something that you should at least know as well. Captain, you've been neglecting your studies, too." [Duke]

I didn't expect him to start lecturing me instead. The time that could be used to study when I was still in the Demon Lord castle had gone down the drain. Considering that Duke and Happiness were around at that time, I didn't think that I needed those knowledges so I hadn't studied at all.

"Uuu... A-Anyway, it's unexpected that I've managed to find the solution to restore Gai's body that easily even though Tiel-chan was desperately searching for one on her side. With this, there's a probability that Gai's body will recover. I'm glad, I'm glad." [Youki]

"Captain, you're changing the subject, aren't you? Well, it's natural that humans wouldn't know the methods to restore a demon's body even if they were to go looking all over for it. After all, who would go heal an enemy? Even if they do know about it, those are usually researchers who have been studying about demons." [Duke]

I smiled wryly when I imagined the look of amazement on Duke's face once again. If I had been seriously studying, I wouldn't have needed to spend three hours running around just to find Duke today. If I had asked Duke about this from the beginning, Gai wouldn't have ended up in this state as well. But what is past is past. Dwelling on this would be pointless since it would be the same as ridiculing Tiel-chan's effort, too. I won't be telling this to the person in question, though.

"...Which reminds me, were you here the entire time? Since you said you were supposed to be out patrolling today, I spent three hours running all over the place to look for you." [Youki]

"Aa... Is that so? I was indeed on patrol today. We might have missed each other." [Duke]

"Even so, it shouldn't have been possible for us to miss each other so many times! I ran into other knights midway and asked them about you. After that, I rushed to those places where you might be immediately." [Youki]

I didn't expect my string of bad luck to have continued till now. I had not recalled saying anything stupid to myself in front of the mirror today.

"To tell the truth, Irene kept getting herself entangled in thugs' troubles at one place after another. Thanks to that, we had deviated from our patrol schedule since we had to haul those thugs back here every time. That might be the reason why we kept missing each other." [Duke]

"Wait, how did a knight keep getting herself entangled in something like this?! It's supposed to be a knight's duty to help those who got caught in trouble, not the other way around." [Youki]

That was supposed to be the reason for the patrol. Although, it did seem that Irene-san is the type of person who has a high probability of attracting trouble to herself. She was teased by me earlier, too.

"What Captain said might be true, but Irene is doing her best in her job too, so she's not at fault." [Duke]

"Well, she does look like a girl who seems really earnest in her work. Sorry, I guess I had somehow made fun of Duke's partner." [Youki]

"Weren't you just teasing her a while ago?... You used to do that to me a lot too." [Duke]

He murmured the last part in a barely audible voice.

"I don't think you're in the position to say that." Was what I thought, but I couldn't say it out loud.

Since I had found the way to restore Gai's body, it wasn't necessary to prolong this conversation, and it seemed that Duke still has work to do at the knight's headquarters as well.

"Well anyway, thanks for that, Duke. Please apologize to Irene-san on my behalf. Good luck with your knight's work." [Youki]

"I got it. Best of luck too, Captain." [Duke]

After exchanging parting greetings with each other, I left the knight's headquarters. What I should do next was to look for magic ores to repair Gai's body.

"By the way, where can I find magic ores? In the first place, what is a magic ore?" [Youki]

I came to this realization once I exited the knight's headquarters. What should I do? I don't know anything about magic ores at all. It would be embarrassing to go back and ask Duke about it after I tried to look good by giving him such a parting line, but it couldn't be helped. While I was having such thoughts, I suddenly caught sight of a familiar looking carriage heading towards me. The carriage pulled to a stop in front of me and the door opened, revealing an impatient looking Cecilia who held her hand out at me.

"I finally found you. Youki-san, get inside the carriage, quickly!" [Cecilia]



"Did something happen?" [Youki]

"I'll explain it while we're on our way back. Anyway, get inside the carriage!"  
[Cecilia]

The moment I got in the carriage at Cecilia's insistence, it took off.

"What happened? I'm actually busy right now as well." [Youki]

"Tiel-chan's condition has gotten worse. Sheik-kun is looking after her at the moment, but he asked me to call Youki-san over just in case. So I have been looking all over for you." [Cecilia]

"Seriously? ...Tiel-chan too?" [Youki]

I didn't expect Tiel-chan to be the next one after Gai. Do the two of them share the same fate? No, that is irrelevant now. I should first confirm Tiel-chan's condition, then consult Cecilia about Gai.

On our way to Aquarain's mansion, I received the gist of the story from Cecilia. It seemed that Happiness couldn't find Tiel-chan's whereabouts while she was working. Feeling that something was strange about it, Happiness went inside the mansion to search for her, and that was when she found Tiel-chan collapsed on the floor with a broom beside her. She tried shaking her body, but regardless of how many times she did so and called her name, Tiel-chan did not get up. She knew that something must be wrong with Tiel-chan, so she informed Cecilia and Sophia-san about it in a hurry. They then carried Tiel-chan to her room.

"I wasn't capable of curing Tiel-chan." [Cecilia]

Cecilia hung her head in disappointment. If even Cecilia, the one chosen as one of the members of the hero's party, couldn't cure her, then...

"Did Tiel-chan collapse because of her chronic illness?" [Youki]

"I think so. The wounds received due to Mirror should've been healed by Sheik-kun, Youki-san and me already." [Cecilia]

"I don't think that working as a maid in Aquarain's house would have led to any injury, and even so, any injury incurred wouldn't have been so serious that she would collapse from it." [Youki]

"Yes. That's why the only possibility left is that her illness has become worse. I asked Sheik-kun, who was playing around in the garden, to look after her." [Cecilia]

"Then, wouldn't it be fine to just leave her to Sheik's care?" [Youki]

Any advanced healing magic would be useless against human conditions like illness or disease. Even my magic. Thus, only Sheik's medicine might have the effect on her, but... for some reason Sheik needed me to be there.

"Sheik-kun asked me to call Youki-san over in any case. By the way, did something happen on your end, Youki-san?" [Cecilia]

"Something similar happened on my side too. Gai... that gargoyle is in a terrible condition." [Youki]

"Terrible condition... Is it the same situation as Tiel-chan?" [Cecilia]

She could guess it from the way I spoke. Well, it was to be expected since I had said it in a way that was easy to understand.

"Yeah, he probably has only five days left." [Youki]

"Five days?! There isn't much time left at all!" [Cecilia]

The fact that there wasn't much time left came as a bombshell. Even though Cecilia would usually remain calm, it had her completely taken aback that she couldn't hide her discomposure.... I was pretty shocked as well, when Gai told me about it himself, so it was not surprising.

"No, but I've asked Duke about method to cure Gai already. It seems that as long as I can find the magic ore, or something, then he can be saved." [Youki]

"I'm glad... So you've already found the method to cure him." [Cecilia]

She patted her chest in relief. There was also a time when Cecilia suspected that Gai was a bad demon. However, after observing Gai's interaction with Tiel-chan, she might have realized that Gai is not a dangerous demon ...He might be 'dangerous' in a different way, though.

"Yeah. So once we get our hands on the magic ores, Gai will be fine. Tiel-chan's the problem now." [Youki]

"True. It would be good if her condition improves..." [Cecilia]

At that point, the atmosphere became heavy, making it impossible for me to grasp the timing of the conversation. When I looked outside through the window, I could see the mansion gradually coming into view.

"Cecilia Ojou-sama, Guest-sama, we've arrived."

A voice could be heard from outside when the carriage pulled to a stop. Cecilia and I then alighted from the carriage and entered the mansion.

... It might not really matter, but I wished that coachman could at least try remembering my name. We have met many times by now, but all he kept calling me was 'Guest-sama'.

"Youki-san, is there something wrong? It looks like you're not satisfied with something." [Cecilia]

"Ah, no. It's nothing." [Youki]

In attempt to gloss over it, I laughed. It wasn't really the coachman's fault, and it wasn't as bad as how the two guardsmen treated me when I first came here as well.

"Is that so... Then let me guide you to the room where Tiel-chan is resting now." [Cecilia]

"Yes, please." [Youki]

Following Cecilia, we walked along the long corridor, passing by several servants on our way. Upon encountering us, all of them lowered their heads towards us, but their movements were awkward and they appeared fidgety. And...they looked dispirited for some reason.

"Hey, Cecilia. The servants look dispirited, don't they? Also, it might be rude to say this but, their movements are kinda awkward, or strange." [Youki]

"...It's possible that the news about Tiel-chan collapsing has spread. Since all of them knew that Tiel-chan had a weak body." [Cecilia]

"Eh? Really?" [Youki]

"Yes. They've praised her, saying that she's a hard worker even though she has a weak body. Of course, Sophia-san's also one of them." [Cecilia]

...Tiel-chan must have been a really diligent worker to have that Sophia-san praised her. Could it be that she had forced herself to do so because she had witnessed the moment when Happiness was preached?

I should stop thinking about such dangerous thoughts. It would be dangerous since Sophia-san could use mind reading technique. I would end up getting a sermon.

"We need to help Tiel-chan get well again for the sake of the servants as well." [Cecilia]

"Yeah, you're right." [Youki]

While we were having such conversations, we finally arrived at the room where Tiel-chan was resting. After knocking on the door, we entered the room to find Tiel-chan sleeping in the bed and Sheik with a complicated look on his face. It was rare to see that expression on him.

"Ah, Captain. You're finally here." [Sheik]

His tone sounded different than usual as well.

"Sorry for being late. I've got things to handle on my side too... I've heard about it from Cecilia. How's Tiel-chan's condition?" [Youki]

"I've taken the emergency measures. The medicinal herbs in hand now are not enough for her to make a complete recovery. There are not enough medicinal herbs to compound the medicine for her." [Sheik]

Sheik said with a troubled look. At this point, I realized why he had called me over.

"I see. So you want me to help gather the insufficient medicinal herbs?"  
[Youki]

"As expected of Captain!" [Sheik]

"Not a problem. Sheik can't leave Tiel-chan's side now too." [Youki]

"Un. The medicine I've used is only a temporary measure so I can't leave her side for now." [Sheik]

"Sheik-kun got along well with Tiel-chan... so you're worried, aren't you?"  
[Cecilia]

"...Un. I guess." [Sheik]

Sheik nodded at Cecilia's words. He must have conversed often with Tiel-chan since they're close in age. The conversation should be mainly about Gai, though. Anyway, the one who was most anxious when Tiel-chan collapsed was probably Sheik. It was possible that he wanted to gather the medicinal herbs personally.

"Sheik, leave it to me. I will collect all the necessary herbs on your behalf!"  
[Youki]

I would like to show my cool side not only to Tiel-chan, but Sheik too. I gave him a thumbs-up.

"No, Youki-san. I will be the one to collect the herbs." [Cecilia]

"Eh?" [Youki]

"Cecilia-ane will?" [Sheik]

I had not expected Cecilia to cut in. Sheik seemed to be surprised too. Would there be a problem if I were to be the one to collect them?

"Youki-san, have you forgotten about Gargoyle-san?" [Cecilia]

"I've not forgotten about him. But, as long as we can get magic ores, Gai will..." [Youki]

Recover....Yes, he should recover. However, I didn't know if magic ores would be easily obtainable. Where can I find one? Are they sold somewhere? Will it be expensive? I didn't have any information about it at all.

"Hey, Sheik. How much herbs do you still need?" [Youki]

"Umm, I've created a list before Captain came... Here." [Sheik]

Having said that, he handed me the list, which contained the names of medicinal herbs that I had not heard of before. There were only about ten different kinds listed, but I wasn't sure if I could gather them all in just two or three days.

"Damn... It might be hard for me to do it alone." [Youki]

"Hey, you mentioned something about gargoyle... What's that about?" [Sheik]

"I guess I haven't told Sheik about it yet. Actually, Gai's in a terrible condition. I have to obtain magic ores within five days." [Youki]

"...Is what you said, true?"

Suddenly, a faint voice could be heard from the bed, causing everyone to turn towards it. It seemed that Tiel-chan had woken up due to our conversation. Moreover, she had overheard the things that we didn't want her to know most.

"W-What are you doing, Tiel-chan. You should be sleeping now." [Sheik]

He had reverted to his usual tone, probably so he could set Tiel-chan's mind at ease.

"Sheik-kun, I'm sorry to have made you worry. Youki-san, is what you said earlier, true?" [Tiel]

I felt hesitant about telling her the truth, but it would be cruel to lie to Tiel-chan when I look at her current condition. It might be better to be honest than to mess up if I were to be untruthful.

"Yeah, but..." [Youki]

"Is that's the case then, don't mind me. I will be fine. Please... Please save Guardian Deity-sama!" [Tiel]

She pleaded me, as tears flowed down her cheeks.





For Tiel-chan, her own condition was of least importance. Gai seemed to be the most important thing to her. Nevertheless, that was something that I couldn't do. I was planning to tell her that I would try to do something about Tiel-chan's issue too, but...

"It will be fine, Tiel-chan. Youki-san will definitely do something about Gargoyle-san." [Cecilia]

I was silenced by Cecilia.

"Is that, true? I'm... glad." [Tiel]

"Yes. But you shouldn't tell a lie, saying that you'll be fine, alright? Sheik-kun and I will handle Tiel-chan's matter. So, be assured and get some rest." [Cecilia]

Cecilia caressed the top of Tiel-chan's head as she said so. Shortly after that, she shut her eyes and fell asleep again. Could it be due to Sheik's medicine, or was it because her mind was finally set at ease? Cecilia, who was originally gazing at such spectacle with a blank look, suddenly turned around.

"Youki-san, I did not say those words earlier just to reassure Tiel-chan." [Cecilia]

"Eh, you were serious?" [Youki]

"Yes. Besides, healing and treatment are my job. Leave that to me." [Cecilia]

I couldn't insist on it anymore after she went that far. It might sound pathetic, but it would be almost impossible if I were to do it alone.

"Then, I'll leave the medicinal herbs seeking task to you, Cecilia. Do your best too, Sheik. I'm sorry I couldn't lend a hand." [Youki]

"Leave the matter about Tiel-chan to us. We'll leave Gargoyle-san to you."  
[Cecilia]

"Leave it to me. I'll do my best to help Tiel-chan." [Sheik]

"Then I'll go search for that magic ore thingy." [Youki]

After making the proclamation, I left Aquarain's mansion. I have to find the magic ores in five days. For the time being, I should try the Merchant Guild or the Blacksmith Guild. The moment I left the mansion, I immediately regretted that I had not asked Cecilia about the magic ore. However, it would be uncool if I were to go back, so I ended up not returning.

"Oo..." [Youki]

I was at a loss for words when I reached the Merchant Guild. Unlike the guild that I usually go, the interior was huge and there were many luxurious decorations. In addition, the employees consisted of not only humans, but also demi-humans.

"May I know if you're looking for something?"

Someone called out to me from behind, when they saw me standing there with a vacant look. When I turned around, I noticed a man, possibly the guild merchant, standing behind me. He must've had plenty of good food, considering his plump body.

"Yeah, I guess." [Youki]

"What kind of item are you looking for? This is the Tarevoke Merchant Guild. We're not trying to brag about it, but we have a wide variety of goods available here. So, I thought we might have something that you need." [merchant]

The merchant smiled as he rubbed his hands together. To be honest, his conduct aroused my suspicion. It gave me the impression that he was trying to rake in more cash by exploiting the name of the guild. Nonetheless, since my friend's life was on the line, some extra expenditures would be unavoidable.

"Then, do you have magic ores?" [Youki]

The moment I said that, his smile quickly faded. It was a look that a merchant shouldn't be showing to a customer.

"...Excuse me, but may I know if you're from the Blacksmith Guild?" [merchant]

"No, I'm not." [Youki]

"My apologies, customer! There's still a shortage of magic ore, so it will be impossible for us to sell it to general customers." [merchant]

"What?!" [Youki]

"Deeply apologies about it..." [merchant]

The merchant apologized as he lowered his head, but I couldn't accept it.

"No, no, no. What happened to that vigour of yours a while ago? Couldn't you procure it from somewhere if there're not enough in stock?" [Youki]

"Well, urm...the possibility of procuring them at the moment is slim."  
[merchant]

He broke out in cold sweat. It seemed that he was trying to evade my question. What should I do? It didn't seem as if I could get one from here. Should I try my luck at the Blacksmith Guild?

"...You, what are you doing in a place like this?" [???

When I turned around, I found the usual, unenthusiastic looking Clayman standing there. I was too preoccupied with negotiating with the merchant that I didn't notice him.

"Um? Ah, Clayman. I'm trying to purchase something here. Can't you tell?"  
[Youki]

"You seem to be in disagreement... Are you trying to haggle down the price of an item or something? You're quite a miser even though you're earning a lot."  
[Clayman]

He assumed that I was bargaining when he noticed the troubled look on the merchant's face. It was certainly undeniable that I did haggle over prices at stores before in my previous life, but I had not done any extreme negotiation that would've caused a store clerk to break out in cold sweat like this. What Clayman said was true: I was indeed earning quite a bit so there was no need for me to negotiate that much.

"How much of a miser do you think I am? I'm just trying to purchase something!" [Youki]

"Hmm... Well, in any case, it has nothing to do with me. So, Merchant-san, has the request form been submitted to the guild?" [Clayman]

"Yes, yes. I have been waiting for you, Clayman-sama. The document is completed too. I will bring it to you now." [merchant]

It seemed that Clayman was executing a task for the guild. He began speaking to the earlier merchant. The merchant's panicky behaviour was a huge contrast to Clayman's usual laid-back attitude. He lowered his head numerous times towards Clayman, who was yawning as he scratched his head. Other

customers and merchants could be seen stealing glances at Clayman as they gave a cry of surprise. Even though he looked lackadaisical, his title as the assistant guildmaster didn't seem to be just for show. On seeing such a spectacle, I came to a strong realization that Clayman is actually a considerably well-known figure.

"My apologies to keep you waiting, Clayman-sama. Here's the request form."  
[merchant]

"Ou." [Clayman]

Clayman gave a curt reply and received the document when the merchant handed it to him in a hurry. Was the content not agreeable to him? He was reading it with a sombre expression. "This is such a pain." Those words seemed to be written all over his face.

"Oioi. The contents of the request are more troublesome than when I came the last time." [Clayman]

"Yes... but, we've added rewards for that as well. This is the consensus of the Tarevoke Merchant Guild." [merchant]

Somehow, it didn't sound like a really good request. It appeared that the merchant tried to elaborate, but all Clayman did was click his tongue in response. There were times when he yawned as well. Is it acceptable for an assistant guildmaster to behave like that? No. Come to think of it, this guild seemed to be fine with it. When I looked around, there were a few among the people here whose eyes seemed to sparkle when they gazed at the languid looking Clayman. How could they direct such a gaze at him after looking at that apathetic behaviour? Rather, Clayman, could you hurry up and put an end to your conversation?

While I was having such thoughts in mind, Clayman suddenly directed his gaze to me and grinned. He then beckoned me over.

I've got a bad feeling about this.

"Oi, Youki. You'll help with the request." [Clayman]

"I refuse." [Youki]

I had to look for magic ores for Gai, so I didn't have the leisure to take up any request. Besides, the smile Clayman had on his face earlier was too suspicious. It was certain that he had hatched some kind of scheme in mind.

"Ah... then, that. Well, lend me your ear." [Clayman]

"Hah!? Didn't I just tell you that I can't do it..." [Youki]

"It's fine, it's fine." [Clayman]

He grasped my shoulder and forcibly pulled me towards him.

"I said I'm busy now." [Youki]

"Well, just listen. Look, you said you wanted to be promoted to A rank this morning, right? I'll be able to do something about it with my authority."  
[Clayman]

"That sounds too suspicious. It's impossible for Clayman, who's so lazy to do such a thing for me... Besides, I need to look for magic ores." [Youki]

I shouldn't waste my time on this. I should go search for it at another store if I couldn't find it here. If I still couldn't find one, then I will find a way to get it directly as the last resort.

"Magic ore? Then, this is just right, isn't it? I don't know why you're looking for magic ore, but this request is related to magic ore. I don't mind sharing some of them with you if you come along with me." [Clayman]

"Are you serious?! ...Even so." [Youki]

I couldn't really trust Clayman. I wasn't sure if this request would take a long time too.

"...Come on, just help me out. If you're in a hurry, we can depart tomorrow." [Clayman]

"Tomorrow, is it?" [Youki]

If I were to believe in Clayman's words, then rather than trying my luck at another merchant's guild, it would be better for me to help out with this request, since I would definitely be getting one from this. I shouldn't delay this any further considering the time limit I had as well.

"I got it. In exchange, once the request is completed, you must give me a share of the magic ore." [Youki]

"Alright. So the deal is on. Rest assured. Once the request is completed, I will definitely present you the magic ores." [Clayman]

The conversation was over, so Clayman took his hand off my shoulder.

"Umm, so, in the end, will you be accepting the request?" [merchant]

Since we were having private conversation between ourselves, I had completely forgotten about the merchant. He called out to Clayman anxiously.



It seemed that he had still not stopped perspiring. He pulled a handkerchief out of somewhere and began wiping his sweat.

"Ah, I'll accept it. I guess I'll do my best to meet your expectations." [Clayman]

Clayman received the request form while giving the merchant a half-hearted response that he did not mean. The words: 'I'll do my best' just don't exist in Clayman's dictionary.

"Thank you very much, Clayman-sama." [merchant]

"Then, once the request is completed, someone from the guild will come report it. So look forward to it." [Clayman]

"Ah, wait a minute, Clayman." [Youki]

I waved my hands around as I went after Clayman who left the Merchant Guild.

"...Nn, do you have anything you still need?" [Clayman]

"Don't give me that! I have no choice but to accept the request that you have selfishly pushed to me. However, I still don't know the details about it." [Youki]

"To put it simply, the request is to collect magic ores. As we've discussed earlier, due to your situation, we'll be departing tomorrow. We'll meet up in front of the guild early in the morning then. That's all." [Clayman]

Having said his piece, Clayman left.

To put it simply, I was deceived by him.

But, Clayman wasn't really a bad guy. He probably wouldn't set me up. Either way, Gai's life was on the line, so I didn't have much of a choice.

"Cecilia and Sheik are doing their best for Tiel-chan, so I guess I should give my all too." [Youki]

For the time being, since I had found the prospect of acquiring the magic ores, I returned to the inn. While still feeling distress about Gai's welfare, I went to bed to prepare myself for the next day.

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The next day, after the preparation, I left the inn and headed towards the guild, so I could arrive there by the appointed time. Along the way, I had a strange notion that lazy-ass Clayman might be late, but it seemed to be a needless worry. When the guild came into sight, I could see a carriage parked in front of the place. Someone was waving their hand at me from afar, hence I waved back as well...

"Clayman's not the type of person who would wave his hand at me, isn't he?" [Youki]

Due to the sense of discomfort swirling inside me, I ended up blurting out what was on my mind. When I drew closer, I noticed that the silhouette I saw from afar was not Clayman, but Cecilia. Upon a closer look, the carriage seemed to be the Aquarain carriage that I usually rode in as well.

"Good morning, Youki-san." [Cecilia]

"Morning... Wait, why are you here, Cecilia?" [Youki]

"I'm not the only one." [Cecilia]

Cecilia pointed at the carriage, prompting me to look there.

There sat Sophia-san, drinking tea elegantly, and Clayman, who appeared half-dead inside the carriage.

## Chapter 06: I enquired the secret of the married couple

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I was, at that moment, inside the Aquarain's carriage. Cecilia was next to me, while Sophia-san was sitting on the opposite side. Clayman, on the other hand, was being given a lap pillow by Sophia-san.

"What kind of situation is this?" [Youki]

Why were Cecilia and Sophia-san here? Why was Clayman beaten up until he passed out? While I was still stupefied by the turn of events, Cecilia gave my back a light push, which had prompted me to go inside the carriage earlier, so I would like an explanation now.

"Where should I start explaining?" [Cecilia]

A question mark appeared above my head as I desperately wished for someone to assuage my confusion at the earliest. At that moment, Cecilia started explaining.

"Yesterday after you went back, Sheik-kun told me the names of all of the insufficient herbs. However, when we tried collecting them, I realized that there is a herb that we couldn't get." [Cecilia]

"Uh-huh. So, what happens after?" [Youki]

"It is a special medicinal herb that only grows in a place overflowing with magic power. But when I told them that I would head to the place personally to gather the herb, Sophia-san said she wanted to come along." [Cecilia]

"The maids in the mansion were put in a difficult situation when they heard about this. So how could I, as the head of the maids, not take any action?" [Sophia]

Even though she made a cool remark in a calm demeanour... it contradicted the image I was seeing at the moment; She was being a lap pillow for a battered middle-aged man.

"I was a little uneasy doing this alone too, so I accepted Sophia-san's kind offer." [Cecilia]

"I am somewhat worried about the mansion, but I decide to leave it to Happiness and the rest of the maids. Of course, I have received the permission from Madam." [Sophia]

Seeing that it was Celia-san, she had probably approved it immediately.

"Then, why did you come with us?" [Youki]

"Yesterday, my husband told me that he would be going to a mine overflowing with magic for a request. Since we were looking for a place like this as well, and I thought this was just right, I talked to him about it." [Sophia]

"I see. Then..." [Youki]

"He was opposed to it initially, but I persuaded him." [Sophia]

"Eh?... Is that so?" [Youki]

Why did Clayman object to having Sophia-san and Cecilia come along? Was it such a dangerous request? For the sake of fixing Gai, a certain level of danger was to be expected for me, though. Well, I'll leave that aside for now.

"I understand now why Cecilia and Sophia-san are here, but why is Clayman in such a battered state?" [Youki]

Clayman was still sleeping on Sophia-san's lap. What on earth did he do? What he said during his occasional sleep-talking made me feel irritated. Something along the lines of *"Sophia's lap is so soft~"*

*Is he an idiot?*

"He said it was bothersome and I couldn't get him to wake up this morning. So I forcibly dragged him here." [Sophia]

Un, I couldn't find anything to say. Cecilia's face twitched upon hearing that too. When Cecilia and I gave Clayman a cold-eyed stare, he suddenly woke up.

"Nn... I was just wondering why the bed felt so comfortable. So it was Sophia's lap pillow." [Clayman]

After uttering something stupid, he got up and stretched himself.

"...That's quite, a fast recovery." [Youki]

His appearance was like that of a beaten-up rag doll when I arrived this morning. I think Sophia-san said that she had grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and threw him inside the carriage earlier. At that time, Cecilia and I were at a loss, wondering if we should laugh about it.

"Nn, I've been sleeping for quite some time, haven't I?" [Clayman]

"It's not even thirty minutes yet since we departed. How did you get up that soon despite being in that state earlier?" [Youki]

"Youki-san and I didn't even use any recovery magic on you. You have an amazing recuperative power." [Cecilia]

During our journey, Cecilia tried to use her recovery magic on him, but I could finally understand why Sophia-san said it wasn't necessary. Clayman's arms were twisted in a strange angle and clicking sounds could be heard from his neck earlier. However, looking at his current condition made it seem as though his half-dead state earlier was a lie.

"Well, Sophia's touch is the best healing magic for me." [Clayman]

It amazed me that he could calmly blurt out such a mushy line so easily. Cecilia, who was sitting next to me, edged a little closer because Clayman was sitting in front of her. It seemed that Clayman's remark had made her draw back a little. I had gained the advantage from this, and Clayman didn't seem to mind it either. Anyway, I should confirm the contents of the request with him since he had woken up.

"Sorry to ask this from you since you've just woken up, but I'd like to know more about this request." [Youki]

"Oh, come to think of it, I've not explain it to you. The request this time is to exterminate the demons that reside in the magic ore mine." [Clayman]

Surprisingly, it seemed to be an ordinary subjugation request. Since Clayman asked me to come along, I had initially assumed that there is more to this request than meets the eye, but I might be overthinking it.

"How strong are the demons residing in that mine?" [Youki]

"Based on the report, almost all the demons in there are about C-rank... but I wonder." [Clayman]

It sounded ambiguous, but as expected, it still seemed like a normal request. It appeared to be a request that Clayman could easily handle by himself. He

didn't need me to come along at all. There must be some sort of scheme behind this.

"Rest assured, Youki-sama. Ojou-sama and I will be accompanying you all to the mine." [Sophia]

"That's right, Youki-san. I will do my best too." [Cecilia]

"...I guess, with this combination, even if anything happens, it will still be alright." [Youki]

That was because we have Sophia, the strongest head maid, and Cecilia, one of the members from the hero's party. The two of them are more reliable than Clayman, so there shouldn't be a problem.

"By the way, how long will this request take?" [Youki]

I had forgotten to ask him about the most important thing. The time limit left was only four days. Even if we completed the request, if we couldn't make it back in four days, Gai will crumble into pieces.

"If everything goes well, we can go back after three or four days. Well, we have Sophia and the young lady from Aquarain family with us, so it will definitely work out." [Clayman]

"Is that so..." [Youki]

It would be a really tight time constraint then. I wasn't sure if we could make it back in time. If worse comes to worst, the only thing I can do is to fly back by myself once I acquire the magic ore.

"Well, I told the guild that we would take one week, though." [Clayman]



"Why is it?" [Cecilia]

"That's so I can finish the request quickly and take it easy—" [Clayman]

Before Clayman could finish his sentence, he disappeared from his seat.

No, he didn't actually disappear.

When I realized it, he had collapsed sideways on the carriage floor.

"Dear, please conduct yourself appropriately in front of Ojou-sama. Also, please make sure to go to work after you finish this request, alright?" [Sophia]

"O-Ou... I understand...Sophia." [Clayman]

While still lying on the floor, he raised his hand as he answered. Upon seeing the two people's exchange, my and Cecilia's faces twitched.

Could you two please not do something like that in such a narrow space?

"U-Umm, Sophia-san. I'm currently one of the members who have taken up this request, just like everyone else here... so, if it is possible, could you treat me normally?" [Cecilia]

"Even if you say that..." [Sophia]

"Now, now, Sophia-san. If Cecilia wishes for it, why not yield just a little bit and comply with her request?" [Clayman]

I had not expected Clayman to use honorifics. I didn't know if Cecilia had proposed that because she was sympathizing Clayman, but nice work! It might be Sophia and Clayman's 'skinship' kind of routine, but Cecilia and I couldn't really keep up with them.

"It can't be helped then, since it's Ojou-sama's request." [Sophia]

"Thank you very much, Sophia-san." [Cecilia]

"But I will be speaking with you using the usual tone." [Sophia]

"Is that so... It's regrettable then." [Cecilia]

Cecilia seemed disappointed.

Hmm, I would like to do something about it, but Sophia-san didn't seem to be the type who would change her mind once she made her decision. I have to consider it from her standpoint, too.

"Couldn't you at least call her by her name?" [Youki]

Sophia-san pondered over my subtle suggestion. It might be fairly different, even if all she did was call her by her name.

"If it's just that, then... I don't mind it. Then I'll call you Cecilia-sama." [Sophia]

"Is it true?! Thank you very much, Sophia-san." [Cecilia]

She hugged Sophia-san, probably because she was happy to be called by her name.

*...I was the one who had suggested that, though.*

"Heh, you lost to Sophia. Well, it can't be helped, can it?" [Clayman]

Before I knew it, Clayman had resurrected himself. He patted me on my shoulder. His attempt to console me made me feel even more miserable though, so I wish he would stop that.

The carriage continued advancing to our destination while I was slumped in deep dejection. After that, we continued our idle chat as we gazed at the scenery outside. We reached the town where the mine was after sunset.

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At that moment, I was witnessing a rare scene: Clayman and Sophia-san were checking into the inn.

Since the two of them said they could handle it, Cecilia and I decided to move to another location not too far away and chatted amongst ourselves.

"...Which reminds me." [Youki]

"Is there something wrong?" [Cecilia]

"I was just wondering – Sophia-san wouldn't be wearing her maid clothing tomorrow, right?" [Youki]

That was because my impression of her was that she was always wearing her maid uniform. We would be going to a mine where demons appear, so she should have prepared herself with appropriate equipment.

"She should have the clothing from when she frequented the guild last time. So she should be wearing those, I think." [Cecilia]

"Please don't worry about it." [Sophia]

"Uwaa!?" [Youki]

Sophia-san suddenly appeared from behind. She was supposed to be talking to the inn's receptionist a while ago, but it seemed that she had left Clayman to deal with it alone.

"Is there something wrong, Youki-sama?" [Sophia]

"No, that's because you suddenly appeared behind me. More importantly..." [Youki]

"Sophia-san, do you have the clothing to wear for tomorrow?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia raised the question before I could do so. She must have been worried about it. Considering that I had never seen Sophia-san dressed in anything other than her maid clothing, I was slightly curious about it.

"I have naturally prepared one. It's something that was custom-made." [Sophia]

It seemed to be something that was specially made for Sophia-san. Cecilia appeared to be relieved as well after hearing what Sophia-san said. Although... there was something that I would like to ask, just in case.

"By the way, what kind of clothing is it?" [Youki]

"Let's see... It's not much different from the maid outfit that I am wearing now." [Sophia]

Ah, Cecilia looked stunned. Well, I was stunned too. Couldn't she have prepared proper clothing?! She didn't have to go through the trouble to prepare another custom-made maid uniform.

"Why didn't you prepare any regular protective gear?" [Youki]

"My husband said he likes seeing me in a maid uniform." [Sophia]

"...." [Cecilia & Youki]

Cecilia and I were dumbstruck. Sophia-san said something after that, but I couldn't remember what.

When Clayman brought the room keys to us, Cecilia hid behind me, which caused him to tilt his head in wonder. Nonetheless, there was nothing I could do but give him a pat on his shoulder for now – an indirect way of telling him not to mind it. In any case, I had not expected that Clayman has a '[maid moe](#)'.

I went to bed after that to prepare myself for the next day.

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The next day, we headed to the mine after we finished our preparations.

It was somehow saddening though, when I saw how Cecilia was avoiding Clayman as we left the inn. Sophia-san was dressed in her maid outfit, as she had declared yesterday. It seemed that it was certainly similar to her maid clothing yesterday.

I wonder if it was okay.

On the other hand, since Clayman didn't seem to know the reason why Cecilia was avoiding him, he grew a little anxious. By the way, as for me, there is

a proverb that describes what I think about people's preferences: To each their own.

At the moment, we were proceeding into the depths of the dim mine, with the help of Cecilia's magic as illumination.

"Hey. I have a feeling that the young lady from Aquarain family is avoiding me..." [Clayman]

"Ah, un. Well, isn't it just your imagination?" [Youki]

I gave him an ambiguous reply as I looked at Cecilia, who was on the front line illuminating the mine. Cecilia and Sophia-san were in the vanguard while Clayman and I were the rearguard.

"It's not just my imagination. I have this feeling ever since I came back from the reception table yesterday." [Clayman]

"Ahahaha..." [Youki]

I smiled bitterly. Hmm, it would be somewhat unpleasant to prolong this awkward atmosphere, so I guess I should tell him what happened yesterday. I explained the content of yesterday's conversation to Clayman secretly, speaking in a low voice, so as to prevent Cecilia and Sophia-san from overhearing it... though, Sophia-san might have overheard it anyway. I caught her glancing towards us once when I started talking.

"Ah, I see." [Clayman]

Clayman seemed to be convinced after listening to my story.

"Hey, do you really have a 'maid moe', Clayman?" [Youki]

To be honest, Clayman doesn't seem to be the type of people who have maid fetish to me. So long as it's Sophia-san, any clothing will look good on her. That is how Clayman is, in my opinion.

"Maid moe? What's that? I don't really get it, but all I said was that... When I see Sophia wearing those clothes, I realize that she has a normal job." [Clayman]

"I see. Was there a reason for that? I had initially thought that you have a 'maid moe'." [Youki]

"Like I said, what the heck is that moe thing? I'll say this beforehand. I did say that I like it, but I did not force Sophia to wear it." [Clayman]

As what Clayman said, it seemed that they did not request it from each other directly. However, it was a fact that Sophia-san did have a maid outfit custom-made for his sake. Even if they did not say it out, this couple tried to satisfy each other's demand as much as possible.

"When I see how intimate the two of you are, it makes me somewhat envious." [Youki]

"What's with you, all of the sudden? I'll say this first, but don't you dare get any ideas about Sophia. Our relationship is still lovey-dovey now." [Clayman]

I never had the intention to do that at all, so what the heck was this guy saying? The way he said it sounded like how a father speaks.

"Which reminds me, do you have children, Clayman?" [Youki]

"Ou, I got a daughter and a son. They are starting to resemble Sophia and me recently." [Clayman]

Clayman said as he laughed... Wait, son? I was certain that I had not heard about his son when I eavesdropped on Sophia-san and Celia-san's conversation the previous time.

"Hey, you have a son, too?" [Youki]

"Didn't I just say that I have a son? ...Ah, you have overheard it from Sophia before. Sophia hardly talks about Quinn. That's probably because he bears a remarkable resemblance to her." [Clayman]

Apparently, his son was just not mentioned in the conversation.

"That means your son resembles Sophia-san then. What about your daughter?" [Youki]

"Sophia's giving her different kinds of education now but... it looks like she's starting to take after me when she plays with me." [Clayman]

Clayman said as he laughed, but hearing what he said had instantly made me realized the difficulties Sophia-san was facing. She did tell Celia-san that she was educating her, but she didn't tell her that her daughter was starting to resemble her beloved husband, did she? I could roughly imagine what she would be like since she resembles Clayman. It seems that the son takes after Sophia-san while the daughter takes after Clayman. It really made me feel like meeting them.

"Youki-sama, Dear. It's time to put a stop to all that idle talk." [Sophia]

At Sophia-san's words, we turned to the front, to find countless black shadows coming towards us. They were probably a group of demons. According to the information provided by Clayman, the demons in this mine are about C-rank. When Cecilia illuminated the surrounding with her light magic, we were able to eventually discern the appearance of the demons; they seemed to be rock lizards and rock gorillas.



The surface of those demons' body seemed to be as hard as rock, as expected of the demons in the mine. Though, I wasn't sure if it had any relation to that. It didn't seem as if physical attacks would be effective against them. Magic is my forte, so I guess it didn't really matter.

I had initially intended to defeat the demons with magic, but before I could do so, Sophia-san, who was supposed to be standing next to Cecilia, suddenly advanced towards the demons before us. She jumped up, spun in the air and landed an axe kick on a rock lizard, pulverizing it.

An anime-style illustration of two characters. On the left, a young woman with short, light-colored hair and a white headpiece with a black bow. She is wearing a white dress with a large black collar and a large white cross-shaped ornament on her chest. She is holding a small, dark object in her hand. On the right, a young man with long, dark hair, wearing a brown jacket with gold trim and a dark blue scarf. He is looking towards the woman with a slight smile. The background is dark and textured.

Sophia

Clayman

"As expected of Sophia. Your movement's agile."

"Ou, as expected of Sophia! Your skills haven't gone rusty at all, even after you became a maid. Your movement's really agile." [Clayman]

Even after encountering a group of demons, he still seemed to be doing things at his own pace as he observed Sophia-san's fight. In the meantime, Sophia-san was delivering killing blows to the demons one by one.

"No wait, I should go help, too." [Youki]

"Ah, you should guard the young lady for the time being. Sophia and I will handle them." [Clayman]

Having said that, Clayman moved in front of Cecilia and me. Certainly, Cecilia was in a defenceless state at the moment, so I guess I should be guarding her.

At any rate, how does Clayman fight? He didn't seem to be carrying any weapon, so he was probably a magic user like me. Nevertheless, I soon realized that the way Clayman fights was vastly different than what I had imagined.

"Wha.. Cecilia, what're those" [Youki]

"I've seen them before when I was travelling as a member of the hero's party. That is what we call shikigami." [Cecilia]

I had seen them before in manga in my previous life. The ones using it should be priests, I think? ...Somehow that doesn't seem right. Well, such a trivial thing is irrelevant to me.

Clayman was fighting the demons using that shikigami look-alike thing, but...

"Do shikigami look like that?" [Youki]

"No, I've seen quite a few shikigami users already, but..." [Cecilia]

Cecilia appeared puzzled, too. Apparently, they were different than the ones Cecilia saw. Well, it wasn't surprising.

"The ones Cecilia saw were in the forms of humans or animals, weren't they?" [Youki]

"Yes. Youki-san, you actually knew about it already, didn't you?" [Cecilia]

"No, well that is, I'll leave it at that." [Youki]

Sophia-san and Clayman might be in the middle of a fight, but I still don't think I should talk about my past life while in their presence. I gave them a quick glance.

"...I'm sorry. So it's like that." [Cecilia]

Cecilia nodded, as if she understood what I meant. As expected of Cecilia! Our conversation ended up getting deviated from the main subject. What was I supposed to be talking about again?

"To me, I can only see what looks like origami fighting." [Youki]

Facing the group of demons that were attacking, humanoid-shaped papers could be seen fighting against them with weapons like swords, spears, and wands that were made of paper, like origami. Moreover, those origami were strong. They stopped the rock lizards' claw and fang attacks easily, and dodged the rock gorillas' fierce attacks without difficulty. The origami swords cut through the rock surfaces with ease, the spears were able to penetrate the demons, and fireballs could be seen flying from the tip of the wands. Nonetheless, Clayman, the one had created such a surreal spectacle, was just standing there. In the beginning, I thought he was concentrating on manipulating the shikigami, but that didn't seem to be the case. He could still repel the occasional stones that flew towards him with his hand, as though he found them irritating.

"Fuua~" [Clayman]

Not to mention, he started yawning, looking relaxed about the whole thing.

While we were watching the Clayman, wondering if he was actually fighting considering his languid demeanour, the battle ended before we realized it. All the shikigami grew smaller and returned to Clayman. Sophia-san was also brushing the dust off her maid clothing.

"Alright, shall we proceed?" [Clayman]

"Hold it, hold it. Clayman, what were those thing from a while ago?" [Youki]

"Don't you know about it? It can't be helped then. Listen well, alright? Those are what we call shikigami..." [Clayman]

"I've heard that from Cecilia earlier." [Youki]

That was not what I wanted to hear.

"Umm... Why do Clayman-san's shikigami look like that?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia wound up asking him in place of me. She must be curious about it since she had seen what shikigami looks like.

"Cecilia-sama, my husband said it was a troublesome to think of the shikigami's form, so they ended up becoming like that." [Sophia]

"Huh?!" [Cecilia]

Cecilia was surprised, but that explanation had convinced me. So that was the reason. It seems that Clayman is actually a genius who excels at using both

weapons and magic. However, since he is lazy, he wanted to think of a way to fight without exerting much effort. When he tried searching for the means to do so, it seemed that what he found was the art of shikigami. It appeared to be a skill from a foreign country and it seemed that he had a hard time learning it. Nevertheless, it was not known if it was due to his talent, or his high tenacity that resulted from his laziness, but he ended up acquiring the shikigami skill.

"However, because of my husband's usual lazy habit, he decides to leave the shikigami's forms as is and use them." [Sophia]

"...That means, if he wanted to, he was able to change the forms of the shikigami earlier to humans or animals and use them in that fight?" [Cecilia]

"Yes." [Sophia]

"..." [Cecilia]

Cecilia cocked her head, seemingly not convinced by it, but...it didn't really matter to me. That behaviour was just like Clayman. As long as those shikigami can fight, who cares what they look like. To be honest, I was tired of coming up with a retort for Clayman's antics.

"Time is precious. Let's proceed ahead." [Youki]

If we don't hurry up, it will eventually be too late to save Gai and Tiel-chan. When I urged everyone, Cecilia lighted the mine with her magic and walked ahead.

"By the way, is it common for demons to appear here?" [Youki]

"That's right. Is there something wrong?" [Clayman]

"I was just wondering if there would always be requests given out to subjugate them like this." [Youki]

"Of course not. The people working in this mine are unexpectedly high ranking, so they are capable of fighting off the demons here on their own."  
[Clayman]

The interior of this mine seemed to be well-maintained, so I guess they would try handling whatever things that they could do on their own. In other words, it was certain that there was another more troublesome enemy aside from the normal ones: one that couldn't be defeated by those who could normally defeat C-rank demons. Well, it was expected that it would be a troublesome request, judging from Clayman's behaviour. Not only that, but I still need to acquire the magic ore for Gai and gather the herbs for Tiel-chan's medicine too. Henceforth, there was no way I could back out of this.

With the help of Cecilia's light magic, we proceeded ahead.

After the battle against the first wave of demons, we ventured deeper into the mine. We were attacked by demons numerous times, but we managed to defeat them without any trouble, and continued moving forward. It was regrettable that I didn't have the opportunity to join in the fight though, since Sophia-san and Clayman were just too strong. Even though I was assigned to protect Cecilia, all the demons were defeated before they even got to us, leaving me with nothing to do at all. Thanks to that, Cecilia and I could take it easy, but somehow it didn't feel right not being able to contribute anything. Since the mine was well maintained by the workers here, and because we had obtained a map in advance, we could navigate through the area easily.

I had a feeling that we had ventured quite a long way into the mine, but we had yet to come across the demon mentioned in the request. All of the demons defeated by Sophia-san and Clayman so far were similar to the ones that we had encountered earlier.



"Hey, I think we've travelled quite deep into the mine now, but... we've yet to encounter the demon that we're supposed to subjugate. What's the meaning of this?" [Youki]

"Ah, we'll probably encounter it once we reach an area deeper in the mine."  
[Clayman]

"Hmm..." [Youki]

I had a suspicion that he gave me an ambiguous reply just for the sake of it, so I secretly strengthened all of my five senses. Upon doing so, I could indeed sense the smell of a demon that seemed different than the ones we had come across so far. However, I could also hear crunching sounds coming from that direction.

*\*crunch crunch\**

It sounded like something was being munched on. It gave me an unpleasant feeling somehow, but I forced myself to move forward.

Shortly after, we finally reached our destination, but...

"Oioi, is that the demon that we're supposed to subjugate?" [Youki]

That was quite a huge demon. It looked like an enormous version of a rock lizard, but the colour of its rocky skin surface seemed different.

"That's a rock lizard, isn't it? It's a demon that eats rock as its staple food, but... the rock that it is eating now doesn't seem to be a normal rock." [Sophia]

"...What that demon is eating now is a magic ore." [Clayman]

"What!?" [Youki]



Upon closer observation, I noticed that the rock eater was dexterously digging the magic ores from the wall and chomping on them noisily.

"It seems to have undergone some kind of mutation, so it began eating magic ores. A normal rock eater will only eat normal rocks." [Clayman]

"No, save that for later. What we should do now is to defeat it quickly!" [Youki]

If that demon continued popping the magic ores like snacks, we would not have enough to fix Gai up. However, when I tried to attack it after casting my usual body reinforcement magic, I was stopped by Clayman.

"Hold your horses. I'm not done explaining yet." [Clayman]

"Hah?! What do you mean by that?" [Youki]

"I've yet to explain the condition of the request and the demon's trait. I don't know why you're in such a hurry, but calm down." [Clayman]

"...I got it." [Youki]

I decided to listen Clayman after he soothed me. If I were to make any mistake here, I would only end up troubling Cecilia and the rest.

"Then I'll start. First of all, I'll explain about its trait. Based on the information provided, probably due to the magic ores consumed, the attribute of the magic ore has become part of its constitution." [Clayman]

"Umm, if I'm mistaken, magic ore has a magic absorbing property... in other words..." [Cecilia]

"I wouldn't say that magic doesn't work... but the effect seems small. It is a natural enemy to the both of you." [Clayman]

Clayman pointed at me and Cecilia. Immediately, Sophia-san forcibly twisted his finger upwards. Cecilia stared at the scene unfolding before her round-eyed, as it's not every day you see a wife breaking off her husband's finger. It was probably disrespectful of Clayman to have pointed his finger at Cecilia.

"Sophia-san, isn't that too much..." [Cecilia]

"It's fine. My husband's not that fragile." [Sophia]

As Sophia-san said, Clayman, who was on verge of passing out earlier, seemed to have made a miraculous recovery and resumed his explanation as if nothing had happened. Clayman has an incredible recuperative power, indeed.

"If it's still somewhat effective, wouldn't it be fine if I attack it using advanced level magic?" [Youki]

"That would work, but that won't do. If you use that level of magic in a place like this, this tunnel might collapse. Besides, Tarevoke Merchant Guild has made a troublesome request." [Clayman]

"Troublesome request?" [Youki]

"Ou, that's..." [Clayman]

According to Clayman, the hide of a mutated rock eater would make a rare material, so they wanted us to defeat it without injuring it, if possible. That condition seriously made me feel that they were screwing with us.

"Dear... why did you accept a request with such an unreasonable condition?" [Sophia]

"Sophia, I'm not done explaini... g-give, I give up!" [Clayman]

Sophia-san put Clayman in a headlock. I heard something that sounded like bones cracking. Was Cecilia accustomed to this situation already? She laughed a bit as she watched the scene with a calm demeanour. Although, I was laughing, too. In the first place, it didn't seem as if Clayman was suffering at all. His hand was running over Sophia-san's waist as he cried for mercy.

...I wished they would do this kind of things at home.

After Sophia-san was satisfied, she released him from the headlock.

"O-Ouch... Anyway, it's not like I accepted the request without first thinking through it. I have a proper strategy for this." [Clayman]

Although he made the declaration confidently, it gave me a bad premonition. It must be a strategy that would put me at a disadvantage.

"What kind of strategy is it?" [Youki]

"The strategy is simple. I will first wrap your body with my shikigami, then you'll enter the demon's body and defeat it from the inside. How's that? A perfect strategy, isn't it?" [Clayman]

"Stop shitting me!" [Youki]

So that was the reason why this fellow invited me along! Was he planning to turn me into some kind of virus for the rock eater? Don't even joke about it!

"It'll be fine if Clayman goes, right?" [Youki]

"I have to control the shikigami, so that's not possible. There, go. I will wrap them around you, so it will be fine, probably." [Clayman]

"You should be assuring me that it will definitely be fine!" [Youki]

I flung him a retort as I watched the rock eater. Clayman's plan was to have me enter that demon's body and go on a rampage from the inside. It would indeed be doable if I were to use my body reinforcement magic. However, it was still questionable if Clayman's shikigami could offer that much of a protection... It would be hard. I guess I could think of it as doing it for Tiel-chan and Gai.

"I'll handle that task." [Sophia]

"What?!" [Youki]

While I was still conflicted about it, Sophia-san volunteered to take up the role of the virus. It seemed that Clayman was surprised, too. His eyes were like that of a dead fish usually, but they were wide opened at that moment.

"No, no. I can't have Sophia do this." [Clayman]

"Youki-sama specializes in magic, so I should be a better candidate since I'm better at close combat." [Sophia]

"W-Well that might be true but..." [Clayman]

"In the first place, isn't this strategy itself dangerous?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia was right. One could say that it could be likened to being eaten alive, too. After all, that demon seemed to be chewing ores easily as though it were eating candies.

"Cecilia-sama, there's no need to worry. My husband's shikigami is not something that's so weak. Isn't that right, Dear?" [Sophia]

"No, well that's true. But..." [Clayman]

"Besides, Youki-sama and Cecilia-sama need to stop the rock eater's movement with magic, since it will be considerably painful for the demon if I attack it from the inside. Youki-sama is capable of using stronger magic than me, too. So, he's the right guy for the job." [Sophia]

This was so the mine wouldn't collapse due to the rock eater's struggling. Since magic wasn't totally ineffective against the demon, we could still restrict its movement using restraining magic. There was no mistake when Sophia-san said that I could use stronger magic as well.

"Oi, Sophia..." [Clayman]

"Dear, could you please make the preparations then? I believe in you."  
[Sophia]

"O-Ou, leave it to me!" [Clayman]

In the end, it was decided that Sophia-san would be the one to do it. Clayman then started preparing his shikigami, applying all his effort in doing so. He might not have worked so hard on it if I were the one who took up that role.

"Even if she's the right one for this job, why did Sophia-san volunteer herself for such a dangerous role?" [Youki]

"...I don't understand it either." [Cecilia]

"Shall I answer it?" [Sophia]

We were planning to discuss this secretly, but it seemed that Sophia-san could still hear us. Clayman was immersed in the preparation of the shikigami so he wasn't aware of this conversation.

"Was it because I was throwing a fit?" [Youki]

"No, you're wrong." [Sophia]

Her answer was instantaneous. Well, I guess Sophia-san wasn't the type of person who would volunteer to do so just because of something like this. She had probably wished to throw herself mercilessly into the mouth of the rock eater.

"You're thinking of something impolite, aren't you?" [Sophia]

"Ah, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." [Youki]

"What were you thinking about?" [Cecilia]

There was a look of amazement on Cecilia's face. I had totally forgotten that Sophia-san has mind reading technique. I should stop all the needless thoughts and ask her frankly.

"Why such a dangerous role?" [Youki]

"It's just as I said earlier. I'm the right person for the job. Besides, it's not dangerous. I believe in my husband." [Sophia]

Sophia-san had a serious look on her face as she looked at Clayman, who was in the midst of preparing the shikigami.

In other words, that was all there was to it. What kind of bond exists between this couple? Cecilia and I were rendered silent after that. All we did was watched the two of them alternately until the preparation was completed.

The moment Clayman readied himself, Cecilia cancelled out the illumination magic and used a torch instead.

"Alright, go!" [Clayman]

At Clayman's signal, Cecilia and I jumped out.

"《Earth Rock》" [Youki]

"《Saint Chain》" [Cecilia]

Cecilia and I cast intermediate level earth and light magic spells. Upon activation of the spell, the ground began to raise up, restricting the rock eater's leg movements, and chains of light could be seen restraining its body. Nonetheless, probably because its meal was suddenly disrupted, it started struggling intensely, causing the chains to break and the rocks to crack.

"Oioi, we just invoked the magic." [Youki]

"If we do not cast the magic repeatedly, we won't be able to stop its movement." [Cecilia]

We might have underestimated it a little. I should give my all and cast my restraining magic continuously.

"《Saint Chain》,《Earth Rock》,《Aqua Press》,《Blizzard Gale》" [Youki]

Chains of light and spiky rocks that burst out began restraining it, and gushes of water froze its body, confining its movement. Even though Cecilia was also casting her magic repeatedly, we still couldn't restrain it completely when the opponent started struggling.

"Vuooo————!"

It let out a ghastly roar, possibly because it was getting irritated that it couldn't move. The loud sound reverberated through the tunnel, causing my ears to ring. However, it was also fortunate for us since its mouth was wide opened at that moment.

In that instant, Sophia-san, who was wrapped in Clayman's shikigami jumped inside the rock eater's mouth. Although the rock eater tried to spit her out after noticing that something had entered its body, it was futile. Not long after, it began to thrash around as if it was writhing in pain. Sophia-san must have started attacking the rock eater from the inside.

"This fellow is going berserk." [Youki]

"It seems to be quite painful. I feel a little sorry for it." [Cecilia]

Cecilia sympathized with the rock eater. I am also a demon. While I wouldn't say that I don't feel sorry for it, I know that this has to be done. I wouldn't be able to help Gai if I were to have any uncertainty in my decisions. I should focus on restraining the rampaging rock eater.

"Oraa, stop struggling!" [Clayman]

The moment Clayman let out an angry bellow, a huge shikigami that was as big as the rock eater appeared and began to suppress it. Moreover, there wasn't just one shikigami, but four of them all together. It was my first time seeing Clayman look so motivated.

"It must be because Sophia-san's inside the body. Clayman would certainly not work so hard if I were the one inside." [Youki]

"I wouldn't be so sure about that. He would've tried his best in Sophia-san's presence, too." [Cecilia]



"...Certainly, that might also be possible." [Youki]

Cecilia seemed to have understood Clayman's personality even though she had travelled with him for only a short period of time. Has she cleared her doubts concerning the maid uniform? ...No, it would be better not to remind her about it again considering that the 'misunderstanding' was already resolved.

"Both of you, don't get distracted and keep your mind on it until that fellow stops moving." [Clayman]

"Yes." [Cecilia]

"I got it." [Youki]

Even though the rock eater tried to thrash around, it couldn't move much after we restrained it. After several minutes, the rock eater collapsed to the ground and remained motionless. Since it was Sophia-san who had taken up this role, we knew she wouldn't take long to finish this task. Once we had confirmed that the demon was defeated, we cancelled out our magic. Cecilia appeared a little tired, but I still have plenty of energy left.

I ran up to her.

"Cecilia, great job." [Youki]

"Good job, Youki-san... It looks like you're still fine." [Cecilia]

"That's because I'm not your average kind of guy." [Youki]

While we were having such a trifling conversation, the area around the rock eater's mouth started wriggling and a human covered shikigami could be seen pushing herself out through the mouth. Clayman then cancelled out his shikigami

revealing Sophia-san, who looked totally unscathed with not a single bit of dirt on her body. Cecilia called out to her and tried to approach her. However, before she could do so, Clayman rushed over to Sophia-san and embraced her.

"Sophia, you're safe. I'm glad." [Clayman]

"Yes. As you can see, I'm fine. So can you please release me? Youki-sama and Cecilia-sama are looking at us." [Sophia]

"It's no big deal. If they want to watch, just let them watch." [Clayman]

"That won't do. Please release me. The request is not over yet. I still have to look for the herbs." [Sophia]

"Uu... I got it." [Clayman]

Clayman separated from Sophia-san reluctantly. On looking at their exchange, what came to my mind was...

"They're so lovey-dovey..." [Youki]

"Isn't it?..." [Cecilia]

Cecilia and I looked at each other. Our faces turned beet-red when our eyes met. I wasn't sure why we blushed. It might be that we had felt something after looking at that couple.

"Oi, why are the two of you just standing there for? You're here for something, right? Let's look for it quickly so we can go back." [Clayman]

"Ah, my bad. I'll go now." [Youki]

"I'll look for them, too." [Cecilia]

Thus, we began our search in the mine. It was quite brutal though, since the rock eater had messed up the place earlier. Nevertheless, it seemed that it had not eaten up all the magic ores, so we managed to find them easily. The problem laid in the medicinal herbs. Since stones and ores were scattered all over the places, it took Cecilia and the rest some time to look for the herbs.

By the time we achieved our objectives and left the mine, it was already dusk.

"Damn, we can't go back today then..." [Youki]

"It's dangerous to travel back at night and we can't make the horse carriage go too fast, too. Well, let's take our time and go back tomorrow." [Clayman]

"I don't have the leisure to take my time now." [Youki]

We still had some time left, but I was concerned about Gai. I looked at the bag which was jam packed with magic ores in my possession. I would be able to restore Gai's body with these, so I wanted to give them to him as soon as possible.

"Youki-san, what's wrong?" [Cecilia]

"Hey, can't I just fly back by myself first?" [Youki]

I consulted Cecilia secretly. It wouldn't have mattered even if it was night time if I were to fly back. I should be able to make my trip back faster than a carriage.

"That would be bad. You'll definitely be suspected later. Besides, what if by chance someone were to witness it while you're flying?" [Cecilia]

'The risk is high, but...' [Youki]

"Is there something wrong?" [Sophia]

While we were brooding over the problem, Sophia-san came over to us, so I tried to gloss over it hastily.

"Ahaha... I was just telling Cecilia that I was feeling tired." [Youki]

"Is that so? I'm feeling somewhat weary, too. It's been some time since I last did a guild request. At the moment, my husband is reporting to the mine workers about the subjugation of the rock eater and the dismantling of the materials. Once we return, we'll rest at the inn." [Sophia]

"Ah, yes. I understand." [Youki]

I couldn't say anything unnecessary in front of Sophia-san, so I decided to heed what she said obediently. After Clayman came back, we returned to the inn where we stayed yesterday. I had intended to sneak back to the capital at night, but when I recalled what Cecilia said, I crawled back into my bed. Nevertheless, I couldn't get to sleep at all. Even though Clayman had fallen asleep, I was still wide awake. The moment I closed my eyes, the image of Gai with cracks all over his body flickered in my mind. Then I started recalling Tiel-chan, who was worried endlessly about Gai, despite her own pain. It wouldn't have been a problem if I were to make myself invisible using magic, since no one would be able to see me. I should be able to return to the inn by morning without arousing any suspicion if I were to fly back at full speed.

Before I knew it, I had abandoned the idea of sleeping and started devising a plan to sneak back to the capital.

"Alright. I'll fly back. It's been a long time since I last do this." [Youki]

I got up from my bed to confirm if Clayman really was sleeping. However, I cast 《Nightmare Sleep》 on him just in case, since I would get into trouble if he

were to wake up. I had been under his care this time, so I guess I should give him a good dream. The moment I cast 《Nightmare Sleep》 on him, he started murmuring, “*Sophia~*” with a visible disgusting smile plastered on his face. I could easily tell what kind of dream he was having.

I then went out of the room, leaving Clayman, who was embracing his futon while wearing a silly grin. However, in order to leave the inn, I would have to pass through the reception desk. Even though it was night time, the inn’s owner might still be awake. While I tried to think of a way to sneak through, I hid myself to observe the place first.

“Eh, why...?” [Youki]

For some reason, Cecilia was sitting on the couch at the inn’s reception area. There was a cup of tea on the table, so she was probably waiting for someone. Out of concern, I called out to her.

“Cecilia, what are you doing here?” [Youki]

“I was waiting for you.” [Cecilia]

What did she mean by that? Cecilia got up from the couch and handed me a bag.



"These are the herbs collected today. Please give them to Sheik-kun." [Cecilia]

"Eh, but..." [Youki]

"Please remember to ask Sheik-kun to match his story with yours if someone were to ask. Also, do tell Tiel-chan the same thing too if she wakes up." [Cecilia]

"Y-Yeah, I got it." [Youki]

I received the bag from Cecilia and kept it inside the bag containing the magic ores.

"It has been a long time since Sophia-san did a guild request, so she seemed tired. She has fallen asleep already. She will probably not wake up until morning unless something happens." [Cecilia]

"I'll try to come back by morning." [Youki]

"I see. The owner asked me to call him if something happens. He has gone out for dinner, so if you want to leave, now's the time." [Cecilia]

It seemed that she had somehow done something about the inn's owner, too. At any rate, it was amazing that she was able to carry it out with such outstanding finesse.

"I got it. Thank you. But, why did you make all these preparations. Just a while ago, I..." [Youki]

"I have a feeling that Youki-san will try to sneak back. Actually, it was already the third time I got the owner to leave his seat... It will indeed be too suspicious if I do it again, so if you had not come out, I would've returned to my room."  
[Cecilia]

I looked at Cecilia as she laughed lightly. I would've left my room earlier if I had known that she was waiting for me. She must have been worried about the two of them, too. Hence, after she considered the possibility that I would sneak back, she decided to aid me.

...I really need to express my gratitude to her.

"Thank you very much for everything. I'll take my leave now." [Youki]

"Please be more careful and try not to be discovered by anyone." [Cecilia]

"I got it. Later." [Youki]

After bidding Cecilia farewell, I left the inn and cast 《Vanishing Wave》 to make myself invisible before leaving the village. Once I had confirmed that I was quite a distance away from the village, I reverted to my demon form.

"I won't be able to fly at full speed if I don't return to this form. Well... I don't really want to go back to this form if it's possible, but it can't be helped. This is an emergency." [Youki]

I quipped to myself as I stood at an empty grassland. Following that, I spread my wings and took off to the sky. Thereon, I flew back to Minerva in silence and arrived at the inn. Naturally, I hid myself before entering the inn and snuck back into my room. It was an irony that I had to sneak back into my own rented room, though. I guess it couldn't be helped considering my current appearance.

It seemed that Gai was still alright. The cracks had spread even more compared to the previous time, but he had not crumbled into pieces yet. I could still save him. I woke Gai up while trying my best not to shake him as much as possible.

"Oi, wake up, Gai!" [Youki]



But, there was no response. Was he just in a deep sleep, or could it be that....

"Am I too late...!?" [Youki]

Gai had not crumbled into pieces yet, but could it be that he was already dead? No. I should still have two more days.

"Oi. Stop sleeping and wake up. Ahh jeez, move! You lolicon stone statue! I found a way to save you. All you need to do is to eat this magic ore!" [Youki]

"....!"

I noticed Gai's body twitching. It seemed that there was slight reaction from him. He might get up if I were to continue waking him up like this.

"Get your lazy ass up! I'll tell you this first. I'll not let you die just like that after you've deceived an innocent girl like her. That's why..." [Youki]

"Eei! You're noisy!" [Gai]

Just when I thought of spouting whatever came to my mind, Gai opened his eyes. Just as I had thought, he had not died yet.

"Thank goodness. So I still managed to make it in time." [Youki]

"What are you feeling glad about, brat? Why the heck are you disturbing my sleep for? This might possibly be my last sleep. Besides, it seems that you were having fun blabbing all those things while I was asleep, weren't you?" [Gai]

"Eh, so you heard me? Since you did not wake up, I thought..." [Youki]

"I was awake! But, my body is at its limit, so it took me some time to move my body." [Gai]

It appeared that he had heard everything.

"Alright. Then why don't you eat this?" [Youki]

If he was awake, then he must have heard what I said earlier about the magic ore. I didn't have time to give him a detailed explanation, so I took a magic ore from the bag and forcefully shoved it into his mouth.

"Oi, brat. What are you... mugu-?!" [Gai]

"I'll explain later. Eat this, quick!" [Youki]

Gai reluctantly crunched the ore and ate it, but before he could finish the first one, I thrust another magic ore into his mouth.

"M-Mu, mguu, mguu." [Gai]

Gai stuck his hand out, looking as if he wanted to tell me something.

"I don't get what you're trying to say... Wait a minute!" [Youki]

When I looked at his arm, I noticed that the cracks from before were gone. It seemed that his body was recovering thanks to the magic ores.

"Mm!? Mmguga..." [Gai]

Gai appeared to be surprised when he saw the state of his own arm, too. He should have realized the effect of the magic ore by now. I kept stuffing the magic ores into his mouth until half the contents of the bag were gone. At that point, all the cracks on his body had completely disappeared.

"There're still half remaining... Even so, I could at least feel relieved now."  
[Youki]

"...Oi, brat. Don't forcefully thrust them into my mouth like that. I saw the cracks disappearing from my arm, so I understand the effect of this stone! Let me eat them slowly." [Gai]

"Ah, my bad, my bad. I was too impatient earlier. I thought it would be bad if I didn't feed them to you soon." [Youki]

"Hmph, it's good that you understand it... There're still some left, right? Why don't you let me finish them all?" [Gai]

Gai snatched the bag from me and stuffed the remaining ores inside his mouth. I wonder if he actually likes it. I don't know what gargoyle likes to eat so it wasn't possible for me to give any comment. However, it reminded me of the rock eater when I looked at the way Gai ate the magic ores and swallowed them all.

"Oioi. Aren't you eating too much? Will you be all right?" [Youki]

"Hmm... They're quite tasty. Could you bring me more?" [Gai]

It seemed that he has taken a liking to the magic ore's taste. However, I wouldn't bring any more to him. It was troublesome enough to collect them. I received the bag from Gai and confirmed the content. The medicinal herbs should still be inside the bag.

"Hmm...?" [Youki]

There was something else inside the bag besides the medicinal herbs. When I took it out, I noticed that it was something that resembled a nail, but its colour was similar to a magic ore.

"Mm? There's still another one left? Give me that!" [Gai]

"Ah, wait a minute!" [Youki]

Gai disregarded my warning and stuffed it inside his mouth. That was probably not a magic ore, but one of the claws from the mutated rock eater. I might have mistaken it for an ore and collected it. ...He might have not realized that it was actually a nail. It was unsettling, though.

"This one has a different taste... What's this? My body feels hot!?" [Gai]

"That's why I told you to wait. That's not a magic ore!" [Youki]

I watched over Gai, waiting to see if anything would happen. Shortly after, the area where his arm and wing were missing began to expand.

"Hot! Hot!" Gai writhed in pain as he cried out, while I stared, fixated at the phenomenon happening before my eyes.

Eventually, both his wing and arm were regenerated completely when the areas finished expanding.

"...." [Youki]

"...." [Gai]

Both of us were at a loss as we stared at the newly grown wing and arm.

"...Don't think too much about it. I'm short of time. I still have another place to go, so I'll be leaving first. See ya." [Youki]

I left the room secretly, leaving Gai who was still confused there alone.

Following that, I sneaked into Aquarain's mansion the same way, and located Sheik by strengthening my sense of smell.

It seemed that he was inside Tiel-chan's room. He was leaning against the back of the chair as he slept. Was he on standby here in case her condition worsens? Or was it because of his concern for Tiel-chan? Either way, you did great, Sheik. I praised him silently in my heart as I woke him up.

"Uuu~ it hurts... who's that?" [Sheik]

"Keep quiet. It's me." [Youki]

"Eh? Captain's current form... Oh, it's still night time? Night night~" [Sheik]

"Don't go back to sleep!" [Youki]

I felt uneasy since I wasn't sure if he was still half-asleep. Hence, I woke him up forcibly with my water magic before explaining the circumstances to him. In the end, even though he was still rubbing his eyes sleepily, he managed to prepare the concoction after I brought him the materials.

"I've prepared it." [Sheik]

"Alright. Now let her drink it as soon as possible." [Youki]

I made my body invisible just as assurance when Sheik made Tiel-chan take the medicine. I had a feeling that his expression became somewhat gentler, though.

"Sheik, I'll leave first so I won't arouse any suspicion." [Youki]

"Un. If Tiel-chan asks me about it, I'll tell her that what she drank earlier was just nutrients for her body. Bye bye~" [Sheik]

I made myself invisible and flew back at full speed, so I could hurry back to the inn where Cecilia and the rest were. I landed at a place not far from the village and got rid of my horn and wings, reverting to my usual form. By the time I was done with everything, it was almost dawn.

"This is bad. I need to hurry!" [Youki]

I made myself invisible and returned to the inn without being noticed by anyone. When I entered the room, I noticed that Clayman was still asleep with the futon in his arms. I shot him a sidelong glance before crawling back into my bed.

"I'm tired... I can finally sleep..." [Youki]

I soon drifted into the dream world, but...

"Youki-sama, Youki-sama. Please wake up." [Sophia]

"Unn, eh? Why is Sophia-san in our room..." [Youki]

"We have been waiting for some time for both of you to get up. So, I came to wake you two. The carriage is already ready outside, since you said that you'd like to return to Minerva as soon as possible." [Sophia]

Did I say that yesterday?

I didn't need to hurry back anymore, but I couldn't possibly explain it to her. I should just go along with the flow and prepare myself. By the way, Clayman was woken up with his usual beating. At that moment, he was probably still half-asleep with half of his consciousness still in the dream world, so he ended up hugging Sophia-san unintentionally. He was blown off instantly, though. At any rate, we got into the carriage after that and took off immediately.

"Youki-san, are you alright?" [Cecilia]

I could hear Cecilia's voice. I guess it was natural since she was sitting next to me. I could tell that my head was bobbing about as the carriage shook. The reason to that was simple. I was sleepy.

"Oioi, didn't you sleep last night? What were you doing the entire night? Good grief!" [Clayman]

"Dear, are you in the position to say that? You've overslept, too." [Sophia]

Clayman and Sophia-san were performing their husband and wife comedic routine, but I didn't have the energy to laugh or retort at all.

"Sorry, please let me sleep..." [Youki]

I collapsed sideways as it is and fell asleep.

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The first thing that I noticed when I opened my eyes was Cecilia's face above of me. My brain was still foggy, probably because I had just woken up. Regardless, I decided to get up.

"You've finally woken up. We've already arrived at Minerva, Youki-san."  
[Cecilia]

It seemed that I had slept through the entire journey. Well, it couldn't be helped since I had been up almost the entire night. At any rate, why was Clayman looking at me with that huge smirk across his face?

"You have an enviable life as well, don't you? You'll get stabbed by the young lady's fans if they saw that." [Clayman]

"What are you talking about? ...Did I do something?" [Youki]

"...You've been sleeping on Cecilia-sama's lap the entire journey." [Sophia]

"Seriously?!" [Youki]

Have I finally become a rijuu? I was resting my head on the lap of the girl I like – was what I thought for a split second, but I immediately ceased that thought. If I remember correctly, I had collapsed and fallen asleep earlier, so she was probably just being considerate.

"I don't really mind it, so it's fine. Besides, a lot of things happened yesterday, so... right?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia winked at me. She was probably referring to my flight journey last night. ...I shall accept that as my reward then. Gai's body was restored and Tiel-chan should be fine if I leave her to Sheik.

"Alright, I guess I'll sleep once I go back." [Youki]

"What? You're going to sleep again? You're even lazier than me." [Clayman]

"Leave me alone." [Youki]



The two female members laughed upon seeing at my exchange with Clayman. They might have unexpectedly been great party members. That was my thought as I returned home in the carriage.

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Two days later, Gai and Tiel-chan, both of whom seemed to have made a full recovery in a short period of time, were the first two beings that greeted my sight in the morning.

"I'm glad. I'm so glad. Guardian Deity-sama! Even though Guardian Deity-sama was in such a predicament, I wasn't able to stay by your side." [Tiel]

"You're in a terrible condition yourself, girlie. So, don't mind it at all. Rather, sorry for making you worry even though you're unwell." [Gai]

"How could... There's no need for Guardian Deity-sama to apologize for something like that." [Tiel]

"Sigh... Then both of us don't need to feel bad about it. I hadn't expected that we could talk with each other like this again." [Gai]

"Yes. Same here. I'm glad to be able to stay by Guardian Deity-sama's side and talk with you like this." [Tiel]

"Yeah. I must really thank the brat for this. No, it's not just the brat. I should thank the cleric girl and the feathered brat, too." [Gai]

"Yes. I will be expressing my thanks to Cecilia-sama and Sheik-kun on behalf of Guardian Deity-sama, too." [Tiel]

"Hmm, I got it. Brat, thanks." [Gai]

"I'd like to express my gratitude as well, Youki-san. Thank you very much."  
[Tiel]

The two of them lowered their heads towards me.

I'd like to think of this as my reward for doing my best for them, but...

"...The two of you. First of all, good morning." [Youki]

They were deeply immersed in their own two worlds, engaging in such displays of affection since just now. I had been pretending to be asleep, but I had reached my limit.

"Mm, that's right." [Gai]

"What do you mean by 'that's right'?! Tiel-chan, when did you come here?"  
[Youki]

"I came here around two hours ago. I didn't get the permission to leave yesterday, so I came here to see Guardian Deity-sama as soon as I could today."  
[Tiel]

It amazed me that a girl with weak constitution like her was able to summon up that much energy. The door was supposed to be locked, so I guess Gai must have opened it for her.

"Two hours ago?! The play you guys put on just now made it look like it was such a touching reunion!" [Youki]

"After crying for two hours, I embraced Guardian Deity-sama. Guardian Deity-sama was also embracing me closely." [Tiel]

"Oi, Tiel. Don't tell him about that." [Gai]

What had you two been doing while I was asleep?

Gai clasped his hand over Tiel-chan's mouth. However, probably because Tiel-chan had misunderstood it and thought that Gai was holding her close, her cheeks turned red.

"...I'll be going out." [Youki]

I quickly got myself ready, grabbed my valuables then left the room.

"Wait, brat. Listen to—" [Gai]

*\*Bang\**

I closed the door.

## Extra : I went to the festival

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"Hah? Festival? Party?" [Youki]

I initially came to the guild to see if there were any requests I could accept, but I ended up receiving some unexpected information from Clayman. It seemed that there would be festival-like event organized for the hero's party soon. Quite some time had passed since they defeated the Demon Lord, so there should have been enough parties and celebrations already.

So then, why were they organizing a festival now?

"Ou. I was told that some kind of big shots from another country will be visiting. After the Demon Lord was defeated, each country was preoccupied with their own celebrations and they also had to settle their own country affairs. So, now that everything has calmed down, don't you think it is finally their opportunity to probe the secrets from respective countries?" [Clayman]

Although he said it in a listless manner, it wasn't really off the mark. In fact, I think what he said was spot-on.

"Hmm, will there be anything interesting?" [Youki]

"Beats me. I think there will be merchants coming to open stalls here.... which reminds me, there will be some kind of event where a famous so-and-so painter will be painting a picture of each of the hero's party members." [Clayman]

"Really?" [Youki]

Will he also paint a picture of Cecilia? Since it would be painted by a famous painter, the picture would definitely capture the real beauty in Cecilia. It made me look forward to the festival.

"Well, if they're going to throw a festival then they should throw a grand one. That means that there will be less people coming to the guild, so I'll get to relax."  
[Clayman]

"Will you not be taking the day off during the festival, Clayman?" [Youki]

The first time I met Clayman was during the parade. If I remember correctly, all his co-workers took the day off, leaving him alone in the guild at that time.

"I'll be the only one working in the guild this time as well. After all, there will be no one who would come for a guild request. So I'll get to laze around."  
[Clayman]

"Oioi. Don't tell me that everyone else aside from you will be on vacation again?" [Youki]

"Ou. It seems that the rest of them want to see the hero. Of course, there are also people who are aiming for the other party members too... like that Aquarain young lady." [Clayman]

"Wipe that smirk off your face!" [Youki]

Are you trying to pick a fight with me? He was saying it like it was someone else's problem. It pissed me off. I wondered if there is a way for me to get even with him.

"I'm going to relay that statement from earlier to Sophia-san. Clayman was smirking when he told me that there will be a bunch of guys who will take advantage of the festival to get close to Cecilia." [Youki]

"Oi, wait a minute. Don't do that. Don't you know what Sophia will do if she hears that?! Besides, you've distorted what I've said! I didn't put it that way."  
[Clayman]

"That's all. I've got valuable information, too. I'll not take up any request today. Later, Clayman." [Youki]

I stood up from my seat and left after bidding farewell to Clayman. I wasn't sure if Clayman was going to protest about it, but rest assured. Even though Cecilia might attract the vulgar gazes of many men, I wouldn't be stupid enough to tell Sophia-san that just to spite Clayman.

"Even so, a picture, is it... It's cool. I'm envious." [Youki]

Only someone who had made remarkable accomplishment would have their picture painted by a famous painter. Someone like Cecilia Aquarain, one of the party members who had defeated the Demon Lord would have their legend handed down from generation to generation.

"Alright. This is something to be celebrated!" [Youki]

I'd like to hear about the festival, too. I immediately contacted Cecilia and made an appointment to meet her at a later date.

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On the promised day, I arrived at the mansion with a gift in hand.

"I heard that there'll be a famous painter who'll be painting your picture during the festival. That's so cool. Ah, here's a gift." [Youki]

"No, it's not really that big deal... Oh, thank you." [Cecilia]

I handed Cecilia the bag of pastries and took a seat on the chair. Cecilia then prepared the tea for two people and readied the pastries for a quick tea time.

"It tastes good as usual." [Youki]

"Fufufu, thank you very much." [Cecilia]

I looked at Cecilia as she drank her tea elegantly. It was certainly a picturesque sight worthy of being made into a painting.

"...Is there something wrong?" [Cecilia]

She raised the question, probably because I was just staring at her without touching my tea. I would normally go into raptures over the snacks as I heartily tucked into the pastries and guzzled down the tea.

"No, I was thinking about how you look like a painting." [Youki]

"Wha-!? Come on, please stop that..." [Cecilia]

Why did her face suddenly turn red? Was it something I said?

"Did I say something wrong?" [Youki]

"No, please don't worry about it. However, it's just as Youki-san said. We'll have our portraits painted in the incoming festival. I'm actually nervous about it." [Cecilia]

"Nervous?" [Youki]

"Yes. It's my first time having my portrait painted." [Cecilia]

"It's surprising. My impression is that it is a common occurrence for nobles to have their portraits painted." [Youki]

"I didn't have an opportunity to have mine painted and I didn't think of having one done either." [Cecilia]

It was such a waste considering that fact that she's so cute. However, since this would be a picture left to posterity, it wouldn't do for her to remain nervous. I'd rather have a picture of Cecilia looking relaxed and natural instead of all tensed up.

"Cecilia, let's have a special training." [Youki]

"Eh? Training?" [Cecilia]

"Yep. Let's have a special model training so you'll not get nervous during the real thing." [Youki]

I dashed out of the mansion at once to buy the art supplies. When I was done with my purchase, the store owner said, "You do your best, too." I wasn't sure what he meant, but since I didn't have the time to be bothered about it, I just left the store after telling him, "It'll be alright. I think I can do it."

"I'm back." [Youki]

"You're fast... That dynamism of yours always amazes me." [Cecilia]

I believe in striking while the iron is hot. It wouldn't do for me to be wishy-washy. Even though it was a cool line, I couldn't say it out loud in the current situation. It was likely that she would only smile bitterly upon hearing it.



"I bought these sheets thingy so I wouldn't dirty the room." [Youki]

"Mother told us to do it in the garden when I consulted her about it." [Cecilia]

"Is that so? Yeah, I guess that's true." [Youki]

If, by chance, I were to make a mess of the room, I would only end up troubling Sophia-san.

"Shall we move to the garden?" [Cecilia]

"Yes." [Youki]

We brought the newly purchased art supplies, along with the cups and the basket of pastries, to the garden. It was fortunate that the weather was fine, making it an ideal day for painting.

"All right. Shall we start then?" [Youki]

"What should I do?" [Cecilia]

"Let's see. Can you take a seat? It will be tiring for you to stand." [Youki]

The thought of making Cecilia stand the entire time as she modelled for me frightened me as I wouldn't know what Sophia-san would do to me if she were to find out. Well, I had no intention of making her stand from the start, though.

"I understand." [Cecilia]

"Of course, I won't tell you not to move. You can just relax and move about if you want to." [Youki]

"...Will you be able to paint then?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia looked at me anxiously. It will be alright. Nothing is impossible for me. I gazed at her seriously and ran my brush over the sketchbook. Even though I had told her that it would be alright for her to move about freely, she remained still, possibly out of consideration for me. Although it was supposed to be only a model practice for Cecilia, I ended up becoming serious.

"I will definitely produce a magnificent artwork." [Youki]

"I'm looking forward to it, Youki-san." [Cecilia]

When I first started painting, I thought that I would be able to pull it off for sure, but I had forgotten something important. There was a problem with my artistic sense. After taking some time to finish my painting, I stared at my sketchbook. I thought it looked good. At least, that was what I felt, but something seemed different.

*"Is this supposed to be Cecilia?"*

That was the feeling one would get at first glance.

"Have you finished the painting?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia stood up from the chair and walked over to me. When she looked at the picture on the sketchbook, she fell silent. The deafening silence was torturous, so I wished she would stop that.

"Your reaction's the same as Gai's, that one time." [Youki]

"U-Um... sorry." [Cecilia]

The girl I like was being considerate of me, even though it was supposed to be a training session for her to ease her tension.

How did this awkward atmosphere come about?

"It's not something that you need to apologize for, Cecilia. It's just that I don't have any artistic sense." [Youki]

"That's not it. Youki-san is just... unique." [Cecilia]

"Guh-!?" [Youki]

I was stabbed by her words this time, causing me to choke and cough reflexively.

"Ugh, this is not the end. I will not let it end just like this." [Youki]

I would not let it end just like that after showing Cecilia such a pathetic side. My chuuni switch was flipped.

"Ah, I have a feeling that Youki-san can't be stopped anymore..." [Cecilia]

"Rest assured, Cecilia. I will not give up." [Youki]

"What are you not giving up on? You've deviated from your main purpose already." [Cecilia]

Despite looking seemingly weary, she still went along with me, so I had to show her a fitting result. I turned to a new page in the sketchbook and took up the brush.

"Visualization. I have to visualize it." [Youki]

I tried recalling the moment when I had successfully moulded Gai using my earth magic. At that time, I had done it without taking much time and my mind had been free of obstructions. Even so, I still needed a certain concept in mind before I start drawing Cecilia. Since I failed in achieving realism, I went for the super-deformed (chibi) style.

I ran my brush over the sketchbook while still on my chuuni mode. Cecilia, on the other hand, returned to her seat and watched over me until I completed my painting. The time taken to finish this painting was half of last time.

What was drawn in my sketchbook was Cecilia in a cute chibi form.

"All right!" [Youki]

I cried out in satisfaction.

This level of work should be worthy of presentation to Cecilia.

"Did it come out well?" [Cecilia]

Was it because I was too engrossed in it? Or could it be that I was feeling too excited? I didn't realize that Cecilia had approached me. She peeked at the sketchbook from behind me. I almost cried out in surprise, but no voice came out. My heart started racing at her close proximity.

"That's me?! That's such a cute drawing. I like it." [Cecilia]

I was happy that she liked it, but I wished she would move back a little. The pleasant smell of her body caused my heart rate to accelerate to dangerous levels at that moment.

"T-Thank you..." [Youki]

I squeezed out my words of gratitude. My chuuni mode was completely switched off. While I was desperately calming my heart, Cecilia moved away from me, leaving me slightly relieved, yet disappointed at the same time. However, my heart throbbed with excitement once again when I recalled Cecilia's happy smile.

...More. I would like to make her even happier.

"Alright. Let's come up with the visuals for all the hero's party members."  
[Youki]

"Eh, you mean Hero-sama, Mikana and Raven-san?" [Cecilia]

"Yeah. I think I'll try challenging myself and draw the others too." [Youki]

I looked at the sketchbook with the brush in hand. The important thing was visualization. First of all, would be Yuuga, but seeing that it was that fellow, there was no need to spend so much time on the visualization of his image. After deciding on the theme, I finished his picture in a short time.

"Youki-san, who are the girls around Hero-sama?" [Cecilia]

"They're just unimportant minor characters that I had drawn." [Youki]

I came up with the drawing by visualizing Yuuga with a harem of girls. In other words, the theme for this was a harem.

"Then why is Hero-sama, the main character of this picture, so small?" [Cecilia]

"He's in the center, so isn't it fine?" [Youki]

Being in the center of the drawing would make him appear like the leader.

"The size of the girls around him is larger... but, it does give one the feeling that the main focus of this picture is Hero-sama." [Cecilia]

"It does, doesn't it?" [Youki]

It was something that I had simply drawn... no, it was an important piece of art that I had drawn with my skill. However, the one that stood out the most here was still Yuuga, regardless of how small the visual of him was.

"His presence is still overwhelming even though his size is small. As expected of a hero." [Youki]

"I think the final impact of a drawing depends on Youki-san, though." [Cecilia]

"That's true." I thought and laughed upon hearing Cecilia's response.

I took a short break since I was tired of drawing.

"We're supposed to be having a practice session, but I ended up getting sidetracked." [Youki]

"I was able to experience how it feels, so it's fine. Besides, it's not good to get too used to it, too." [Cecilia]

"You mean, it's important to feel somewhat anxious about it?" [Youki]

We chatted while we partook of the pastries. In the first place, I was just fooling around, so it was natural that she wouldn't feel nervous about it.

"Well, I'd like you to remember my painting during the real thing then. I think you'd feel more relaxed if you do." [Youki]

"It'll be fine if that's all it does, but..." [Cecilia]

She cupped her hand over her mouth and averted her eyes from me.

"Aaah! You're trying to say that it'd make you laugh instead?!" [Youki]

"...Sorry." [Cecilia]

I wished she hadn't given me such an apologetic look. I was pretty sure that people who received such mindful treatment didn't usually go on to be more than just friends.

"No, no, no, no!" [Youki]

Would I lose in the end? That realization suddenly hit me like a stream of cold water. It wasn't really about winning or losing, but I didn't want to be just 'an interesting guy' to her. I should possess a certain other charm that could attract her!

"Is there something wrong?" [Cecilia]

"It's nothing. Alright, break's over. Let's move on to the next person." [Youki]

I picked up a pen and looked at the sketchbook. I decided to draw Mikana next, so I started visualizing her image. In short, she's a tsundere who ended up liking a no-good asshole, I guess. I had an image of her firing flashy looking magic, but I chose to take a different approach. Cecilia seemed to be anticipating it as well, so I should try my best... no, I should go all out on this. I wound up taking a longer time with it compared to the one I did of Yuuga earlier.

"How's this?!" [Youki]

I turned the sketchbook around and dramatically displayed it to Cecilia, as though I were saying, "*Ta-da!*"

"That's Mikana, right? She looks different in this drawing." [Cecilia]

"Right? Right? I knew Cecilia would understand it." [Youki]

The outlines of the sketch were thin, giving Mikana a fragile appearance. The drawing made her resemble a 'literary girl' from somewhere. The impression was similar to Tiel-chan when she was not around Gai.

"It might be rude to Mikana if you were to put it that way, though." [Cecilia]

"Well, it's just a picture, and I hadn't said anything bad about her." [Youki]

I was just portraying her image in a different way. If I were to depict the usual Mikana, I would end up recalling the image of Tiel-chan when she was around Gai.

"I wonder what Hero-sama would say if he saw this..." [Cecilia]

"He might say, 'Wow,' followed by comments that are blunt and insensitive." [Youki]

He'd probably say something about how the image resembled Mikana, yet it didn't seem like Mikana. I don't think Yuuga is capable of softening his words.

"In the first place, they won't have the chance to see this, so it should be fine." [Youki]

"That's true." [Cecilia]

I turned to a new page in the sketchbook. The last one would be Raven. I should change the style a bit, just like Mikana's.



"The last one is Raven-san, isn't it? Since he's the captain of the knights, will you be drawing a picture of him with that kind of aura?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia came up with an opinion, probably because she was interested in my drawing. Seeing that it was a great request, I decided to go for it.

"Alright. I've decided." [Youki]

I freed my mind of all obstructive thoughts and instead focused on the theme of the drawing. I started my art. In the end, I completed the painting, spending the most time on it out of all the ones I had done today.

"I'm, finally done..." [Youki]

I leaned back in my chair with exhaustion.

"Ah, you've finished it?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia closed the book she was reading. Since I had told her that it would take some time, she had brought a few books from her room to read.

"It might be my top favourite one today. Mwahaha." [Youki]

The chibi Cecilia was awesome, but this picture of Raven was 'amazing', too. I could hardly keep myself from laughing, even though I was the one who had made the drawing, and should not have been amused or surprised. I clasped my left hand over my mouth as I handed the sketchbook to her.

"Eh?!" [Cecilia]

Cecilia looked at it with her eyes wide opened. It seemed as if she was surprised by it instead.

"You can feel the aura coming from him, right?" [Youki]

"This is a different aura than the one I was thinking of..." [Cecilia]

The 'aura' Cecilia had in mind was probably something like the manner of a captain. However, the Raven I drew was out of her expectation.

It was a picture of Raven drawing his sword out while in his armour. With his back to us, he turned his face to glance over his shoulder. Anger of sorrow mingled in his expression. Dark clusters of thunderclouds dominated the sky above and his lone figure stood on the cracked earth. This image reminded me of a certain supreme ruler of the century's end.

"Don't you think it's extremely cool?" [Youki]

"I don't think this one looks like Raven-san." [Cecilia]

"It can't be?!" [Youki]

As I thought, I shouldn't have taken so much time on this. Nonetheless, it was something that I had come up with while I was on high spirits, so I wondered what was wrong with it.

"...I guess it is acceptable, if one were to see him as a warrior who had defeated the Demon Lord, here." [Cecilia]

"Alright, then it's good." [Youki]

Since Cecilia said it was acceptable, it should be fine.

"Ojou-sama, it's time for dinner." [Sophia]

"Ah, I'm sorry to have troubled you to do this Sophia-san. I'm coming now."  
[Cecilia]

"Eh! It's that late already?!" [Youki]

The sky had turned crimson even though it was still blue a while ago. I might have not realized it if Sophia-san had not approached us to inform Cecilia.

"Could it be that you didn't realize it?" [Cecilia]

"It's scary when one loses themselves in something. Sorry." [Youki]

I cleaned everything up in a hurry. I supposed it was impolite of me to have stayed at someone's place until dinner time.

"Would you like to join us for dinner?" [Cecilia]

"Eh, really?! Is it alright?" [Youki]

"Yes. Sophia-san, it's fine, isn't it?" [Cecilia]

"...Yes. I will prepare it at once." [Sophia]

After saying so, Sophia-san disappeared into the mansion. She could prepare another person's share that easily?

"Then let us go, too." [Cecilia]

"Eh, Sophia-san just went back inside the mansion, though." [Youki]

"It'll be fine. If we don't hurry, the dishes will get cold. Besides, since Sophia-san had gone through the trouble to come inform us, it would be rude to make her wait any longer." [Cecilia]

"Ah, okay. I got it. The art supplies..." [Youki]

"It'll be fine if you leave them here. Let's go." [Cecilia]

Cecilia reached for my hand and pulled me inside the mansion. I had not expected to be able to have dinner with her at her house. Not only could I have delicious food, I could eat them with Cecilia, too... it was a heaven. Actually, the place where I would have dinner at that moment would be a heaven.

Thus, the three of us, Celia-san, Cecilia, and I, had dinner together. It made me nervous to eat while being watched by the servants, but thanks to Celia-san's teasing, my tension was eased, though I still felt bewildered. Upon noticing that I wasn't anxious anymore, she then targeted Cecilia. The sight of Cecilia looking embarrassed as she was being teased by Celia-san was truly a feast for the eyes.

"Let's eat~" [Sheik]

"You're happy-go-lucky as usual." [Youki]

While the three of us were in the middle of our meal, Sheik finally came in. It rendered me speechless though, when I saw Sheik eating in a marvelously well-mannered manner.

"Sheik-kun has been given a proper dining etiquette lesson before. I was actually surprised that he was able to remember it." [Celia]

I had not expected Celia-san to be giving Sheik a lesson on table manners. I wondered if he had said something like "I don't wanna!" or "I'm tired!". As his former captain, I was concerned about it.

"By the way, Cecilia. Will you be busy during the festival?" [Youki]

"Yes. I'll have to greet the delegates from different countries. Then I was thinking of dropping by the nursing home, temple and orphanage, too." [Cecilia]

"T-That must be tough..." [Youki]

I wished to be able to enjoy the festival with her, but that didn't appear to be possible. Well, it couldn't be helped since the leading characters of the festival were of the hero's party. It seemed that there would be a lot of events, too. Better yet, they should just leave everything to Yuuga.

"True. It is likely that I'll be busy for about a week from that day forward."  
[Cecilia]

"That must be really tough..." [Youki]

Should I bring some kind of refreshments to her?

"Does Youki-kun have any plans on the festival night?" [Celia]

"No plans on the festival night." [Youki]

It was because I had no plans that I tried to invite Cecilia out. I would probably look for Clayman, who would be working alone in the guild that day.

"Actually, I thought of hosting a little party in the mansion." [Celia]

"Party?" [Youki]

"Yes. Although, it will be just a small scale one for family and friends. Why don't you join us?" [Celia]

"Will that be alright?" [Youki]

I had a feeling that I would feel out of place going to a high-end party held by nobility. I didn't have any suitable clothes that I could wear either.

"It's only among family and friends, so it's fine. The servants from the mansion will also be joining us, too." [Celia]

I glanced around. With exception of Sophia-san, I noticed that all the servants appeared unsettled, so I guessed not all of them would be joining us. No, I didn't hear that from Celia-san herself. It was just how it looked like.

"Mother. It was my first time hearing that, though." [Cecilia]

"Is that so?" [Celia]

Celia-san seemed to be feigning ignorance, but I could tell from her eyes that she was serious. This person was seriously planning to throw a party.

"Madame, everyone is feeling unsettled now. Please tread lightly with your humour, for our sakes..." [Sophia]

"Ara, but I was serious about it..." [Celia]

"I understand. I will assemble the maids later for the planning of the party." [Sophia]

"Please do." [Celia]

"You just decided that there and then, didn't you?" [Youki]

At this point, no one could stop her anymore. The servants' expression had reverted to normal. They were already in 'working mode'. It amazed me that they could switch back that fast. Were they used to this already?

"Youki-san, will you be attending the party?" [Cecilia]

"Ah, yeah. I will." [Youki]

"Then we will await your arrival on that day." [Cecilia]

Even Cecilia and I seemed to have adapted to the situation quickly. I would really end troubling them if I were to remain here any longer, so I decided to return to the inn after finishing my meal.

"Thank you very much for the splendid meal." [Youki]

When I lowered my head at the servants, they were all startled. Was it because they were all under Sophia-san's direct tutelage? That might be the reason why they were unanimous in their expressions.

"Captain~ You forgot something~" [Sheik]

"Ah, sorry for the trouble." [Youki]

I had forgotten about the art supplies I had left in the garden. He didn't have to go through the trouble of bringing them to me.

"Good boy. Onii-san will give you some pocket money." [Youki]

"Youki-san, the way you say it sounds dodgy." [Cecilia]

I gave Sheik some money so he could use it during the festival, enough for him to buy about 20 kushiyaki.

"Wai~ Captain, thank you~" [Sheik]

Sheik clutched the money in his hand and disappeared into the mansion.

"Well then, Youki-san, let's meet on the festival night." [Cecilia]

"Ah, okay. Well, see you then." [Youki]

I bade Cecilia farewell and went back to the inn.

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The following days after that, I spent my time completing guild requests, and preparing my clothing for the party. Before I knew it, the day of the festival finally arrived.

"It's flamboyant." [Youki]

When I strolled around Minerva by myself, I noticed that the surroundings looked different than usual.

"There're a lot of people. There shouldn't be any crimes... I mean, it should be safe, right?" [Youki]

Knights could be seen everywhere. They had probably strengthened the patrol force today, due to the festival.

"There are several shops that have tightened the security in their own way, too." [Youki]

A few adventures that seemed to be hired through the guild could be seen standing guard inside those shops.

"There are quite a number of visitors from other countries." [Youki]



I had passed by peculiarly dressed people numerous times.

"Oniisan, oniisan." [???

"Hmm?" [Youki]

While I was observing the people and stalls around, someone called out to me. Judging from his appearance, he should be one of the merchants from the stalls.

"Actually, there's a bargain there. Come take a look." [Merchant]

"I'm interested in unusual items." [Youki]

Especially if they are items that would stimulate my chuuni's heart.

"This way, please. The stall's right there." [Merchant]

It seemed to be a transportable type of stall using a rear car. It certainly did give one the feeling that he was selling unusual items.

"So, what do you recommend?" [Youki]

"Yes. Here they are." [Merchant]

The item that the merchant took out was tea leaves. Was this what the merchant considered interesting?

"Do I look like the kind of human who would drink tea?" [Youki]

'You do drink tea, but you're not really a human.' It almost made me laugh when I retorted my own statement in my mind.

"No. Oniisan certainly doesn't look like someone who usually drinks tea. Oniisan, you're an adventurer, right?" [Merchant]

"Well, something like that." [Youki]

Since I was dressed like one, it was blatantly obvious.

"These are from the purveyor who supplies tea leaves to Cecilia Aquarain, one of the members from the hero's party." [Merchant]

"Hah?!" [Youki]

What he said sounded suspicious to me.

"I certainly understand your doubts. But I was able to obtain the information through my network that these are the tea leaves that Cecilia-sama likes. Please give them a try. It's different than the tea leaves from anywhere else." [Merchant]

"...Hmm." [Youki]

'Did he prepare it in the rear car?' I thought as he served me the tea. There shouldn't be any poison inside, right?

"It's fine. Here, look." [Merchant]

The merchant took out a pot and cup from the rear car, poured the tea and drank it.

"I see. I'm sorry, but I'll drink it from the pot, just in case." [Youki]

"Oniisan, you're being too wary." [Merchant]

I poured the tea from the pot directly into my mouth.  
The taste was indeed unusual.

"But this is different." [Youki]

I could tell even though I wasn't a tea connoisseur. Cecilia never had this kind of tea before. Though, it seems that the taste of a tea depends on the skill of the person who brews it as well.

"Oniisan, hold on a second. Could you not find fault with me please?"  
[Merchant]

"No, it's definitely not the same." [Youki]

"Then do you even have proof that it's different?" [Merchant]

The merchant's attitude underwent a change. This might be a fraud.

"You don't have proof that this is the same kind of tea that Cecilia's drinking either." [Youki]

"...That's right. Sorry about that. Sales trust is important when we're selling such things, so I don't have the opportunity to sell anything to you this time."  
[Merchant]

The merchant cleared everything up in a hurry, preparing to move to another location.

"Wait a minute. You're changing location that soon?" [Youki]

"Yeah. I'll have to constantly find a place where lots of people pass by. That's why I made this into a rear car." [Merchant]

This guy... He was trying to run away from me, wasn't he? However, since I didn't have proof, I couldn't detain him. If I were to kick up a ruckus here, I would instantly draw the attention of the knights.

"This is not the tea leaves that Ojousama is using." [??]

"Hah?"

"Heh?"

While I was having the conversation with the merchant, someone else interjected. When I turned around to see who interrupted, I noticed Sophia-san standing there. I didn't know when she made her appearance. The pot of tea that was supposed to be in the rear car had somehow made it into her hands, although I didn't know how.

"I can tell by the smell even without drinking it. These tea leaves are from the northern side, right? They might be rare here, but since they're popular in the northern side, they can be cheaply acquired there." [Sophia]

"Sophia-san, that is amazing." [Youki]

She could understand that much about that tea just by its smell?

"It's easy to tell due to its unique fragrance. Ojousama's tea leaves are supplied by a tea shop in the imperial capital. The owner is a trustworthy one, so there's no way there'll be any leakage of information." [Sophia]

She asserted it, clearly.

"W-Who the heck are you? Why did you butt in all of a sudden? Please don't interfere with someone's business!" [Merchant]

"Apologies. That was rude of me. I'm Sophia. I'm currently serving Aquarain's family as the head maid." [Sophia]

She displayed a beautiful bow, as always. The merchant's face became pale.

"Damn it!" [Merchant]

"Ah, hold it!" [Youki]

Probably because the merchant realized that he was in an unfavourable situation, he ran away. It was unforgivable that he had tried to make use of Cecilia's name to swindle someone. I was initially planning to chase after the merchant by activating 《Lightning Flash》, but after seeing that he was heading in the direction of the knights, I stopped.

"All right, all right. I'm stopping you here." [Familiar-looking knight 1]

"Wha-! Goddamnit!" [Merchant]

"P-Please stop resisting!" [Familiar-looking knight 2]

Both knights, with whom I am well acquainted, restrained and incapacitated the merchant in a short time.

"Yo, thanks for your hard work." [Youki]

"You're acting quite high and mighty, ain't ya? Well, whatever." [Duke]

"Ah, g-g-good afternoon." [Irene]

"Ah, Irene-san. Thanks for your hard work, too." [Youki]

She got flustered as usual.

"Well, at any rate, you guys came at the right time." [Youki]

"The maid-san over there alerted us." [Duke]

"You serious?" [Youki]

Did Sophia-san notify them in advance?

"I will not forgive anyone who exploits Ojousama's name before me." [Sophia]

"O-Oh, she's somehow cool, isn't she?" [Duke]

"Y-Yes. Very much so. She's somehow, cool." [Irene]

I understood what Irene-san wanted to say, but she didn't have to repeat the last part.

"By the way, Sophia-san. What about the mansion?" [Youki]

"Since today's the long-awaited festival, I've assigned more servants to watch over the place. We'll be working in shifts, so everyone will have the opportunity to enjoy the festival." [Sophia]

"I see. Then, is it Sophia-san's break time now?" [Youki]

"Yes... Well then, please excuse me." [Sophia]

After giving me a beautiful bow, Sophia-san left.

"Eh? There're not many stalls on that side, though. Isn't she here to enjoy the festival?" [Duke]

"T-That's true." [Irene]

The two of them tilted their heads. Certainly, it might seem strange to them, but I knew the real reason.

"The guild's on that side." [Youki]

"Guild?... Don't tell me, she's going there for a guild mission?" [Duke]

"There's no way that's possible! Sophia-san's husband's working in the guild, so she must be going there to take a look." [Youki]

Clayman was probably watching over the guild by himself. Since it was noon at the moment, it was possible that she had bought something for him, so they could have lunch together.

"So, the Head Maid-san is already married. W-Was her husband very proud to have married such a beautiful wife like her?" [Irene]

Her unexpected question amazed me. As a girl, she might find this topic interesting, but there should be another way for her to ask something like this.

"Irene, don't ask Head Maid-san and her husband such a question." [Duke]

"W-Why is that?" [Irene]

"Just don't ask it." [Duke]

I guess Irene-san is not just someone who's easily flustered. She's dense as well. Duke must have a hard time, too.

"By the way, the answer to your question..." [Youki]

"You're answering her?!" [Duke]

"I'm just kidding." [Youki]

She should ask the person himself about such things. However, considering Clayman's lackadaisical personality and Irene-san's panicky behaviour, their conversation would just lead to a downward spiral.

"So, you were kidding. Then we'll take this swindler back to the headquarter. Irene, I'll leave this merchant to you." [Duke]

"Eh? D-Duke-san?" [Irene]

"...I'll be pulling this rear car. We have to seize these goods as evidence. Or, would you like to be the one to pull this?" [Duke]

"I-I'll handle the merchec-." [Irene]

"...You bit your tongue?" [Youki]

"Uuu..." [Irene]

"Alright, alright. Let's go. See you then, Captain." [Duke]

Irene-san, whose eyes were watery, hauled the swindler away, and Duke followed after her.... while pulling the rear car.

"I guess I'll stroll around." [Youki]

The festival was held throughout the kingdom. I had still not seen quite a number of the stalls that were set up by the merchants from other countries, and there might be interesting events going on, too. While I was contemplating where to begin exploring the festival, I heard a loud voice.



Was he hosting an event or something?

I followed the sound of the voice to the source and found myself in the plaza.

"Come on, everyone. Let's have fun together! I'm Kihiro, your host for today!"  
[Kihiro]

It seemed to be quite a high-spirited host. Surrounding the host were cloth-covered objects which resembled boxes. Looking at them made me wonder what kind of event it could be. I tried asking the uncle who was among the spectators.

"Umm, excuse me. Is this some kind of event?" [Youki]

"Nn? Ah, kid. Are you here because of the commotion? This is an art competition." [Uncle]

"Competition?" [Youki]

"Ou. You had probably applied for the 'Hero's Party' theme, right?" [Uncle]

"Ah, come to think of it..." [Youki]

I think I had seen a poster about it in the guild. The words, "Assemble, Star of the Next Generation!" and some information I couldn't really comprehend were written on it. Judging from the art supplies shop owner's reaction previously, he might have mistaken me for the participant of the contest.

"I think the result of the competition will be announced now." [Uncle]

"Heh, is that so?" [Youki]

"I have heard that if the artist's work is highly evaluated by the judges, he would receive words of gratitude directly from the hero's party." [Uncle]

"Seriously?" [Youki]

Cecilia had not mentioned anything about that, though.

"Well, it was just a rumour. Ah, they seem to be revealing it now." [Uncle]

"So it was just a rumour." [Youki]

I wondered where that rumour came from. Well, since I didn't have anything to do, this event would be perfect to help me kill some time.

At the signal of that high-spirited host, they removed the cloth, unveiling the "box" beneath. It surprised me, though, as what I had thought to be a box was unexpectedly a painting.

"Erm, the artist of this artwork is Mireta-san who works at the florist. It seems that she has painted the image of Hero-sama proudly departing from the capital." [Kihiro]

"It doesn't interest me." [Youki]

It must be one of Yuuga's fans anyways.

"Rather, since the theme's the 'Hero's party', will they be unveiling the artwork of each member one by one?" [Youki]

"Looks like it. I wonder how many applicants are there." [Uncle]

"They must have been flooded with them." [Youki]

"I know, right?" [Uncle]

The uncle and I then laughed. He was quite a friendly old man.

"Then, the next is the painting of Mikana-sama." [Kihiro]

They removed the cloth and unveil the painting like before.

"The artist of this, is the second son of Listerfur family. It's the artwork of Wynn Listerfur." [Kihiro]

Judging from the name, he should be a member of the nobility. Looking at his painting, he probably wouldn't have needed to bribe the judges to make it as the finalist.

"It seems that Wynn-sama was saved by Mikana-sama before, so he had re-captured the scene, at that time, into this painting. It's hot, Mikana-sama!" [Kihiro]

It was a painting of Mikana, casting fire magic with the staff in her hand. It really does seem to resemble Mikana.

"I love that painting! It really captures the look of Mikana-sama!" [Uncle]

"Ossan, you're getting too excited." [Youki]

Probably because of the host, the spectators were enlivened each time the painting was unveiled, causing the tension in the plaza to be increased.

"Alright. Everyone is getting excited, right? The next is Cecilia-sama's painting!" [Kihiro]

"I'm very interested in that!" [Youki]

Who was the artist and what kind of painting was it?

The host started explaining after removing the cloth.

"The artist of this painting is Furoa-san, who works at the bar. He was raised in an orphanage, so it seems in painting this, he wanted to convey his gratitude to Cecilia-sama, who often helps out in that orphanage. Let's give a round of applause to Furoa-san and Cecilia-sama!" [Kihiro]

*\*clap clap\**

Swayed by the mood, the spectators broke into applause. I, too, was caught up in the enthusiasm.

"Umm, the painting of Cecilia-sama playing with the children looks amazing. The painting almost glowed with her kindheartedness." [Uncle]

"Yeah." [Youki]

When Cecilia sees that heart-warming painting, she should not have any doubts about his appreciation of her.

"Alright, now that I've brought everyone's heart together, I shall present you the last piece of work... one of Raven-sama!" [Kihiro]

He removed the cloth and revealed the painting.

"Hah?!" [Youki]

The painting that was unveiled was the one I did of Raven; The supreme ruler of the century's end.

While I was still stupefied by the sudden turn of events, the host proceeded to introduce the work, without any concern.

"The artist of this painting is Youki, who belongs to the guild in Minerva. A little boy representative entrusted this painting, along with a comment from Youki to me. Oh?... It seems that he had come up with this painting after visualizing Raven-sama's image. It's extremely cool!" [Kihiro]

Oi, I don't know anything about that comment. Rather, a little boy representative? That's right, Sheik was the one who handed me my art supplies that day...

"He's the oneeeeeeeeeee?!!!" [Youki]

I did not check my sketchbook when I returned.

Is he an idiot?! Why did he submit my painting to the contest without letting me know?!

"Kid, what's wrong? What caused this outburst?" [Uncle]

"Ah, sorry. It's nothing." [Youki]

I had worried the uncle. I guess that's a given, if someone suddenly starts yelling like that.

"We're done with the unveiling of the paintings. I, Kihiro, am your host until the end. The finalists of this art competition will, at a later date, receive the comments from the respective members of the hero's party that they drew. That's great, isn't it?" [Kihiro]

That's not great at all! How could I let Raven see a painting that portrayed him in such a light! After bidding farewell to the uncle, I left the square so I could escape.

"That's definitely bad, isn't it?" [Youki]

Based on what the host said, Raven would see that painting of mine as well. If that were to be the case, I had a feeling that Raven might really appear before me, like the image depicted in my painting. Since Cecilia said she would be busy for a week, maybe I should disappear from Minerva for about 10 days, too.

"Captain~"

The culprit, who had caused all this trouble, ran towards me at that moment.

"Sheik!!! Don't submit someone's painting to the contest without permission!!!" [Youki]

"Captain got angry~" [Sheik]

As I ran towards Sheik, he turned on his heel and began to flee from me instead.

Unforgivable. I will definitely catch you.

I gradually narrowed our distance, and when Sheik entered an alley, I went in after him. However, as I turned the corner, I ended up face-to-face with the last person I wanted to see.

"Y-Yo, Raven." [Youki]

"...Let's go." [Raven]

Raven began to drag me behind him.

*Cecilia, I might not be able to attend the party tonight. Will I get out of this alive? Will I see Cecilia again?*

Raven brought me deeper into the alley. It seemed to be an inconspicuous area with few passersby.

"...I went to the square." [Raven]

That means you've seen the painting. He had probably wanted me for something else. That was what I had fervently hoped for, but my last grain of hope was dashed.

"I-Is that so?" [Youki]

"...Is that, me?" [Raven]

There was a note attached, under the painting I did with the following words: '*An Excellent Painting of Raven-sama.*' He must have doubted his own eyes when he saw that.

"W-Who knows." [Youki]

"...The name of the artist written there is Youki." [Raven]

"..." [Youki]

I was at a loss for words, not knowing what to do in a situation like this.

*Duke, please help me.*

I silently prayed for the capable former subordinate of mine to come to my rescue.

At that moment, as if my prayer was answered, someone entered the alley. I looked at that person expectantly.

"...Oha."

The one who approached us was indeed my former subordinate, but it wasn't Duke. Seeing that she was dressed in maid clothing with several bags in her hands, it was possible that she was having a break. It seemed that she was thoroughly enjoying the festival by going on a shopping spree.

"O-Ou, Happiness. Are you enjoying the festival?" [Youki]

"...Not really." [Happiness]

Liar. Look at how many bags you have in your hands.

"You're alone?" [Youki]

"...Sheik." [Happiness]

"Ah, are you in charge of looking after him?" [Youki]

It must be hard, looking after a boisterous child like him.

"... Something happened?" [Happiness]

How should I go about explaining this? Raven had become silent the moment Happiness approached us earlier.

"Happiness, let's go to the square." [Youki]

"Oi!!" [Raven]

Raven raised his voice in a fluster.

"Happiness likes interesting things, right?" [Youki]



"...Why now?" [Happiness]

Why are you asking me that at a time like this, you mean? Alright, I've decided.

"Let's go, Happiness." [Youki]

"...Got it." [Happiness]

"...W-Wait!" [Raven]

I ran off with Happiness, disregarding Raven.

Happiness dashed through the crowds easily despite that she was dressed in maid clothing. Raven, on the other hand, could not go after us at full speed as he didn't want to draw too much attention to himself due to his suit of armour. Moreover, it seemed that he had purposely taken the routes with less people.

"Alright. We got to the square before Raven. Happiness, what do you think of that painting?" [Youki]

After reaching the square, I pointed at the picture of Raven.

"...Captain, drew that?" [Happiness]

"Yeah. I'm the one who drew that. I never have the intention to enter the competition, but Sheik submitted the painting without letting me know." [Youki]

"...Not bad." [Happiness]

"Isn't it?" [Youki]

Happiness seemed to have given it a high evaluation. If that were the case, then there might be a way out of this.

"I caught up... am I too late?" [Raven]

Raven finally got here after quite some time, but he looked sad when he realized that he was too late. Seeing him in such a state, Happiness began tugging at his sheath, as one might tug at someone's sleeve. She usually does that when she wants that person to explain something to her.

"...It is good." [Happiness]

"Do you mean that painting? Do I look like that? From Happiness's point of view?" [Raven]

"...I think, it looks cool, you know." [Happiness]

*\*twang, swish, woosh\**

It was like I could hear the sound of an arrow being shot right through Raven's heart. Raven seemed stunned by Happiness's words, as he stood there motionless. Happiness waved her hand in front of Raven's face, checking if he was still present.

I left the two of them alone to try to enjoy the festival myself. However, regardless of where I went, all the stall items began to look the same, and I lost interest quickly.

"I suppose this is how it is when one walks around the festival alone." [Youki]

I always find it more enjoyable to walk around a festival in a group. Having no one else to browse the stalls with, try out new food together, and share thoughts with, was a little...

"Taking a slow stroll around has helped me kill some time, I guess." [Youki]

I returned to the inn to change into the clothing that I bought in a hurry yesterday. I had purchased a clothing that resembled a purple suit, but I had no idea if it was the right kind of attire, so I wore a basic white shirt inside, just in case.

The merry-making at the festival was still going strong while I was on my way to the mansion. I supposed it wasn't strange at all, since the citizens could freely make a racket, using the festival as a pretext.

Normally, wearing an outfit like this in public would make me feel awkward. However, I was so excited at the moment that I decided I didn't care what others think of me. I reached the mansion without noticing any strange gazes on me.

"Youki-san, good evening." [Cecilia]

"O-Ou. Good evening, Cecilia. Great job today." [Youki]

When I arrived at the mansion, Cecilia was surprisingly there to welcome me. She was clad in a white dress and adorned with the necklace that I gave her. Looking at it made me feel happy since she had worn my gift to her. It matches her dress perfectly, too. Just this alone was well worth it. I was glad to have come to this party.

"Thank you very much. Then let's go inside. Everything is prepared." [Cecilia]

"Got it." [Youki]

Cecilia then led me inside the mansion. It seemed that I was the first to arrive as I didn't see anyone else in the hall.

"They have just finished with the preparations, so all the servants went to change their clothes." [Cecilia]

"Where is Celia-san?" [Youki]

"I think mother will be here soon since she has told me that she was done changing." [Cecilia]

"I see." [Youki]

Somehow, it made me feel awkward to be alone with her in such a huge hall. I wondered what to do at a time like this.

"Youki-san, can you dance?" [Cecilia]

"Eh? Me? Not at all." [Youki]

It was unfortunate, but I did not possess such a skill. I didn't think I was capable of dancing at all.

"If you don't mind, I can teach you. No one else is here yet." [Cecilia]

"Yes, please!" [Youki]

I made a deep bow. We were both wearing the appropriate clothing and the ambience seemed right, too, so I seized the opportunity while I could.

As I took Cecilia's dance lesson, I reminded myself to not to step on her foot. She pointed out in detail the posture that I should take, my line of sight, the placement of my hands, and the steps.

When I started showing improvement, the other guests entered the hall.

"Cecilia, it finally ended so I'm here!" [Yuuga]

"Sigh, I can finally relax. It was hard having to greet people here and there..."  
[Mikana]

Even though Mikana looked worn out, Yuuga seemed totally fine. Didn't he go through the same thing as her? Most importantly, I guessed these two people were the party guests, too. Mikana was clad in a red dress that has quite a revealing chest area while Yuuga was wearing a blue-coloured suit. Judging from his attire, he must be quite accustomed to parties like this.

"Good evening. Great job today, Hero-sama, Mikana." [Cecilia]

"Um... Eh, Youki-kun is here, too?" [Yuuga]

"Well, yeah." [Youki]

"Can you dance well?" [Yuuga]

The question sounded like he was making fun of me at the same time. Didn't he know that I had been personally taught by Cecilia? Couldn't he tell after looking at the situation before his eyes?

"I will not step on someone's foot." [Youki]

"That is natural." [Yuuga]

While I was exchanging retorts with him, someone tapped me on my shoulder.

"Ah. Raven, you're here too?" [Youki]

Raven seemed accustomed to parties like this as well. He wasn't wearing his knight armour anymore, but a proper navy-blue suit.

"Isn't it for relatives and close friends? All the members of the hero's party are present now." [Youki]

Would it be alright for me to be here? I hoped someone else would come, quick. As though my wish was fulfilled, the servants who had finished changing started entering the hall, one by one. When Celia-san finally joined in as well, the party had already started.

I moved away from Cecilia temporarily and helped myself with the food and drinks. I was slightly weary after the dance lesson, so I took a short break.

"The servants can dance as well..." [Youki]

"...Feeling incompetent?"

"Wah!? So it's you, Happiness." [Youki]

Didn't I tell her not to approach me from behind without warning already? Happiness was clad in a light blue dress while holding a plate in hand. She was probably getting something to eat since it was a buffet party.

"I was given a short lesson a while ago... Care to dance with me?" [Youki]

"...You kid?" [Happiness]

"Don't laugh through your nose! Then why don't you go dance with someone! Like that knight-captain who looks pretty much available there." [Youki]

There was only one person in this party who fits my description.

"...Un." [Happiness]

Happiness headed towards Raven. Escort her if you're a man, Raven!

When I was dawdling around while keeping an eye on the two persons' development, I stumbled across the one person I least expected.

"Ou. As I thought, you came." [Clayman]

"Clayman, what about the guild?" [Youki]

"No, well. Since I was also watching over the guild by myself at night during the parade the last time, I was told to take it easy this time. So I left it to them."  
[Clayman]

"Heh. So, Sophia-san brought you here?" [Youki]

"Yeah." [Clayman]

He didn't seem languid like usual. Could it be that he was looking forward to the party? Or was there another reason?

"Then I'll go dance with Sophia. I won't be able to dance with her if not for an opportunity like this." [Clayman]

"O-Ou. See ya." [Youki]

Clayman headed in the direction of Sophia-san. It was suspicious not seeing his usual listless manner. Was it because he could dance with Sophia-san? Or was it so he would not be an embarrassment? In any case, it was definitely related to Sophia-san.

While I was wandering around, I heard a racket coming from Mikana and Yuuga. I didn't know what happened, but I wished they could keep their voices down.

"M-Mikana. When I went outside to the garden just now to enjoy the night breeze, I saw a girl. She was standing at the corner for a long time. But, when I asked her if there's anything wrong, she got into a very bad mood. I wonder what happened." [Yuuga]

"No idea. If it's a girl, then it might be one of the servants. She is probably troubled by something, so she wants to be left alone." [Mikana]

"I see. She is in bad mood because she is having some problems. I'll go see if I can help her then." [Yuuga]

"Yuuga... didn't you hear what I said just now?" [Mikana]

I gulped down the drink in my hand, put the glass on the table. and went out to the garden.

"Tiel-chan, it'll be suspicious if anyone comes, so please don't move around by yourself." [Youki]

"Isn't it Youki-san? I was just releasing negative aura at the person who was disturbing my precious time alone with Guardian Deity-sama." [Tiel]

I was at my wits end when I looked at Tiel-chan, who has nothing but Gai in her mind.

"Sorry, brat. I couldn't do anything." [Gai]

"Ah, it will be even more troublesome if Gai were to do so, so please don't do anything." [Youki]

I gave a warning to Gai, who was buried in soil.



Why was Gai here in the first place? I started to remember the time when Tiel-chan came by the inn. Since all the servants were allowed to participate in this party, she begged me to bring Gai to the mansion. Gai and I had told her that it was impossible, but she refused to back down. In the end, I had no choice but to give in to her. After I had brainstormed an amazing idea, I intruded upon the mansion and successfully sneaked Gai inside the garden... although it wasn't really "intruding" since I had received Cecilia's permission to do so. Using my earth magic, I buried Gai in the garden from the neck down and moulded him into the shape of a curb. The most exhilarating moment occurred after I had sneaked in during the middle of night. It was when I had made myself invisible as I dug a hole in the ground.

"Don't do anything that stands out. Also, someone might come here later, so be careful." [Youki]

"...I understand." [Tiel]

"Um." [Gai]

"Then, I'll go back inside the mansion." [Youki]

After parting from them, I pretended to go inside the mansion. I hid in a corner to observe them.

"Guardian Deity-sama, is it not cramped for you?" [Tiel]

"No, it's fine." [Gai]

"Really? I'm so sorry. You're forced to accompany me because of my own selfishness." [Tiel]

"D-Don't mind it. I wanted to leave the room, too, occasionally." [Gai]

"Is it true? Thank you very much. I'm really happy to be able to have lots of conversation with Guardian Deity-sama outside, too..." [Tiel]

"I-Is that so?" [Gai]

Listening to their exchange made me deeply regret eavesdropping them. I went back to the hall for real while wishing in my mind that Gai would explode.

"Ah, Youki-san."

I stumbled upon Cecilia on my way back.

"Did something happen?" [Youki]

"No, that's not it. Can we talk a little bit?" [Cecilia]

"Sure. Rather, I would like it." [Youki]

There was no way I would refuse Cecilia's invitation. After she led me to another place, I leaned my back against the wall.

"Come to think of it, how did it go with the modelling?" [Youki]

"It ended quickly without any trouble. I wonder if it's the result of the practice." [Cecilia]

She chuckled, probably because she had suddenly recalled the paintings I did.

"Sheik submitted the painting I did that day without my permission..." [Youki]

"When I went to the square, I was surprised to see the painting of Raven-san. It was the doings of Sheik-kun, wasn't it?" [Cecilia]

Cecilia smiled wryly. That picture of Raven had a strong impact, so she must be surprised to find it displayed in such a conspicuous place in the square.

"Seriously... Well, I'm glad the modelling for the painting ended smoothly. It must have been an amazing painting." [Youki]

"True. I was startled when I saw the completed painting." [Cecilia]

"I see." [Youki]

She must have been more impressed by it compared to the one I did. I knew I shouldn't have felt that way, but it still made me feel disappointed. Though, I supposed it was strange to compare myself with a professional.

"I like the one Youki-san did, too. I've kept it inside my room." [Cecilia]

"Eh?" [Youki]

"Please wait a moment." [Cecilia]

Cecilia trotted off somewhere. I was supposed to have brought all the pictures in the sketchbook back with me, though.

"Captain, hey there."

"So it's Duke... your whole body's in armour." [Youki]

Duke was dressed like he usually does. It might be unavoidable considering his circumstances, but he stuck out like a sore thumb.

'Yeah. When I first came here, all of them screamed.'" [Duke]

"Couldn't you hide your neck portion with a necktie or something?" [Youki]

It wouldn't look unnatural even if he were to wear a scarf, or bow tie in a party like this.

"Ah, I never thought of that. As expected of Captain. A master of disguise."  
[Duke]

"That's not a big deal. Did you come as Raven's escort?" [Youki]

"Yup. Irene was dragged away, though..." [Duke]

I didn't see Irene-san, who was usually seen tagging along with Duke.

"What's happened?" [Youki]

"She came along with me in armour as well. Though when the servants saw her, they took her away." [Duke]

"Ah, the ladies are probably..." [Youki]

I could just imagine the scene of Irene looking at Duke pleadingly while being taken away by the servants. That was probable considering Irene-san's personality.

"How about if you go change into something else, too?" [Youki]

"I'll pass. I prefer to watch than to dance." [Duke]

Duke replied as he pointed at somewhere. In the direction of where Duke pointed, I could see Raven and Happiness dancing there, rigidly. Happiness was supposed to be a beginner, so it would be bad if Raven did not escort her. He was probably feeling tense as well, considering his awkward movements. Both of their faces were tinted red, giving them really innocent looks.

"Certainly it might be fun to watch that. It's a heart-warming sight, too."  
[Youki]

"Isn't it?" [Duke]

While we were conversing among ourselves as we laughed, Irene-san, who had finished changing, ran towards us. It was probably because she wasn't used to wearing a dress, seeing as she almost tripped several times as she ran over.

"Duke-san, I'm done changing, hiyaa-!?" [Irene]

"Alright, I got you." [Duke]

"Duke, nice catch!" [Youki]

Duke managed to catch Irene-san, who almost tripped over herself. As expected of an expert in support.

"Then see ya, Captain. I'm going to help Irene practice until she can walk properly." [Duke]

"Ou, I got it." [Youki]

"I'm being treated like I'm a baby..." [Irene]

Duke held Irene-san's hands so as to support her in case she fell, and left the place with her. It would be scary, since Irene-san seemed to be a klutz. I didn't want to hear something like glasses breaking or anything, though, it should be alright seeing as Duke was with her.

"Youki-san, sorry to keep you waiting." [Cecilia]

"Welcome back. Eh, that..." [Youki]

What Cecilia was holding with both her hands was the painting that I drew.

"Sheik-kun retrieved the paintings that were submitted to the contest."  
[Cecilia]

"That guy, he submitted all my drawings to the contest?!" [Youki]

Even if he did it as a joke, he should've send in just one painting, not every single one of them. There should have been a limit to his prank. The culprit himself didn't seem to feel that he had done anything wrong. At the moment, Celia-san was wiping his mouth with a handkerchief.

"May I keep this?" [Cecilia]

"Please feel free to. I'm glad you like it." [Youki]

"Thank you very much." [Cecilia]

Cecilia took the painting to a cabinet nearby and kept it inside carefully, as if she were handling a treasure. Would it be fine to keep it in there? Wasn't it in her room? Well, I suppose she could retrieve it later.

"Erm, would you care to dance with me?" [Youki]

As a guy, I should be the one to initiate the first step. It would be too late if Yuuga were to invite her before me.

"Certainly." [Cecilia]

"Don't step on the foot. Don't step on the foot." [Youki]

As I started dancing, I murmured those words under my breath, as if I were chanting a spell.

"Youki-san, please don't mind the gazes of the surrounding people and let's just enjoy this." [Cecilia]

"I-I got it." [Youki]

I was guided by Cecilia. I supposed there was no need to get agitated since it was only a dance. When I looked around, I noticed that the pair that was dancing most elegantly was Sophia-san and Clayman. It was strange, but Clayman gave the impression of a stud at that moment.

"Cecilia looks calm, somehow." [Youki]

"That's because I was given dance lessons by Sophia-san. It was a strict guidance, you know?" [Cecilia]

I see. So it was due to Sophia-san's lesson.

"It's fun today." [Youki]

"Yes, it is. I've been really busy, but it is a fulfilling and great day." [Cecilia]

"I also, enjoyed it... I have forgotten to tell you this. Your dress... You look great in that dress." [Youki]

I thought she looked good when I first got here, but couldn't say it out loud then. It wasn't something that I would usually say, and it was hard to say it in this moment too. My face was probably beet red.

"T-Thank you very much..." [Cecilia]

Cecilia seemed embarrassed as well.





I use the word 'seemed' because I wasn't really sure, but the compliment was a success.

After that, Yuuga came to ask Cecilia to a dance, but his attempt failed miserably. Even though Irene-san had almost tripped several times as expected due to her dress, Sophia-san and Duke managed to prevent a catastrophe from happening, so it was overall an enjoyable party. It will just be a little troublesome to bring Gai back with me later, though.

**-END OF VOLUME 2-**

## Afterword

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Whether we're old friends who've not met for a long time, or new friends meeting each other for the first time: Hi, I'm Suisei.

It's because of all the readers, fans, and other involved parties, that I was able to release this second volume of my work, "Yuusha Party no Kawaii Ko ga Ita no de, Kokuhaku Shite Mita". I really appreciate all of your efforts and assistance with this. Thank you very much.

However, as I wrote in the previous volume, I wasn't sure how I should go about writing this afterword. It would seem that I have not improved in this respect since the last time. I'm sorry. But since I've been given the opportunity to write my thoughts out here, I'll do my best.

So, let's start with an author's confession at the end of this volume. There was a rumour going around for a while, that the author dislikes women. Lol. I guess it could be that I appeared to be much closer to my male friends, or maybe that I did not have much contact with females. Nevertheless, I actually love romantic fantasy, so I'm not sure how that speculation came to be. I suppose you're not interested in hearing about something like that. I'm sorry. That's about all I've got for my personal story.

The summary about the second volume is going to be just a short one. Since I'm strictly prohibited from writing spoilers here, I'll just give a very basic synopsis:

It ended with Youki's struggle, Cecilia's waiting, Raven's unsettled feelings, Yuuga's growth, and Mikana's problem solved. Of course, Duke and the rest played an active role, too. And, just like in the previous volume, there's a full extra chapter of all new material. Was that summary too simple? *\*sweats\**

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the people who helped me out with this little work of mine:

First, my editor, to whom I caused inconvenience in various ways. I'm really sorry, and thank you very much for your help.

Next is the illustrator, La-na, who has drawn all the illustrations for both volumes. Thank you once again for such wonderful illustrations. Youki and the rest are also pleased with them. "Fuahahaha," he laughed loudly, as he cockily conveyed his gratitude to you. Lol.

I'd like to thank my family who always supported someone like me. And S and T, who helped me with various aspects like the ideas for the story; I'm really grateful for their suggestions since the ideas are usually hidden in everyday life.

Last, but far from least, to the readers who purchase my work. I would be so pleased if you have enjoyed reading my work.

...My apologies for the long-winded afterword in the previous volume. Also, if there is a chance for us to meet yet again another time, I'll make sure to write a well-thought-out afterword.

**Author: Suisei**

I live in Hokkaido. After being an avid reader for 5 years, I began writing a year ago. As a result of my love for fantasy and romance stories, I finally completed my first work. (April 2015)

**Illustrator: La-na**

I'm an illustrator from Gunma Prefecture who currently resides in Tokyo. (April 2015)

## CREDITS



**Author:**

Suisei

**Illustrator:**

La-na

**Publisher:**

Futabasha

**Translator:**

Rinkage

**Editors / Proofreaders:**

The Blacksmith

Ranock Pliskin (The potatic Draturtle)

**PDF compiled by:**

Rinkage

**Special thanks to:**

Matthew.S

James.L

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