



The
Forsaken
Hero

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The Forsaken Hero

– Suterareta Yuusha no Eiyuutan –

- Volume 1 -

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[Ziru's Musings]

- STORY -

Katsuragi Daichi, a youth that had suffered through gruesome bullying, suddenly teleported into another world together with his classmates.

Daichi did his best in trying to be a hero, but as he was useless even after reincarnating, he was abandoned in a Monster House to be a scapegoat.

Daichi should have died.

However, he rose, somehow unharmed.

The ability he gained was [Revenge of the Grudgebearer].
It was a unique ability, one that would revive him each and every time he died and bring him an extreme level of growth!

The strongest ability in his grasp, Daichi set out to take his revenge...



Akina
Leadred

Hamakaze
Shuri

Katsuragi
Daichi

Tamaki
Yuina

Hayase
Fuuko





“I’ll say
it as many
times as
it takes.
I...
want you.”

“Will you...
accept...
me?”

Prologue

I was the target of bullying in my class.

If I had to say why, there'd be too many to count. I don't know where I'd even start.

Reason: My face is gross. My body is fat.

How could I do anything about my face? What can I do about my body?

My objections were ignored.

Reason: Because I'm an nerd. Because I have a thing for romance games.

That's just a personal hobby. No one else has any right to say anything about it. Besides, I prefer beat-em-ups over romance games.

My objections were tossed aside.

Reason: Because I'm not up for studying or exercising, because I'm a gloomy bastard that can't make any friends.

It's all because of you guys that I can't make any friends. I try my best to study and exercise. What do you guys know?

My objections were stomped on.

My classmates and the rest of the students in my grade all looked down on me as though they were seeing a pile of trash, treating me like shit and abusing me.

I would be beaten like a sandbag and forced to clean the mess up with a worn out rag every day.

And now—now, I'm being used as demon bait.

“Ah—”

Pushing my body despite my attempts at resisting, I was thrown down.

Below me stood many varied monsters all gathered together.

There were some taking the form of wolves.

There were some taking the form of scorpions.

There were some taking the form of giant ants.

They were all waiting to fill their bellies with their food. With me.

I hit the floor before I could even scream. My numbed body was unable to move.

Demons came at me from each and every direction.

I felt my fingers bitten down on and chewed off.

I felt my legs have their flesh ripped away chunk by chunk.

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts...!

“———!!”

I let out a soundless shriek.

Why couldn't they just hurry up and eat my head? At least I'd die right then.

I want to be freed from this suffering as soon as possible.

My vision slowly grew blurry. Was I running out of blood?

It seemed that my nerves were severed, the acute pain from before was entirely gone.

All I could hear was the sound of chewing.

I couldn't see any of my classmates.

Just a pitch black darkness.

These guys are riling themselves up even though they're eating me, I guess the stairway got closed up so that they couldn't follow.

No, it might just be my eyes not working right anymore.

Let's try thinking about something else before I die.

Something better... nope, there's nothing. Each and every day, it's been nothing but humiliation after humiliation.

It never changed, did it?

Pain, injuries, agony.

"Ah."

My head was finally bitten.

Feeling that sensation, I lost consciousness.

Chapter 1

God's Summons to Another World (1)

Oginomiya Private Academy. It wouldn't be a stretch to call the school the execution ground that I commute to.

I receive beatings practically daily, same with verbal abuse.

It's only a source of pain, not of enjoyment at all.

Even so, I cannot run from it.

As this school has dormitory regulations, I'm only able to go back home during long vacations.

If I tried to shut myself in my dorm, the teacher would just drag me out and give me yet another bad memory.

Therefore, I was bullied today once again.

"Oi, stand up straight you f*cking pig!"

"Gah—!?"

I heard it before I felt it, a fist had struck my gut from below.

I dropped to my knees and almost collapsed.

"Don't black out just yet, take this!"

"Agah—!!"

Another person kicked the back of my neck with his heel. I felt a pain sharp enough to make me wonder if he'd broken something.

I'm definitely going to die this time.

"Hey now, make sure you make out with the floor. It suits you!"

"Geh..."

He pressed down on my head with his foot. This was how it always went, each and every time.

What the f*ck am I supposed to say?

Why do I always have to go through so much of this shit?

"Ew, it's so disgusting~"

"Seriously, I don't even want to breathe the same air as it!"

"It should just kill itself."

I could hear everyone in the class abusing me.

You think I want to be here, bastards?

"Don't worry so much, Katsuragi. See? We're at least making you helpful, you can help us clean the floor."

The leader of the class' bullies, Samejima Shinji, said that while he rubbed my face back and forth against the floor.

He's an honor student that excels in brains, looks, as well as athletics. To add on to that, he's the board chairman's grandson, so he's basically able to do whatever the hell he wants and get away with it scot-free. They even look the other way when it comes to him bullying me.

Samejima's personality is as black as black can get. If he doesn't like something, he gets rid of it. If he does like something, he'll do whatever it takes to get it.

He's the personification of scum itself.

The person who struck me a bit ago was Kijima Takeshi. The one who kicked me was Mahara Keito. People like them flocked to Samejima like shark-suckers on a shark.

“How should we beat the pig up next, hmm?”

Taking requests from the audience behind him, Samejima folded his arms and looked at me in derision.

It was right then that it suddenly happened.

“Wha—!”

“Kyaaah!?”

“Uwoooah!?”

A light encompassed the entire classroom, filling our vision, followed by the earth shaking and what sounded like something exploding. It felt as if my body was suspended midair, too.

“...Where...?”

When I peeked out from behind my eyelids, I was somewhere I'd never seen before.

It was white, everything was white.

There were no desks, no blackboards, no chairs, nothing.

“O-oi! Where the f*ck is this!?”

“How would I know!?”

The students started to grow noisy, but I didn't say anything.

This let me get away from that pain for at least a moment. I'd just get punched more if I said anything.

Some of them started crying, others called out for their family. There were even a few idiots insisting this had to be a dream.

There's no way this could be a dream. How could all thirty of us share the same dream?

Nevertheless, it's true that none of us know the the hell's happening right now.

I've never heard of a place like this on Earth.

A world with no plants, no animals. Just us.

—It was almost like how heroes get summoned to another world in fantasy books.

It happened just as I had that thought.

“Heroes, please settle down.”

It was a beautifully crystalline voice.

The voice's owner suddenly appeared before us.

Silvery hair that fell to her waist. Crimson eyes that would charm anyone who saw them.

The size of her breasts easily imagined by the curves visible through her garments, her slender legs complimented her thin waist.

The men all had their gazes locked on this embodiment of male desires.

Accordingly, the women all looked at the men coldly.

Wait, that's not what's important. What did she just say?

“My name is Claria, the goddess who summoned you all here.”

Goddess. Heroes.

Knowledgeable about this particular subject, the puzzle pieces all fell into place in my head, bringing me to understand the truth of our current predicament.

...There's no doubt about it, this is—

“I have summoned you all to another world.”

The goddess continued exactly how I’d predicted.



After the initial shock of what Goddess Claria said, everyone finally started to calm down and got an explanation for her.

First off, we’re currently in a divine plane where only deities are allowed to exist.

So then why were we summoned to such an amazing place as this? It’s because the evil, wicked existence called the Demon King revived in this world she governs as its god and she wishes for us to defeat it... apparently.

As the ones to defeat the Demon King, that makes us heroes... apparently.

There are so many of us because the more heroes the merrier... apparently.

Either way, it’s what the god said, so it’s probably justified.

Still though, we’re just everyday highschoolers. There’s no way we could just go and take out the Demon King.

—Which she also seemed to understand.

“I shall bestow each of you with a piece of my power. Each and every piece is very powerful, so please—defeat the Demon King.”

She bowed her head deeply.

Everyone appeared reluctant.

Obviously. It’s not like we’d be getting anything in return.

I’m against it too. We’d definitely be having to fight with our lives on the line.

“Of course, I can’t say it won’t come with its rewards.”

—But everyone appeared to be obviously curious once she said that.

“...Rewards? Like what?”

Samejima, the leader, spoke.

“I shall grant any one wish.”

“———!!”

My classmates’ eyes changed, they all started thinking.

“S-so that means, if we defeat this Demon King of yours... we’ll all get a wish?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Anything?”

“Any wish you desire...”

Samejima’s mood changed as soon as he heard that. As someone who was always forced to be knocked around by him, I knew—I knew that his eyes were as bestial as this when he wanted to take something for himself.

“...Understood.”

Samejima moved to stand before Claria and went down on one knee like a knight.

“We will fight against the Demon King. We will bring peace to your world.”

“Wha—”

“Hey everyone, you’re with me, yeah!?”

Just as someone tried to disagree, Samejima turned around and looked at everyone.

He glared at the guy who’d started speaking with a vicious intimidation.

“...No, it’s nothing, I also think we should.”

He stepped down so easily because he knew what would happen if he went against him.

The other guys started to agree as well.

I didn’t say that I agreed, but it’s not like they cared about my thoughts on it at all.

Once the twenty-ninth person voiced their assent, Samejima turned to Claria once more.

“We have reached a consensus. Please bestow upon us the power to defeat the Demon King.”

Samejima swore his loyalty and kissed the back of Claria’s hand.

It was a big statement.

Even so, Claria didn’t seem dissatisfied with it at all. Her cheeks even blushed.

I never would’ve guessed... so the goddess is simple?

“I will now teleport everyone to the royal palace on the surface. Please lend your strength to the king and aid him. I have already distributed my power to everyone. Please, do not waste it...”

“Leave it to us. We’ll take down the Demon Lord with our own hands.”

“Then, everyone, please. Save Rostalgia—save my beloved world.”

As Claria said that, the same light as before encompassed us again.

And upon opening my eyes, we were inside a luxurious building.

There was a chandelier, the kind you’d only ever see on television. Self-portraits lined the walls with a red carpet draped down the stairway.

Everyone was so awed that no one spoke.

A sole woman walked over to us.

Taking Samejima's hand as he was at the head of the group, she spoke.

"Heroes. Please, do what you can to save Rostalgia."

We couldn't run away from this anymore.

This is how our lives as heroes began.

Chapter 2

God's Summons to Another World (2)

It had been a week since we came to the royal palace.

Lead by Samejima, everyone discussed the matter of our support from the palace.

The information we obtained is as follows:

The nation this palace is in is called Wrystonia. It is the most advanced nation among all those on Rostalgia.

His Majesty Ginger seemed to fully be in support of Samejima and the others, even without them asking.

The most prominent and skilled teachers of swordsmanship, magic, and martial arts are here in the palace.

Each and every person was assigned a room of their own and a maid to take care of their needs. I'm envious.

And now for the important part.

That doesn't include me.

The reason why has to do with the ability examination we had five days ago.

I can remember what happened vividly.

We were first gathered into the palace's largest room.

They were identifying everyone's statuses, something essential when it comes to battle.

Since everyone was confused when they brought up statuses, Heige Strauss,

Wrystonia's military general, explained what it was in detail.

In Rostalgia, a window with your status on it will appear upon you saying the word *open*.

Stamina is exactly what it sounds like. Although you wouldn't die the second it hits zero, you will faint and be unable to move. As fainting in a dungeon is akin to death, we were advised to never let it get to zero.

Mana refers to the amount of spirit that's be exhausted when you activate magic. We were told to be careful to not overuse it as it will cause our minds to weaken in a similar manner.

Strength is simple, every-day physical power. In a head-on collision, the one with the higher strength will push back the other.

Resistance is the numerical value assigned to how much damage we receive is reduced by. The more accustomed to pain you are, the higher the number.

Dexterity is related to how fast you can move. The higher the number, the easier it would be to dodge attacks.

Thinking the whole system was similar to a game, I'd opened my status to see it for myself.

"Open."

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 1

Stamina: 75

Mana: 20

Strength: 50

Resistance: 300

Dexterity: 10

Special Abilities:

None

...Huh?

It doesn't look like those numbers are that high though...?

Didn't I get a portion of Claria's power?

...No, maybe this is enough to be considered strong?

Like right here, my resistance is abnormally high... it's because I'm familiar with pain though.

Then, just as expected, my faint glimmer of hope was shattered.

"That's amazing, Shinji!"

Samejima Shinji

Job: Hero Lv. 1

Stamina: 500

Mana: 430

Strength: 480

Resistance: 300

Dexterity: 500

Special Abilities:

[Holy Guidance] Double effectiveness of Light Magic.

[Dangersense] Increase Dexterity 10% when enemies attack.

All but one of his stats were more than five times mine.

He even had unique abilities.

Rather, it's a bit shocking that he's right up there with me on resistance. I don't have any strong points at all.

More and more people checked theirs, but they all had unique abilities as well.

None of their stats were as high as Samejima's, but they were all at least double mine.

They'd definitely received Claria's divine protection. It's obvious that Samejima was given preferential treatment, too.

I heard about it a little while afterward, but even standard soldiers have their stat values all exceed one hundred.

As the most skilled person in the nation's forces, Heige's stats had all settled around four hundred.

At any rate, I'm even weaker than an army grunt.

I could take a defensive role to make the best use of my resistance, but my stamina is so low that I'd collapse right away.

I'm useless.

Why is it just me?

Because I'm weak?

Because I'm gross?

I don't know why.

After that, my status was revealed to everyone, causing me to quickly be known as the *Useless Hero* among the castle's inhabitants.

His Majesty Ginger was quick to abandon his support for me. The other twenty-nine people were all high-spec heroes, he had no reason to bother with me.

I slept in the stables. Swordsmanship, martial arts, magic, I was forced to study everything myself.

There's no way I could learn anything. But if I ever complain, they'll definitely throw me out. I'd at least like to be spared from that.

This is all because I'm a weakling.

Unable to do anything, defeat anything, or win anything.

I don't want that!

I'm told that I'll be brought along to the next dungeon expedition out of a sliver of mercy, but my livelihood in this world is done for if they judge that I'm unfit to do anything.

Anyone would be able to see that.

Which is why I'm giving it my all this week, more than ever before.

I reduced my sleeping hours to the very limit.

"Ninety-eight... ninety-nine... one hundred!"

I swung my sword for three sets of a hundred every day and made sure to run as long as I could.

"Fire, ignite! *Fire Seed!*"

I also practiced magic. I'd finally gotten to the point that I could produce a lighter-like flame.

The other bastards in my class look like they're able to use more effective and powerful magic, but it's my loss if I care about that.

Rather, I want to praise myself over getting this far on my own. Good job, me.

I was able to fool myself like that.

I've been able to slim down a little due to how little they've been feeding me and how much I've been exercising.

My stats had hardly changed at all, however.

My strength and stamina improved only enough to look like an apology. No matter how many times I use magic, my mana isn't budging at all.

Unfortunately, as I don't know this world's common sense, I don't know how to improve my mana.

It's related to one's spirit, so maybe I have to be enjoying myself?

I tried spending the whole day with a smile on my face to experiment. Avoiding any thoughts about my self-pity, I tried to think positive.

It caused the other people using the road to feel uncomfortable, but it worked.

My mana rose a single point.

I vowed that I would never ever do that again.

I continued implementing the methods I thought up to raise my stats as efficiently as possible.

—The all-important day arrived in the blink of an eye.

Escorted by Heige and six other soldiers, we commenced our expedition into Wrystonia's largest dungeon, **Rigal Den**.

Everyone looked confident despite heading into battle.

More accurately, they looked like gradeschoolers on a field trip.

Why are they taking this so lightly?

I'm here wanting to turn back right now.

...Let's make sure I'm in the best position to run away, at least. My dexterity's only gone up by three.

Once the last of my classmates entered the dungeon, I followed in behind them.

I didn't quite realize it at the time.

—A cruel fate was awaiting me.

Chapter 3

Rigal Den (1)

Rigal Den, a dungeon for beginners.

Although there were many dungeons located throughout the world, it seemed like this was the first dungeon anyone would start out with.

There were two reasons for this. First, the levels of the demons that appear are low. Second, Rigals, demons unique to this dungeon, give a disproportionately large amount of experience.

Our leading group was already fighting.

“Wind spirits, blow everything away! *Wind!*”

Wind blew due to the female student’s magic, stopping three Rigals in their tracks.

Rigals are demons that closely resemble oversized scorpions, around five times the size of a normal one. They are protected by a hard carapace, so physical attacks don’t work too well on them. They are, however, weak to fire-type magic.

Even the weakest offensive fire-type magic, *Fireball*, is able to take them out.

Not like I could even use that, though.

“Fire spirits, burn everything! *Fireball!*”

Samejima launched three fireballs toward the Rigals.

The monsters let out their death wails and transformed into particles of light as they died.

“I did it! I’m already level seventeen!”

The girl who prevented the Rigals' attack with *Wind* did a victory pose.

Amazing. That's probably the result of having stood in the front lines the entire time.

By the way, I was able to kill two demons that looked like enlarged ants earlier, so I'm level two.

They were tough enemies for me to beat since I can't use magic. It took me several attacks to take them out, so Heige ordered me to stay in the rear because I was getting in the way.

I was low on stamina.

It would have been nice for them to at least have healed me.

"Really? Grats, Sajima. And nice assist on that a bit ago."

Samejima praised Sajima. His personality was what it was, but even the girls fell for him.

"Eheheh, I guess it was! Thanks!"

The girl, Sajima, blushed from getting praised.

"This isn't the kind of place you should screw around in, you two. Don't let your guard down, any carelessness can get you killed."

Annoyed by—or perhaps fed up with—their mushy mood, Heige gave them a warning.

"I know, I know. So there's the stairs that lead down... how about we go down them?"

Giving his usual toothy grin, he pointed over to the stairs.

Heige's face soured as soon as he heard the proposal.

"No can do. Nothing's been mapped from there on, it's all unknown."

As a consequence of being for beginners, **Rigal Den** had been mapped considerably less than other dungeons.

After getting to the fiftieth floor, you'd have grown to a level high enough that there'd be no issues with simply heading to the next dungeon.

The country felt the same way in that there was no reason to needlessly endanger people to map it, so the mapping had only been completed down to the fiftieth floor.

And we were already at the fiftieth floor:

"It'll be fine, just look at how many people we have with us. Besides, we should be safe enough with how strong we are now."

"There are always exceptions. What do you plan on doing if there's a demon that not even all of you together could defeat?"

"There won't be. I mean, really, isn't this just a beginner dungeon? There haven't been any stronger monsters appearing in any of the floors 'till now, now has there?"

"There hasn't, but..."

"It also gets harder to level up... right? Doing this will go a long way to reducing how long it takes for us to reach the day we defeat the Demon King. Wouldn't that be a good thing?"

Samejima kept on pressing his point.

Everything he said was the truth. It was logical.

It could even be said that the chances of someone dying upon reaching the fifty-fifth floor was virtually zero.

However, Heige seemed to have sensed some sort of danger laying ahead.

When Samejima pressed him for a reason to not go, he was unable to say. It was most likely the intuition one cultivated through years of experience.

Which is why he was stumped on how to respond.

The time he spent being stumped turned out to be his loss.

“He said it’s fine! Let’s go, Shinji!”

Growing impatient, Kijima started running to the stairs as though to get a head start on everyone else.

“Takeshi, wait up!”

“Ah, Samejima!”

“H-hey, guys! Dammit!”

As if that were the green light, all of my classmates who were on the fiftieth floor followed each other down the stairs.

“...Eh?”

Which left me alone, confused on what to do.

I had no reason to actually follow them down. It’s not like heading back early would change how they treat me, so there was no need for me to worry about that.

“Open.”

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 2

Stamina: 18

Mana: 21

Strength: 58

Resistance: 305

Dexterity: 14

Special Abilities:

None

Looking my stats over, I once again realized that I couldn’t do anything alone.

“...Yeah, going on my own would be a bad idea...”

I hurriedly rushed down the stairs behind them.

Dammit, those bastards took off way too fast!

◆Samejima Shinji's Point of View◆

I, Samejima Shinji, have arrived on the fifty-first floor. On a floor no-one's set foot on before.

What sort of demons are lurking here? I'm pumped just thinking about it!

Killing monsters is fun as hell.

The more I kill, the stronger I get. I'll get stronger than anyone.

My personality is that I absolutely have to make things go how I want.

Right now, I want that Claria woman. I've never wanted a woman so much.

Claria may be a goddess, but once I kill the Demon King now that I'm a hero, I'll have her be mine for my wish.

There might be another person with the same wish as me. I won't hold back on them once the time comes.

I will have Claria.

For that, I need *power*.

"Samejima! There's an Ariant ahead of you!"

"Got it!"

I hacked down the bug throwing itself at me with my sword.

Slicing in half, it collided against the wall and vanished.

"There's been a lot of monsters attacking alone for a bit now, wonder why?"

Standing on the front lines with me this whole time, Sajima looked confused.

This floor has definitely been different from the ones up till now, there's been way more demons attacking solo.

"They're just making it easier on us, isn't that a good thing?"

"...True. There's no downside to it."

"Yep."

Looks like Sajima agrees.

I can make use of her. I know she has a thing for me, I'll leverage that to bring her into my group.

Sajima's ability called **Saint's Smile** lets her heal someone's mana and stamina completely.

It being able to recover both is valuable.

"Hey, Shinji! Does this door look strange to you!?"

Having gone ahead of us, Takeshi found a door with weird patterns on it while I was thinking about how I'd best capture Sajima.

"I've... never seen this magic formation before."

Following behind us, Heige approached the door and looked over the magic formation carefully.

For not even a veteran like him to have seen it... is it some new kind of magic formation?

"Let's open it!"

"...Yeah, let's. Everyone, prepare for a fight."

“Understood!”

My classmates each readied themselves when I gave the instruction.

Seeing as how Heige unsheathed his sword with a resigned look, it looked like he didn't intend to interfere anymore.

When I nodded to give the signal, Kijima easily opened the grand-looking door with his ability, **Overdrive**.

The door groaned in a low rumble as it opened.

What I saw inside was... nothing but a needlessly large room.

“What is this place...?”

“It doesn't look like there's anything in here...”

We all moved into the room to get a better look.

Then, once we arrived at the center, something weird happened.

A resounding shrill filled the room.

The moment it finished ringing, a dazzling light came down from the ceiling.

“What's with this light!?”

Everyone all looked up to see.

The light went out a few seconds later. It was replaced by a creeping darkness that dominated the ceiling.

It steadily dropped down.

My eyesight gradually recovering, I began to realize what it was.

“D-demons!! It's a swarm of demons!”

Someone shouted out what the dark blob was.

A huge number of Rigals were falling down, a number incomparable to anything we've seen so far. If we let things keep going how they are, we'll all end up eaten.

"Quick, run!"

"It's no use! We're surrounded!!"

"What!?"

Too distracted by what was going on above us, Ariants and Wulves had surrounded us.

I thought back to a similar trap in a game I once played.

If I recall correctly, it was called—

—a Monster House.

"Water spirits, turn into bullets and shoot into my prey! *Splash Gatling!*"

Water bullets appeared midair, shooting through the falling Rigals.

Others copied her and started firing off the same magic in rapid succession.

They were using up a lot of mana.

Even so, demons continued swarming us.

"Dammit! There's too many!"

"Everyone, just calm down!"

"Hurry and shoot more magic! We'll blow an path open to the exit!"

Shouts were tossed back and forth.

The demons had made their way into our group.

Caught off guard by the Monster House, our group collapsed into a panic.

“Anyone near the entrance, you have to open a path! Do anything you have to!”

“Fire spirits! Scorch my enemies! *Burning Wave!*”

“Wind spirits! Open a path for me to walk! *Sonic Wave!*”

The students closer to the entrance heard my orders and used the highest strength magic they could back to back.

Volley of fire and wind burned and sliced through the Rigals, mincing them into light.

However, a Wulf leaped and dodged their attacks.

“What!? Heige! What is that thing!?”

“It’s a High Wulf! It’s smart and strong! Watch out for its speed! That thing shouldn’t be in a dungeon as weak as this one!”

Getting more information on it from Heige, I concentrated my attention on the High Wulf.

It lashed out with its sharp teeth. Ducking into a side roll, I quickly got back up.

“Tch...!”

“Grrrrr.”

We glared at each other, unmoving.

I thought about a way to get us out of this mess somehow.

“Everyone! I’m going to shine light here in a sec to blind them! Use that chance to make a break for the stairs! Got it!?”

I don’t know if they could hear me through the free-for-all going on, but I can’t worry about them right now.

A man's gotta save himself!

"Holy light, shine on those who would stay in the dark! Shining!"

Holding up my right hand, I let the mass of mana I'd built up into the air.

Following an explosive sound, an intense light filled the room. Hearing all of the demons howl and groan, I ran straight out of the door and headed for the stairs.

Everyone else did the same. However, a single girl had been captured by the High Wulf.

"Help! Someone, help me!"

The girl's pleas fell on deaf ears as everyone ran for their lives.

"Shuri!!"

"Hey, Sajima...! Tch!"

Sajima stopped running beside me and did a one-eighty. She tried to run back, but I struck the back of her neck with my hand to cause her to faint. Gathering her in my arms, I started running.

This is for the best. Useless people will die. Useful people won't.

"Hurry up! They're chasing us!"

The dazzling light had vanished and the demons were chasing after us in one large swarm.

Crap, crap, crap, crap!

I spent too much mana in that fight.

Mana is directly connected to your force of will. If it gets too low, it starts being impossible to think right. I have to avoid that!

"Am I... going to die here...?"

“No, I don’t wanna die!!”

I could hear people falling into despair.

Their willpower was all but gone from using so much magic.

At this point, all we could do was rely on physical attacks.

How can we get away from them?

How...!?

“...Hmm? Wha—!?! The hell’s going on!?”

I heard a lively voice. One not tainted by despair.

When I looked up to its owner, I saw Katsuragi.

“Hey, Katsuragi! Run for the stairs! Give it your all! Demons are chasing us!”

I gave Katsuragi an order. This trash’s personality won’t let him defy me.

“Huh!? You bastard, I know you’re lying!!”

As I expected, he ran for the stairs. Knowing him, the pudgy f*cker probably left some way to escape.

He knew the quickest route back to the stairs.

He started going up as soon as we reached them.

Now’s my chance.

“Thanks, Katsuragi!”

“Eh?”

He couldn’t believe I actually thanked him and looked back.

He stopped running.

That's what I was waiting for.

"Fire spirits, burn him down! *Fireball!*"

I launched a fireball from my hand and attacked the little piece of shit.

"Wha—... uwaaaah!!"

His clothes catching on fire, he was enveloped by flames.

Writhing on the ground, he screamed in pain.

"Everyone! Go up before it's too late!"

Following my shout, my classmates scrambled to make their way up the stairs.

Their willpower had diminished, so the only thing they could think about at this point was self-preservation.

None of them blamed me, nor did the soldiers. Heige was the only one to give me a scowl, but he kept silent as well.

"Is that everyone!?"

"Wait... please! I'm... I'm still here!"

The one who shouted was Katsuragi. His clothes were singed all over and multiple patches of his skin looked black. Probably from the burns.

He was trying to climb the stairs on all fours.

The monsters were right behind him.

"Just shut the f*ck up already. You still have an important role to play. Everyone! Help me push this thing back down! The demons won't come if we do that! We'll survive!"

“Wha—”

“Really!?”

“We’ll live... we can go back...?”

“I’ll do it... I’ll get killed if I don’t!!”

It was comical after that.

One of them shackled Katsuragi’s feet with ground-type magic, another picked him up.

Then, not hesitating in the least, threw him back toward the demons.

“Ah—”

A stupid sound to fit his stupid face.

Katsuragi fell into the demons, his body disappearing from view.

He’ll probably be devoured by them to the bone.

This was the best method for survival I thought up.

I needed some bait to get the demons to stop moving, but there’s no way I could use any of us heroes as food.

But there was one person who fit the bill. Katsuragi Daichi, our class’ extra baggage. No one in the nation should mind it either, he’s the *Useless Hero*, after all.

He played his role splendidly. The demons went crazy in eating him.

“Isn’t it great, Katsuragi? You finally made yourself useful.”

I sealed the stairs using magic, closing it so that none of the demons would follow us up.

Chapter 4

Rigal Den (2)

◆Katsuragi Daichi's Point of View◆

...Geh... where am I...?

I can't feel my body.

Memories of what happened started flowing through my mind.

Samejima deceiving me. Turned into fodder by my classmates. Killed by demons.

What a harsh life...

But I guess it's alright? I finally got away from them...

If we ever meet again, I'll kill them no matter what.

I'll torture them before I kill them. I'll torment them just enough so that they don't die. I'll crush their fingers like they did to me, I'll cut their feet up, I'll crack their skulls.

That should make me feel better. I don't care what happens after that.

...That aside...

Right now... I'm conscious? Does that mean I got reincarnated into my next life!?

That's the only explanation!

I can't think of anything else it could mean!

This time I'll get an overpowered ability and make a harem!

Even if I don't get that, please at least let me marry someone and live a happy life!

Alright, let's go.

Let's reincarnate!

Full of anticipation for that, I opened my eyes.

I was surprised. I didn't think they'd open. That wasn't the only reason, though.

It's what I saw when I did so.

“—Huh?”

It's because I was in **Rigal Den**, the dungeon that should have been the place I died.

Katsuragi Daichi, sixteen years old.

Just when I thought I'd died, I was alive.



No, no, no!

“...What’s going on...?”

I was confused. It gave me so much of a shock that I couldn’t think properly.

Let’s calm down and sort through it. It’s times like this where taking deep breaths help.

In, out, in, out.

“Pheeeeew...”

.....Alright, let’s make sure if I’m still in Rostalgia or if I’m in some other world.

Fortunately, I have a way to check that rather easily.

I spoke the word—

“Open.”

—and the answer appeared before me.

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 2

Stamina: 1300

Mana: 2520

Strength: 3400

Resistance: 2600

Dexterity: 1400

Special Abilities:

[Heart of Steel] Double resistance value during combat. Prevents poison, paralysis, hypnosis, and mental corruption 1/3 of the time.

[Indomitable Mentality] Mana cannot go below 100.

[Lich King] Able to form contracts with creatures that have died, reviving them and bending them to your will. Every other time the user dies, gain a slot.

Current: 2 Open Slots

Unique Abilities:

[Revenge of the Grudgebearer] No matter how many times you die, gather strength from the abyss of death and resurrect.

Current: 5 Deaths

“...What!?”

I rubbed my eyes. This has to be a joke, there’s no way.

I closed my status and opened it again.

The values it showed were no different.

“The hell’s going on with these stupid values!?”

They were in the four digit range. All of them.

Even though not even Samejima had went over five hundred, mine went well beyond a thousand.

“What’s with this unique ability...?”

If its explanation is to be believed, I can’t die. My level didn’t go up, so it should be safe for me to think of it as giving me overpowered stats. It looks to be different from special abilities somehow.

Rather, I’ve already died five times...?

W-well, it’s the present that’s important. I won’t dwell on the past. Right now, I’m alive. That’s good.

Setting that aside, I have several new special abilities as well. They’re all incredibly strong.

Indomitable Mentality and **Lich King** in particular.

My mana can't go below a hundred. I can use as much magic as I want.

I wonder what kind of things I can enslave?

I don't know anything else about it since it doesn't say, but I'll figure it out as I use it.

"Setting aside my stats, I guess that I'm still in Rostalgia...?"

I died and revived five times. I assume that means I was revived, eaten, and revived again... in a loop.

So long as I have this **Revenge of the Grudgebearer** thing, I won't really die.

The only thing I'm sure of right now is that I'm alive, so I'll trust my unique ability.

Hmm?

Then does that mean that my stats are real too?

I'll have to give them a shot, experience is important.

Just in case. This isn't the Earth, the place I actually get. This is Rostalgia, another world.

"Next on the list is to confirm what happened."

I looked around.

The floor around me wasn't brown, it was covered with red. A liquid.

When I tried touching it, I heard a water-like splash.

It wasn't water, though.

It was blood.

"...I guess... that's my blood, huh..."

There was a ton of blood. I did die five times, so... yeah.

...But really... I'm actually alive?

I felt all around my body. I even rolled my clothes out of the way to look at my skin directly. I didn't even have a scratch on me.

My clothes are all red from soaking up the blood though... it feels horrible.

"...Well then."

I stood up and stretched to loosen up my body.

"What should I do now?"

My first objective should be getting out of this dungeon.

I'd like to use the stairs to go up to the previous floor, but I can't use them since they were blocked up by ground-type magic.

The only weapon I had on me was a bronze sword. Moreover, it had fractured halfway down the blade. Probably the demons' doing.

Some of the equipment I had on me just before I died like my robe were alright, so I guess that's a small mercy?

"—So I guess I'll be heading back unarmed?"

I didn't feel safe. But it'd be the same thing if I did nothing. I'd just starve from lack of food.

I don't want that. I don't want to just stay here.

I'll make something of my life.

This time, I'll fight back. I'll go with what I think is right.

So I'm going to take my revenge on them. I will kill them all.

I'll vent my grudge from them killing me and everything else they've done to me on them, all of it.

That's what I've decided.

Now that I've decided to do it, I should see it through.

"I suppose I should focus on raising my level and stats first..."

No matter how much my stats rose, they have twenty-nine heroes on their side.

I don't know how to take on so many people alone. Hell, I don't even know magic.

Even after becoming this powerful, taking them all on sounds like a bad idea.

Besides, I might be able to head back to the surface after defeating the boss of this dungeon's lowest floor.

I'm only thinking that because of mechanics added to all of the dungeon games I used to play allowing players to teleport straight outside after clearing a dungeon, but it's worth a shot at least.

"Alright, guess I should look for the stairs down."

After repacking and shouldering a bag that had been abandoned, I walked along the path.

I eventually reached a huge room with its doors left open.

"Woah..."

My mouth dropped open.

There was green and red blood all around the room. The green blood is from the demons, leaving the red blood to be from Samejima and the others.

"Doesn't look like there's anything here... hmm?"

As I looked all throughout the room, I found a corpse in the corner to the left of the entrance.

As well as the silver-colored wolf eating it.

“Geh—”

The grotesque sight caused me to blurt out.

It was enough to draw the wolf’s attention.

“Grrrrr!!”

The wolf immediately shot over to me. It closed the distance between us like a gale wind—and leapt.

“Woah!?”

I punched at the wolf who jumped straight at me like a bullet.

At that instant, I heard the sound of my fist striking against bone.

The wolf’s head exploded.

“D-did... did I kill it?”

My arm had pierced into its head all the way to its neck. My fist made its way entirely out of the neck.

The wolf convulsed, soon dropping down limply.

It was dead. By a single amateurish punch.

“...Haha... hahaha! Awesome! This is so awesome!”

Realizing the significance of my feat, I couldn’t stop myself from laughing.

I killed the monstrous demon Samejima and the others were all afraid of.

By myself. With a single punch.

It was the first time I'd felt anything like it, there's no way I could stop myself.

"Hmph!"

Pulling out my left hand, I threw the corpse back. I walked ahead to the other body that was being eaten until a moment ago.

"This girl is..."

Black hair that extended to her waist. Large breasts disproportionate to her half-eaten body.

There's no mistaking her. There's only one person I know who matches these looks.

The dead person laying before me was Hamakaze Shuri. A popular mascot-like person for our class.

"...Well, she'll work."

Not how she was right then, of course. I'm not that perverted.

She's the best. The best thing to test my special ability on, that is.

"The explanation said creatures that have died, right...?"

I thought back to what it said.

"Let's take this as an experiment, then. Experience is the best teacher."

I started to invoke my special ability, **Lich King**, with Hamakaze as my target. Upon doing so, the incantation for it flowed directly into my mind.

"I shall bestow you with new life, a second life. Make a pact with me and become my servant. *Binding Resurrection!*"

A sparkling blue light came from my hands and descended into Hamakaze. A hexagonal magic formation appeared under the girl.

“So it heals wounds too!”

I was a little excited.

Her body was damaged, but it was quickly being mended.

Really, it would have been disgusting if she stayed like that with her organs all hanging out.

The light stayed there for around ten minutes before finally vanishing.

That was probably the signal for her being revived.

“H-hey, Hamakaze? Wake up.”

Timidly poking her cheek, I checked to see if she was alive.

With that, she opened her dark-colored eyes.

They weren't clouded. They were eyes with a soul backing them.

She was breathing. Their fair skin exposed to the very limit, her breasts faintly moved up and down.

“Experiment... successful!”

“H-huh? I'm... alive? Didn't I die?”

The first words Hamakaze spoke were shaky.

Not even looking at me standing right next to her, she hurriedly checked her body's condition.

...Her reaction gave me *deja vu*.

“Hey, are you alright?”

I wasn't exactly in a situation where I could just wait on her.

Nothing would change if other demons came, but it would be a waste of time.

Which is why I called out to her and presented my hand.

She'll probably just say I'm gross or something.

And I would punish her for doing so.

...But that isn't what happened.

“Oh... o-okay...”

Hamakaze responded to me with a slight blush on her cheeks. When she took my hand and stood up, she stared at me blankly.

Like a maiden in love.



...No, no. That's not what I should be thinking.

"U-umm!"

"What?"

"I-I'm Hamakaze Shuri. Umm... c-could I know your name?"

".....Huh?"

What's with her question? Doesn't she know that I'm Katsuragi Daichi?

"U-umm, did you not want to tell me? S-sorry."

Hamakaze looked down, tears forming in her eyes.

H-huh?

What's going on?

I think I might need to check what I look like after this.

"Hey, Hamakaze."

"Sh-Shuri is fine."

"Sorry, but I don't think I'm someone you want calling you that."

It would be annoying for her to accompany me without telling her my name though.

I might as well tell her. I don't know why, but it looks like she favors me now.

"I'm Katsuragi Daichi."

"...Eh? Katsuragi Dai... eh?"

Hamakaze opened and closed her mouth, pointing at me. It was pretty funny to see.

"Yeah. I'm the very same Katsuragi Daichi that was summoned with you all."

“N-no way...!”

Hamakaze plopped down on the ground.

Looks like her hopes just got smashed. Hah, serves her right.

I started to feel a bit better.

“You know, Hamakaze, there’s something I want you to tell me.”

“.....”

“Hey.”

“...Don’t talk to me, know your place.”

“...Hoh?”

When she learned who I really was, she went right back to how she really was. My classmates never change, do they?

But this time, our positions have been reversed.

I am the strong one, you’re the weak one.

“Hamakaze. That wasn’t a request. It’s an order. You *will* answer my question.”

“What are you saying? Don’t you know your place?”

Saying that, she chanted an incantation.

“Fire spirits, burn him! *Fireball!*”

The fireball that should have appeared in the air didn’t appear. Hamakaze blinked, dazed.

“W-why!? I should have had enough mana!?”

“Why don’t you check your status to find out?”

I smirked. I probably looked close to a villain.

“O-open!”

Hamakaze Shuri

Job: High-Grade Slave Lv. 12

Stamina: 620

Mana: 520

Strength: 190

Resistance: 200

Dexterity: 320

Special Abilities:

[Auto Heal] Restore 5 Stamina every 10 minutes.

Special Conditions:

[High-Grade Slave] Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

“W-what is this...?”

Hamakaze was dumbfounded.

By the way, it seemed as though that I was able to see the status of anyone who was my slave.

I saw Hamakaze’s status appear in front of me as well.

“Understand now, Hamakaze? I’m your master, you are my slave. You cannot go against me.”

“Th-there’s no way I’d accept that!”

“It’s the truth. After all, isn’t this just divine retribution for everything you’ve done to me?”

“I-I didn’t do anything!”

“True, you didn’t torment me personally, but you didn’t try to help me either. That is your sin.”

“No way...”

“Do you know how much I suffered? You don’t, do you? Every single day, I was beaten, I was abused. Do you think you could understand how that feels?”

“.....”

Hamakaze was unable to respond at all. Of course she couldn’t. Even if she could understand, she wouldn’t be able to.

I would have been mad if she went ahead and said she understood so carelessly.

“...Tch, just cover up your chest and answer my questions... and here.”

I give her the robe that I was wearing.

“W-what?”

“My robe. Use it to warm up a bit. You were dead there for a bit.”

“I-I don’t need your charity...”

“Even though your legs have been quivering for a while now? Don’t hold me up.”

“...Hmph.”

Hamakaze took the robe from my hand and reluctantly put it on.

After glaring at me sharply, she stopped as though changing her mind and whispered something.

“Huh? Did you say something?”

“No! And don’t look at me!”

“...Whatever.”

When I walked out of the room, Hamakaze fell in beside me.

[...*Thank you.*]

That I heard those words that I hadn't heard in so long... I'll keep a secret.

Chapter 5

Rigal Den (3)

After that, we talked about what would happen from then on while walking around the floor to find the stairs.

“Eh... so you’re saying that we’re going to have to fight even stronger demons than the ones earlier?”

“Pretty much.”

“No way... That’s impossible for us...”

“What makes you think that?”

“I mean, not even Samejima could beat those things! There’s no way we could.”

Didn’t I tell her about my specs far outstripping Samejima’s just a bit ago...?

Guess she doesn’t believe me about it.

I don’t really feel like correcting her either, she’ll see it for herself sooner or later.

“Don’t worry, Hamakaze. I’ll protect you.”

“Wha—! I-Idiot! Y-You’re just Katsuragi, the wimp!”

She suddenly started to blush and twiddle her fingers together.

What, was she always so simple?

Or maybe it’s that I’m not like how I usually am?

It looks like she’s misunderstanding me though, the reason I’ll protect her is that I want to have a lot of subordinates. To that end, she needs to live.

Judging by how I died five times in a row, it looks like there's a time gap between my revival and me regaining consciousness. During that time gap, I want to be the one being protected.

I'm bringing her along for when I die.

I'm not doing it out of kindness at all.

I used some time after that to ask a few questions.

I found a few things out.

First off was that my appearance seems to have changed.

Although I'm told that my face looks better now, my height hasn't changed. I'm not fat anymore either, though. My overall physique seems to have improved.

Hey, Body, was my fat delicious?

I don't feel any incompatibility with my body at all though... I wonder if that's another effect from **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**?

"My heart even started racing when I first saw you... but it was just *you* on the inside..."

"Shut up. The reason I'm like this is because of all you guys."

"..."

Hamakaze stopped talking.

Come to think of it, I wonder how she feels about being abandoned by her classmates?

Betrayed. Forsaken. In those respects, she's the same as me.

If she hates Samejima and the others as well, I'm not against the idea of us taking our revenge on them together.

I understand what the suffering she's went through is like, after all.

Next, I had her teach me all of the magic she knew, including what she herself wasn't able to use. Thanks to that, I have more ways to go about my offense now.

Around two hours passed with us talking about similar things.

We went back to the large room we started at.

Now, however, the doors were closed.

"Hm? Why are they shut?"

"I wonder... oh!"

After tilting her head, it looked like she remembered something.

It didn't look like it was a good memory, either.

She paled as the color of blood left her face.

Come to think of it, this is the room she died in... is it a trauma for her?

"Hamakaze... tell me what happened here. I can't counter it if you don't."

She shook her head back and forth weakly.

"As soon as we opened the doors and reached the middle, demons appeared all around us. It might happen again..."

"What kinds of demons were there?"

"Rigals and Ariants, there was a High Wulf too."

...Aren't those the things that were eating me? This is just getting more and more anticlimactic.

Time for a revenge match.

“That’s all? That works, thanks.”

“I think we should withdraw and check things out further...”

“Alright, let’s head in.”

“Already!?”

Fighting demons in packs would make this more convenient. My strength should be easy for her to understand. Sometimes, numbers just aren’t enough to understand something.

Even if I die in the worst case scenario, I’ll be able to resurrect, I could probably even resurrect Hamakaze again too. I could do without the pain, though.

I pushed the doors open.

The room was empty. I walked to the center together with Hamakaze.

“Eek!”

Suddenly, a light shone down from above. Hamakaze looked as though she were about to start crying, but it wasn’t time for me to worry about that.

“Hamakaze, wait here. If any demons head your way, try to not die.”

“Wh-What about you!?”

“I’ll be killing them all.”

“What!?”

“They’re coming! I’ll blast them with my magic! Grab onto me!”

“Eh? Wai—! Ahhh...!”

Seeing Hamakaze stay still due to shock, I took hold of her.

To be honest though, I wanted to test out how far I could go in groping her.

Concentrating mana into my right hand, I imagined it compressing into itself.

“Wh-what’s happening!?”

Wind picked up and started to whirl around with me at the center. Bending my legs somewhat to lower my center of gravity and avoid being knocked over by the wind, I gathered it all above my open palm into the shape of a sphere.

“Grrrrr!!”

“Kshaaaaa!!”

“Jaaaaah!!”

A large crowd of those three types of demons appeared, attacking from all directions.

I was ready for them.

“O’ Emperor of the Wind! Cut down those who would hinder my right to rule! Exert the might of your storms! Revert all to dust and return them to the earth! *Berserk Tempest!!*”

The ball of wind burst forward once I finished the incantation.

It sounded similar to metal forcibly snapping.

So much so that it drowned out the various demons’ howls.

A moment later, all fell quiet, the faint sound of dripping blood the only thing remaining.

“...You’ve got... to be kidding... me...”

Opening the eyes she’d shut tight in the confusion, Hamakaze was so astonished by what she saw that she was practically at a loss for words.

Even though I was the one to cause it, my thoughts were the same as hers.

The room was dyed in green and filled with particles of light.

All of the demons, every last one, had been annihilated by that sole attack.

Seeing the effects of a power so far from the norm, neither of us were able to so much as budge an inch.

We, stunned by what had happened, were pulled back to reality by the sound of something collapsing.

When we looked over to see what caused the sound, we saw that it was the wall that collapsed, revealing the stairs that lead downward.

I see. So the way to the fifty-second floor was concealed...?

I wonder if all of the floors from now on will be like this?

We were able to continue through the first fifty floors because the ways down had already been discovered.

That said, the following floors should be similar to this in that we won't be able to continue down without meeting the requirements to do so.

Assuming that's how it is... that's pretty depressing...

"Wh-Wh-Wha...!"

When I glanced at the classmate clinging to me, she wasn't able to express how she felt too well.

"...What's wrong?"

"Don't *what's wrong* me...! What's with that power!? It's stupidly strong!"

The magic I used, **Berserk Tempest**, was an imperial rank magic.

The various kinds of magic all had six ranks. Starting from the strongest, they were: divine, imperial, ancient, royal, soul, and spirit rank.

A considerable amount of mana is necessary to use magic of the imperial rank, so it's not something to be used so easily.

I'm realizing my greatness once more. It'd be troubling if just anyone could use magic like that whenever they wanted.

Usually, people have to practice starting with spirit rank magic and strengthen their foundation from there.

Samejima himself is still stuck on soul rank magic... wait, Hamakaze's still talking?

She hadn't stopped asking me questions and had sped up how fast she was talking.

"Katsuragi, how the heck did you get so strong?"

"Like I need to tell you?"

"Tell meeee, I want to know toooo!"

"Alright then, die five times."

"So mean!"

I'm not mean, I told you the answer. You just didn't realize it.

There's no guarantee that you'll be revived if you die, though.

She didn't look like she was convinced though, but she withdrew in reluctance, probably thinking that she wouldn't get an answer if she kept asking.

"That aside, check your stats. Checking whether or not your body has anything wrong with it is important."

"What are you wanting to check?"

"Just do it already."

"...Alright. Open."

“Open.”

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 28

Stamina: 1340

Mana: 2600

Strength: 3500

Resistance: 2680

Dexterity: 1500

Special Abilities:

- **[Heart of Steel]** Double resistance value during combat. Prevents poison, paralysis, hypnosis, and mental corruption 1/3 of the time.
- **[Indomitable Mentality]** Mana cannot go below 100.
- **[Absolute Command]** Appears upon those revived by the Lich King being lower leveled. Any order the slave receives will be followed through with until given authorization to stop.
- **[Magus of Slaughter]** Damage inflicted upon enemies will also damage others of the same species within a 10 meter radius.
- **[Lich King]** Able to form contracts with creatures that have died, reviving them and bending them to your will. Every other time the user dies, gain a slot.
 - Current: 1 Open Slot

Unique Abilities:

- **[Revenge of the Grudgebearer]** No matter how many times you die, gather strength from the abyss of death and resurrect.
 - Current: 5 Deaths

Hamakaze Shuri

Job: High-Grade Slave Lv. 23

Stamina: 1000

Mana: 720

Strength: 680

Resistance: 420

Dexterity: 400

Special Abilities:

- **[Auto Heal]** Restore 60 Stamina every 10 minutes.

Special Conditions:

- **[High-Grade Slave]** Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master, Katsuragi Daichi, is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

“Huh!? My stats improved too!?”

Hamakaze looked at her status in disbelief.

Looks like her level went up as well for some reason...

I wonder if it has to do with her being a **Slave**? Now that I think about it, it doesn't say she's a **Slave**, but a **High-Grade Slave**. It seems as though a **High-Grade Slave** gets the same experience as the one employing them, or at least a portion of the experience.

However, there is no concept of experience points in this world.

It is believed that a person's level is a representation of their accumulated experience of fighting and winning. Experience itself is not shown in a person's stats.

...I'll set that aside for now, this isn't the time to sit and think idly about that.

There's a more serious problem.

Despite my level going up quite a lot, why did my stats barely improve?

Is it another effect from **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**?

Or is there another factor at play...?

I don't know.

Dammit, I don't have enough information!

Chapter 6

Rigal Den (4)

“Katsuragi! Katsuragi! My stats are going up!”

“Shut up already. Now’s not the time nor place.”

“What’s with you? Don’t you have anything to say?”

“Yeah, yeah. Isn’t it great? Now you can actually do something helpful for once.”

“Who would do anything for you!?”

She’s still talking to me like that? You think she’d have understood the pecking order by now.

“...Hey, Hamakaze. There’s something I’d like to test out.”

My stats didn’t improve much, but I *did* manage to get more special abilities.

One of them was **Absolute Command**. According to its explanation, it looks like I have to be a higher level to use it.

So I assume that’s why it didn’t appear until now.

At any rate, for its condition to be that I need to be higher leveled... is it saying that a ruler should be stronger than their subordinates?

Let’s leave that alone for now.

Its effect is what anyone would be interested in.

Being able to make someone follow an order, no matter what it is. Teenage boys the world over would definitely envy me for it.

My gaze was pointed directly at a certain part of Hamakaze's body.

"Wha..."

Hamakaze turned around, hiding her two voluptuous hills from my view.

"Perv! Rapist!!"

"Shaddup... Like I'd do it in a place like this? I'll wait to take you until after we clear this dungeon. You can calm down."

"Th-There's no way I could!! What about my rights!?"

"You don't have any."

I declared it outright.

"You brute! You should just die!"

"I'd just power up and revive if I did."

"I don't get it!"

She beat against my chest. I was thinking about groping her chest in return if she did it again, but she continued speaking.

"You... me... everything, I don't get any of it. Why, why do we have to fight monsters like those... why did we have to start being *heroes*...!?"

She put less and less strength into her fists as time went on.

"I don't... I don't get it...!"

Her voice losing its usual innocent and naive tone, it sounded feeble.

"I can't take it anymore... what's with this place... why did this have to happen...!?"

She crouched down and began to cry.

Did her will break after coming this far...?

With the reality of our situation thrust before her, the floodgates she'd somehow managed to hold back burst open.

It's not like I don't understand how she feels. I'm sure I'd be crying just as miserably as her if I were in her shoes right now.

I can guess at her mental state to some degree.

—Which is why I knew that now was my chance to make Hamakaze *mine*.

I'm such a horrible person, only able to think about stuff like that...

"...Hey, Hamakaze."

".....What?"

"Who do you think caused us to fall into this mess?"

"...What good would answering that—"

"Just answer me. Who do you think caused it?"

"...The goddess, for summoning us?"

"Wrong."

"Huh...? Th-Then, who?"

"Samejima."

I immediately responded with the name of the person who was the target of my revenge.

"Wh-Why? I mean, it was that woman who asked us to do all of this, right?"

"Yeah, she did."

“Th-Then—”

“But we had the right to refuse her. The one to take that right from us was who, exactly?”

“W-Well...”

She hesitated.

She knew exactly who the culprit was.

“It was him. He, at his own convenience, accepted her request. He, at his own convenience, got carried away and—”

I whispered into Hamakaze’s ear.

“—abandoned you, betrayed you.”

“——!!”

I heard her clench her teeth.

Looks like she’d been ignoring that truth, hiding herself from it. She bottled up the hatred that must have been there in her gut, letting it lay dormant.

She’d endured it. I don’t know why and I don’t want to know.

She just needs to drown herself in that anger now.

“...Why... was I... abandoned...?”

She barely managed to squeeze her voice out through her tears. Like a baby clinging onto their parent, Hamakaze grabbed my sleeve.

“Because you were weak.”

I shook my arm, causing her to let go.

“You know... I-I... liked... Samejima... I was trying hard, giving it my all. Even if I was

afraid, I would kill those demons... I was trying to be strong..."

"There's a lot of people who like him. He wouldn't care about losing you."

I spoke in a piercing, cold tone.

"...R-Really...?"

"Yeah. Really."

I didn't sympathize with her.

"Uu... uuu...!"

—But that wasn't enough. I will make her my ally. I will shove myself into her heart.

"Hamakaze."

".....Eh?"

I moved my arm around Hamakaze's waist, holding her as she cried.

"K-Katsuragi? Wh-What are you—"

"I won't abandon you."

Her small body, her shattered mind, overreacted to my comforting.

"You won't... abandon... me...?"

"I'm different from Samejima. I want you. I want you to be by my side forever."

"No way... Katsuragi, even without me... y-you could..."

"Hamakaze!"

I put more strength into my embrace, conveying my feelings.

"Please... come with me. I will never abandon you. I'll say it as many times as it takes.

I... want you.”

“Katsu... rahi...”

There was only a faint glimmer of light left in her teary eyes as she gazed back into mine. If she was left alone now, left without anyone or anything to support her, she would likely die.

It was like looking at my past self.

“Will you... accept... me?”

She slowly lowered her eyelids and brought her teary face closer to mine.

I saw her lips, bloody from being bitten down on so hard.

I'm not sympathizing with her.

I'm not comforting her.

It's fine. I'm just making her my ally.

I don't need to overthink it.

I got an excellent subordinate.

That's all.

“Hamakaze...”

“Mmm...”

My first kiss tasted like blood.



“I’ll say
it as many
times as
it takes.
I...
want you.”

“Will you...
accept...
me?”

On that day, I obtained my first genuine *slave*.

Chapter 7

The War of Death's Beginnings (1)

Hamakaze and I had reached the sixtieth floor. I think it's been around four days. I'm not certain, though, since my sense of time is fuzzy down here.

To put it simply, the fifty-second to fifty-ninth floors were a pain.

At first the reason was the dungeon itself, but later on the reason turned into being Hamakaze Shuri.

After all that happened, I had to increase Hamakaze's stats as fast as possible.

This girl got killed by the demons on the fifty-first floor, so I started out those first floors fighting monsters to raise her level.

Around halfway through the floors, Hamakaze seemed to be impatient about something and volunteered herself to fight as well.

She probably thought that I would abandon her if she was useless, a good trait for a slave to have.

But recently, it's been overwhelming. Not letting me lay a finger on them, Hamakaze charges in the moment we encounter anything and turn them into particles. This happens over and over.

Hamakaze wound up passing me in levels, but if it ever looks like her attitude turns rebellious, I'll just tell her that she's released from the contract, so it's alright.

I also came to know something new about one of my special abilities. Although **Lich King** has an effect similar to resurrection magic, it returns the target to a corpse upon their liberation. I found this out by experimenting on a demon I killed, turning it into a slave before it disappeared into particles of light.

Demons won't disappear if they don't receive fatal wounds. For example, a High Wulf

wouldn't disappear even when I cut off one of its legs. The same would have happened with its severed limb.

Knowing that was helpful.

Hamakaze and I couldn't eat much, so we were currently both hungry.

We would collapse if we didn't handle the situation carefully, but we avoided the worst case scenario by eating meat. It's a shame that demon meat didn't taste too good at all, but there's nothing we could do about that.

By the way, this is what it's like right now.

"Daichi, please open your mouth."

"Ahhh."

Hamakaze held a slice of Wulf meat she'd roasted with fire-type magic and brought it to my mouth.

After that day, be it her tone or her actions, Hamakaze changed drastically. Her calling me by name so respectfully surprised me, I never thought that she'd do such a sharp turnabout.

She's an honest, obedient girl. Her overdependence crops up here and there, but that's how I managed to win her over, so it's fine as is if that's all.

However, I'd prefer it if she stopped embracing me so tightly in her sleep every night.

I'd be troubled if my accumulating desires went on a rampage. I'm a guy, too.

Those were the annoying things about Hamakaze.

...However. There was a however.

Her being so helpful was a big help. Me choosing her wasn't a mistake.

Yep, not a mistake at all.

“Daichi.”

“Ah, thanks.”

“No need to thank me, thank *you* very much.”

With Hamakaze making sure I ate, my stamina recovered. I gave some food to her as well.

We have no problems with stuff to drink thanks to spirit rank water-type magic.

“...Umm... Daichi?”

“What’s up?”

“W-Well... could I... get you to feed me?”

Hamakaze looked up at me with puppy dog eyes. Her cheeks were faintly flushed.

“Feed yourself. Why would I do that?”

“O-Okay... I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it... I’ll think about it after we get out of here.”

“O-Okay...!”

Hamakaze was so excited her body even started to quiver. She looked down and bit down into her High Wulf meat.

...Just like a carrot and stick.

Finishing our first meal we’ve had in a while, we sat cross-legged on the cold, hard floor.

“What are we doing next? I can still fight, but...”

“Yeah, that’s the plan. We still don’t know where the stairs are yet though.”

“The enemies’ stats won’t be a problem, will they?”

“Oh, come to think of it, I haven’t checked yet have I?”

I looked toward the collapsed High Wulf a little ways from us.

That one was one of my slaves too, wasn’t he? We just used him for food... I got careless.

“Open.”

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 46

Stamina: 1430

Mana: 2690

Strength: 3630

Resistance: 2770

Dexterity: 1600

Special Abilities:

- **[Heart of Steel]** Double resistance value during combat. Prevents poison, paralysis, hypnosis, and mental corruption 1/3 of the time.
- **[Indomitable Mentality]** Mana cannot go below 100.
- **[Absolute Command]** Appears upon those revived by the Lich King being lower leveled. Any order the slave receives will be followed through with until given authorization to stop.
- **[Magus of Slaughter]** Damage inflicted upon enemies will also damage others of the same species within a 10 meter radius.
- **[Lich King]** Able to form contracts with creatures that have died, reviving them and bending them to your will. Every other time the user dies, gain a slot.
 - Current: 0 Open Slots

Unique Abilities:

- **[Revenge of the Grudgebearer]** No matter how many times you die, gather strength from the abyss of death and resurrect.
 - Current: 5 Deaths

Hamakaze Shuri

Job: High-Grade Slave Lv. 57

Stamina: 2000

Mana: 1750

Strength: 1900

Resistance: 1000

Dexterity: 980

Special Abilities:

- **[Auto Heal]** Restore 300 Stamina every 10 minutes.
- **[Loyalty]** When master's life is endangered, all stats increase to 150%.

Special Conditions:

- **[High-Grade Slave]** Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master, Katsuragi Daichi, is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

High Wulf

Job: High-Grade Slave Lv. 30

Stamina: 950

Mana: 350

Strength: 1200

Resistance: 600

Dexterity: 1300

Special Abilities:

- *None*

Special Conditions:

- **[High-Grade Slave]** Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master, Katsuragi Daichi, is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

It's higher than I thought..."

"Yeah. He'd beat that *Shit Hero* Samejima."

"...You..."

Her smile seemed to ask if she'd said something strange. She tilted her head to the side.

I don't mind her being so blunt though... it's convenient for me.

The more desire she has to carry out her revenge, the better.

"...No, it's nothing. Right, let's take this guy's stats as the standard for the sixtieth floor."

"Let's go."

There was no need for either of us to ask if that was too much.

“Alright. Let’s go kill some demons.”

“Could I start with this dog, then?”

“Yeah, sure. He doesn’t look like he’d even be useful as a shield anymore.”

“I agree. O’ wind spirits, slice through the air. *Wind Slice.*”

Unable to move due to its missing legs, the invisible blade of air decapitated the High Wulf.

Chapter 8

The War of Death's Beginnings (2)

Exploring by following whichever way had the most demons, we eventually came across a suspicious place.

There was a metallic door held shut both vertically and horizontally by chains.

There was an ominous mist leaking out from its gaps.

...This is... mana?

“Daichi.”

Hamakaze seemed to have sensed something as well. She was staring at the closed door fixedly.

...Guess I'll head in?

There's definitely going to be an enemy stronger than any of the ones we've fought so far in there.

And if we beat it, the way down to the next floor should open up to us.

That's been the way so far. There's been strong demons in each of the final rooms on the fifty-first to fifty-ninth floors. If not those, then there's been traps like the Monster House.

“...If I don't keep moving forward... I won't get to take my revenge...”

I stamped any traces of fear that may have crept up in my mind with my hatred.

“...Shall we go?”

I clenched my fists.

“Yes, Daichi.”

“Hamakaze, we’re going with the usual.”

“I understand.”

Hamakaze nodded.

I was on standby, ready to use a **Berserk Tempest**.

Hamakaze rushed in with the daggers she specialized in.

“O’ wind spirits, slice through the air. *Wind Slice!*”

The chains echoed out with loud metallic clangs as they were severed through. Its seal undone, the door began to open on its own.

I couldn’t see through the mist too well. In that case...

“I’ll disperse this mist!!”

Just as the gap was wide enough for a single person to go through, I ran in front of the entrance.

The one to make the first move decides the fight’s tempo. Before moving into the room, I went to open up the fight with a **Berserk Tempest**.

I thrust my hand forward together with the massive amount of mana bundled together before it.

“Revert all to dust and return them to the earth! *Berserk Te—*”

However, I didn’t finish.

My arm arced through the air.

.....Huh?

My arm?

What?

H-Huh?

My mind couldn't keep up. It did feel the pain jolting through my body, however.

"Gaaaaah!?"

Blood continued to gush out of the stump.

An unbearable pain attacked my mind.

Ow, it hurts, it hurts so bad!

It hurts, it hurts, it—it hurts, hurts, hurts, hurts!

"Ugh...!"

I felt vomit filling my throat. As I tried to resist, I fell to my knees and promptly emptied my stomach on the ground.

"Hah... hah! Ah..."

My vision blurred, everything foggy.

Did I lose too much blood?

No, I should think about escaping first.

Let's do that, I don't want to hurt like this. I'll get away, then I'll have Hamakaze heal me...!

Just as I started to try standing back up, the arm I'd used to brace against the ground was severed.

...?

“Uh?”

Lacking any support with both arms now gone, I fell to the ground.

My upper body fully entered the room.

Ah, shit.....

“GUOOOOOOOH!”

I heard something shout.

I looked up to see what that roar came from and—

I stopped seeing anything.

Feeling a sharp pain go through my neck, I lost consciousness.



Darkness. Black. Pitch black.

That’s the only way I could describe this place. My feet weren’t touching the ground. I was floating. And when I tried to move, I felt weirdly sluggish.

[I am glad to meet you, Hero.]

When I turned my body toward the direction of the voice, I saw a woman.

I couldn’t make out much of her face due to the long black hair covering it. For some reason, she stood out in this darkness. She was wearing a jet black dress.

She reached her hand out to me and stepped a little closer.

At that moment, a change occurred in her.

A wild bloodthirst oozing from her, the woman raised the corners of her mouth.

[Welcome home... and take care.]



“Noooooooo!!”

“Kyaaa!?”

“—!”

I jumped toward the girl’s voice. Mounting her, I shoved my palm onto her head.

If I don’t kill her, I’ll be killed!

Even if I have to use all of my mana, I’ll finish this!

“O’ wind spirits, slice through the air!”

“Daichi!!”

“—Huh?”

Hearing my name be called just before I finished the incantation, I stopped.

Upon retracting my hand, I saw a familiar face.

“...Hamakaze?”

It wasn’t that woman.

It was my slave, Hamakaze Shuri.

“Yeah... I am Daichi’s Hamakaze Shuri.”

“N-No way. You’re a fake. I mean, you were just about to kill me...”

I could remember it clearly.

A mysterious woman grabbed my neck...

But the scenery was way different, I was inside the dungeon. Even the single-toned

dilapidated walls were exactly how I recalled them.

What the hell is going on...!?

Who do I kill? Who was trying to kill me? Who will kill who...?

“Please calm down, Daichi.”

Hamakaze’s voice pulled me out of my confusion and back into reality.

“I don’t know what’s made you so confused, but please calm down.”

Seeing me lost and confused, Hamakaze squeezed my hands.

Her warmth and soft voice pervaded my mind and cleared my confusion, unraveling my tangled emotions.

As my head cleared up, I started arranging what had happened piece by piece.

My roughened breath slowly calmed down as well.

“...Daichi... are you alright?”

“Y-Yeah...”

“Really? Thank goodness...”

Hamakaze looked relieved.

It went to show just how abnormal I was a moment ago.

Dammit... I got swept away by my fear of death?

“Um... Daichi?”

“What?”

“If... if you want, I’m alright with continuing...”

“Oh.”

I was still mounted on top of Hamakaze. Her position left her breasts outlined clearly through her shirt.

I realized what she was getting out.

“N-No, that’s not what I was doing. I’ll get off. Just give me a sec first.”

Recovered from my confusion, I wanted to verify something.

There was still the possibility she was an impostor.

“Open.”

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 46

Stamina: 3100

Mana: 3240

Strength: 4080

Resistance: 3400

Dexterity: 2130

Special Abilities:

- **[Heart of Steel]** Double resistance value during combat. Prevents poison, paralysis, hypnosis, and mental corruption 1/3 of the time.
- **[Indomitable Mentality]** Mana cannot go below 100.
- **[Absolute Command]** Appears upon those revived by the Lich King being lower leveled. Any order the slave receives will be followed through with until given authorization to stop.
- **[Magus of Slaughter]** Damage inflicted upon enemies will also damage others of the same species within a 10 meter radius.
- **[Lich King]** Able to form contracts with creatures that have died, reviving them and bending them to your will. Every other time the user dies, gain a slot.
 - Current: 2 Open Slots

Unique Abilities:

- **[Revenge of the Grudgebearer]** No matter how many times you die, gather strength from the abyss of death and resurrect.
 - Current: 6 Deaths

Hamakaze Shuri

Job: High-Grade Slave Lv. 57

Stamina: 2000

Mana: 1750

Strength: 1900

Resistance: 100

Dexterity: 980

Special Abilities:

- **[Auto Heal]** Restore 300 Stamina every 10 minutes.
- **[Loyalty]** When master's life is endangered, all stats increase to 150%.

Special Conditions:

- **[High-Grade Slave]** Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master, Katsuragi Daichi, is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

What was written there was definitely Hamakaze Shuri.

My stats went up, too. The limitation on **Lich King** had increased to three people.

More importantly, my death counter went up to six.

In other words, this isn't a dream or hallucination, this is the world... after I was killed at those doors.

Everything's real...

".....Hah..."

Relaxing, I fell sideways toward the floor.

The sense of security filling me all at once, I lost all traces of tension.

"What's wrong!?"

Hamakaze asked in a panic.

"I'm just a bit tired."

"B-But..."

“Don’t worry... just let me sleep for a bit... I really... can’t...”

Unable to hold off against the wave of drowsiness assaulting me, I fell asleep.

Chapter 9

The War of Death's Beginnings (3)

Having taken a nice, long rest on Hamakaze's soft thighs, I sat near the stairs leading to the fifty-ninth floor.

She was sitting opposite of me. Us being this close to the stairs is so that we can escape in case any unexpected situations occur.

I'll summarize what I heard happened from Hamakaze.

She picked up my lower half and ran. She said that once I died, the enemy didn't continue its assault.

She also said that the figure of what killed me looked to be similar to a human.

"Are you sure that's what you saw?"

"Yeah. Daichi, what killed you wasn't a demon. It was just like us."

A human. In most dungeons, that wouldn't be too surprising. There were people with the adventurer job, after all.

However, there shouldn't be many of those in **Rigal Den**, let alone any of them as far down as the till-now unexplored sixtieth floor.

Well, let's assume what Hamakaze's said so far is true.

If I had to say whether that helped our situation, I'd say no.

"If it *is* a human, maybe they would let you pass if you talk to them?"

"No, I can't see it going that smoothly."

If they didn't want to attack me for some reason, I doubt they would have attacked me

with such hostility right off the bat like that. Being wary against someone you didn't know would be natural enough, but they came at me with the intent to kill before I had a chance to do or say much of anything.

"More or less, I don't think someone that had to be sealed like that would have much of a kind disposition."

"Yeah... that's true."

"Either way, I think that whatever it was that killed me there is going to be important for what happens from here on out."

That strength was beyond abnormal. Compared to it, the demons we've fought so far haven't been worth shit. It was a stark difference.

"What do you mean?"

"If I can defeat it and take it as a strong servant, it should make our dungeon conquering much easier. You might even be able to say that the moment I kill it, we will have completed the dungeon."

"I wonder if this dungeon is here in order to seal it?"

Hamakaze took my opinion and didn't deny it. Rather, she pointed out something I'd missed.

Really, having others that can point out things I overlook is a big help. It's not like I'm perfect, only a fool would ignore other people's thoughts on something. Slave or whatever, I'll use what I can get.

"That sounds reasonable. At any rate though, there's only one way for us to go."

It was easy to say, but it would be a difficult obstacle to actually overcome.

However, there's no way I would stop here. I have to beat the crap out of Samejima.

"Hamakaze. How did I die? What killed me? Tell me anything you remember."

When I said that, Hamakaze made a sketch on the ground using her fingers, explaining

it to me as she went.

“And then you suddenly fell to the ground like a rock, Daichi. After that...”

“I died?”

“Yeah. The rest of what happened is what I said earlier.”

That. I’m caught up on that right there.

Why did the enemy ignore Hamakaze doing that?

As the one to pick me up, she should’ve also been within the enemy’s range.

Was there some sort of reason...?

I definitely wouldn’t have missed the opportunity if it were me. I definitely would have went for the kill.

Why didn’t it attack... maybe it wasn’t that it *didn’t* so much as *couldn’t*?

That room was sealed shut by those chains. That was to make it so that the creature inside the room couldn’t escape.

But Hamakaze was able to easily destroy them with her magic.

“...Huh?”

I felt something off about that.

If the chains sealing it were weak enough to be destroyed by spirit rank magic, it should have been able to release itself.

And yet it still couldn’t leave.

In other words, perhaps the chain wasn’t the only thing stopping it and there’s something that’s keeping it from using its strength outside of the room?

The pieces fell into place.

“Hamakaze. Where was my body when I died?”

“Your corpse? Just inside the entrance... Why? Did you figure something out?”

“...No, it’s just a hunch. It’s a hunch... but I feel like it’s right.”

It can’t leave the room. It can’t do anything outside of the room.

In that case, I have many strategies I can go with.

“It killed me... I’ll have to repay the favor in full, now won’t I...?”

I stood up and slapped dust off my pants. Hamakaze had already tidied herself up and stood next to me.

“Let’s kill that monster.”

“As you wish, Daichi.”

We moved out to gather the things needed for me to implement the strategy I drew up in my head.

Chapter 10

The War of Death's Beginnings (4)

We were in front of that door once again.

The chains that had been holding it closed were gone, but the door was closed, similar to the fifty-first floor's Monster House, telling me for certain that this was an important room.

As I expected.

Mist still wafted out from the gaps around the door, as though time had rewound for this room.

The current me, however, had Enslaved Hero Hamakaze and High Wolves One and Two.

"High Wulf One and Two, leap into the room as soon as the door opens. Hamakaze, protect me with your life."

I gave instructions to my slaves using **Absolute Command**.

It's essential that we do something about that mist so that I can launch an attack. However, whatever's in there won't give me the chance to do that.

According to what Hamakaze said, it didn't chase after us when she ran. I believe that it wasn't that it *didn't* so much as it *couldn't*.

The parts of me that were severed were all what had entered into the room.

It wasn't that my lower half didn't get sliced up since I was dead. It was that whatever it was couldn't exert any of its strength it since it was outside of the room.

Assuming that to be the case, so long as I attack from outside of the room, I should be able to do it in perfect safety.

I explained my hypothesis to Hamakaze while we were getting these High Wolves, of course.

She agreed with me, even going so far as pleading to stay by my side just in case.

And here we are.

“...Daichi.”

“This time, I’ll kill it with **Berserk Tempest**. You need to concentrate fully on protecting me.”

“...Alright.”

Hamakaze readied her daggers and immediately readied herself to cast **Wind** while I stood by with a **Berserk Tempest**.

“Now, Hamakaze! Open the door!”

“Understood!”

Hamakaze opened the heavy door.

That was the signal to start the deathmatch.

“One! Go!”

“*Guoooh!!*”

The howling silver wolf leapt into the death room.

“**GUOOOOW!!**”

A savage cry drowned out the High Wulf’s howl. I didn’t see it, but man did I remember that sound.

The huge shadow it cast was more than enough to tell me *it* was there.

“GUOOOH!!”

The High Wulf was cut down by a brutal sword swing I couldn't even see.

High Wulf Two ran in at that moment.

I fired off my magic at the same time.

“Berserk Tempest!”

A raging gale burst forth from my hand. The mist cleared as it poured out from the room and around us.

“Wind!”

Hamakaze, not wanting our vision to be blocked by the mist, then split it to our left and right.

I hadn't stopped looking into the room during the meanwhile.

There was a metallic clang.

The High Wulf's body was sliced clean through.

The mist clearing, I could see more and more of what was inside of the room.

Once the mist was entirely gone—my eyes opened wide at what it was.

The huge shadow was just an illusion.

It was a woman wearing a black robe.

Her hood flapping in the wind, I came to see her blood-red eyes and hair.

Hamakaze's guess was a slight miss.

It wasn't a human, it was a humanoid.

“...You've got to be kidding me, seriously.”

“...No way...”

It was a legendary existence even in our original world.

The incarnation of fear and dread. A bloodied sword. Red skin. Fiery-red eyes. Two horns sprouting from its head.

Yeah, it was *that*.

A Devil.

“This is the second time we’ve met, ain’t it, Hero?”

Her hostile smile showed off her sharp canines.

My instincts told me she was dangerous.

She gave off the same feeling of bloodlust as *that* woman.

Someone specialized in taking the lives of everyone they laid eyes on.

And right now, she was staring straight at us.

“Hey... how about we start with the killing?”

Slashing through the air, the curtains to the true deathmatch dropped.

The sword slash that the Devil fired off soared toward us. It crossed the boundary that she shouldn’t have been able to attack beyond and—

“What!?”

My presumption proved wrong, I grew confused. Either way, I had to dodge it. Despite that, Hamakaze stood as still as a statue.

Did the bloodlust cause her to freeze up...!?

“JUMP RIGHT!!”

Seeing her unable to move after being seized by the bloodlust, I shouted as loud as I could. Forced to move due to **Absolute Command**, Hamakaze's body jumped to the right toward me as I commanded.

The sword slash hit the dungeon wall, bursting apart. The wall was left uninjured, but it still sounded like an explosion.

"Kuh!!"

The sound was so loud that I thought my eardrums might burst, but I was more concerned by the girl who'd just collapsed next to me.

"Get a hold of yourself, Hamakaze!"

"Sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

Hamakaze wasn't able to get a grip, she was like a frightened child.

Dammit, did she break?

"As expected of our little Mister Hero here, you're still sane after taking my **Devilish Aura** head on eh?"

She ridiculed me under the guise of praise from her room. The Devil was still staring at us from inside it.

"Hey, let the crybaby be and come play with me. The anticipation's driving me nuts."

"...You can't leave though, right? That'd be like going out of my way to cross a falling bridge."

"You know I know why you're here, right? This place is pretty important for you two."

...Come on. She knows why we're here?

She's even calling me Hero.

"Even so, there's no reason for me to fight alone."

“Not like she’s gonna fight anymore. She’ll be stuck like that, my **Devilish Aura** won’t stop unless you defeat me.”

“...You think I’m going to take you at your word?”

...What should I do?

At any rate, I need to know what’s going on with Hamakaze.

“Open.”

The status window appeared once I spoke the keyword. There was a new string of text on Hamakaze’s status.

Special Condition: Mana value is decreased by the difference in levels between the caster and the target x 100. Moreover, it will not recover until the caster either faints or dies.

Mana reduction... so it’s a mental attack? It doesn’t look like it’ll recover over time either, what a crazy ability...

“Get it? Looks like you didn’t go crazy, so you gotta be around as strong as me yeah? I’d love for us to have some pure one-on-one killing time.”

“Tch...”

My remaining mana was cut down to a thousand. I can’t use imperial rank magic.

So I have to fight her with soul or spirit rank magic?

Me. Alone.

“...Don’t be stupid. If I fight you, it’ll be with her as well.”

“With her? She’s pretty much useless, or maybe you have something up your sleeve?”

I kept talking to buy some time. I had to think up some way to deal with her.

...Something up my sleeve, huh. Right now, all that comes to mind is **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**.

...Should I die?

No, that won't work. There wouldn't be anyone to retrieve my body.

Maybe I could escape by ordering Hamakaze to use **Absolute Command**...?

No, there's no way this Devil would ignore her.

If Hamakaze died, that'd be The End. I'd still be able to revive, but there's too much of a gap in time between when I'm revived and when I come back to. The Devil would probably just keep on killing me forever.

In the end, there's no choice but for me to fight her as-is.

I looked back toward the Devil and glared at her.

"Hoh, I take it you finally thought of something? I've been waiting here for a while now, so make sure to at least make this a little fun, got it?"

"You're talking like you could kill me whenever?"

"Of course I am, I'm great at that. Can we start now?"

"...Yeah, let's."

Slapping my cheeks, I fired myself up.

I carried Hamakaze over to a spot where it didn't look like any stray attacks would hit her at and stepped into the Devil's room.

Immediately, her red body shot toward me.

"Kuh!"

I crossed my arms and blocked her punch, lowering my center of gravity so that I wouldn't be shoved back.

“Ooh? How solid.”

“Thanks to you, I’m pretty strong too!”

Latching onto her fist, I twisted it and raised her into the air. Rotating with the rest of her body to follow the throw, she landed and went at me with the sword in her right hand.

“Tch!”

She was aiming for my legs. Forced to let go of her hand to dodge, I got tripped up, destroying my stance. She followed up by casting magic.

“*Devil Flame!*”

“So fast!?”

Omitting the incantation, she manifested a flaming orb immediately and launched it at me. With no way to defend myself against it, I took a direct hit and was blown back.

“Gah!!”

Banging against the wall, my entire body hurt.

I took damage from hitting the wall, sure, but the main problem was that I was lit on fire. It was much, much hotter than that **Fireball** from before. My entire body set ablaze, it felt like my throat was burnt as well.

“O’ water spirits, give me your blessing! *Water Ball!*”

I used a water-type magic to douse the flames.

“Geh!?”

Still coughing and on all fours, I felt her kick me in the gut, launching me into the air. The impact was incomparable to anything Samejima could do.

My body continued flying upward.

Straight into the ceiling.

“Like hell I’m gonna wait!”

She launched another sword slash at me.

I can’t dodge it!

“O’ wind spirits, slice through the air! *Wind Slice!*”

I at least managed to reduce its strength by making it have to go through the wind blade first.

“Gaaah!!”

It squished me against the wall. Feeling my body being sliced through and the burns across my body rip open from the pressure, I bit down on my lips to endure the pain.

What I saw upon looking down with my ever-blurring vision was my enemy, once more preparing to slash at me.

No way, I can’t take another one of those!

“Diiiiiiie!!”

“I refuse!”

Pushing my body to its limit, I forced it to move.

The tip of her attack grazing my cheek, blood flew through the air.

It missed!

Seeing my chance, I used gravity to fall down, accelerating me as I drop-kicked her.

“Raaaah!”

“Not bad! But you’re still too weak!”

However, she was able to easily stop my attack with a single one of her slender hands.

“No way!?”

“Take this!!”

My foot let out a worrying sound. Grabbing on to my foot, the Devil threw me down against the ground.

“Kah...!?”

My chest hurt, I couldn't breathe that well. My right leg was broken and bent in a strange direction, my bone sticking through the skin.

The pain crashed against me like a raging current.

“Ahhhhh!!”

“Are you a rock or some—thing!!”

She thrust her sword at me. Rolling, I dodged it and stood up—but ended up falling back down right away.

Right onto the Devil.

If... If I'm going to have to feel this much pain, just... just...!

“KILL!!”

Suddenly hearing me beg for my own death, the Devil wrinkled her brow.

“Shut up!”

She tried pulling me off her, but I made the best use I could out of my incredibly high strength stat and clung to her.

“Go for the kill! Hurry up! Do it!”

“Yeah, I will but get the f*ck off me!!”

“Your weapon! Your magic! Just do it already!!”

“You little bitch!”

She pushed my face away with her hand and launched a **Devil Flame** at me.

I don't even care about how hot it is, I just want her to go for it.

Quick, before I... faint...

I couldn't see the Devil at that point. All I saw was the new ability I'd gained in the dungeon.

Seizing her robe one last time before I fainted, I clung to her.

You bitch, this isn't over!

“Please, do it...!”

Along with a mouthful of blood, I spat that out like a curse.

“Yeah, with pleasure!”

In response to her voice, the death god before me raised her weapon overhead.

Seeing that, I grinned.

“.....I win.”

The Devil's sword stopped mid-motion.

She was assailed by a sense of discomfort. Little wonder, that.

She had a dagger sprouting from her chest.

“H... How...!?”

“Wind!”

An incantation being completed as though to drown out her words, a large hole opened up in her chest.

The Devil spat a huge mouthful of blood out, barely supporting herself with her sword.

What I saw appear from behind the staggering Devil was this fight’s key player.

“I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry!”

The black-haired, maddened slave with a bloodied dagger in her hand. Someone simply following the orders she was given, Hamakaze Shuri.

“I said it... didn’t I? That I’d... fight, with her...”

I’d definitely said it. I had no intention of fighting solo in this fight.

I’d been planning on fighting together with Hamakaze this entire time.

“...I thought... this was one on one...”

The Devil grimaced in pain. The attack looked like it was proving to be a fatal one after all.

“Like I, care. So long... as I win...”

“You... shit...”

Unable to finish, she collapsed powerlessly to the ground.

Of course, that included me as well, as I was using her as support.

“...I shall bestow you with a new life. A second... life. Make a pact with me and... become my servant... *Binding Resurrection...!*”

I used the last of my strength to turn the Devil into a slave. With that, I escaped the worst case scenario.

...Ah, dammit. I can't move. Everything hurts. I've lost so much blood that I can barely keep my eyes open. It's cold.

Death's coming for me... so I'm going to die again... huh.

...Well, at least this time... I'm thankful for it... maybe.

I won against someone stronger than me. I snatched the win by giving it all I had, thinking carefully, and using everything I could.

I might be dying right now... but I still feel pride welling up in my chest.

...Let's praise Hamakaze when I revive.

Feeling pride in myself for the first time in my life, I died.

Chapter 11

The War of Death's Beginnings (5)

It's the second time I've seen this darkness. I'm not exactly happy about coming here twice in one day either, all the more since I'm feeling so good right now.

"So, you going to kill me again?"

I moved my head to look toward the long-haired woman who had killed me a while ago.

Oh?

I can move my head?

In that case, maybe my body can... nope.

[No.]

Responding with a negative, unlike before, the woman smiled such that I could easily see her delight.

[Thank you.]

"...Huh?"

I didn't exactly expect her to thank me, so I wound up sounding a bit stupid.

[Thank you, I'm grateful.]

"No, hold up! *You* saying that's just making feel anxious!"

[Thank you. Truly, thank you.]

This time, she bowed her head.

...What's with her? What a strange person.

...Maybe she isn't as bad as I thought she was?

She did something that might've turned into a trauma for me, but... I'll be the bigger person and let bygones be bygones!

[Thank you.]

"It's fine already, don't worry about it."

[Truly?]

"Yeah."

[Then—die.]

"Yea—-huh?"



...The worst possible way to wake up. Why do I have to have to dream about myself getting killed each and every f*cking time?

I'll definitely repay her the next time we meet.

Definitely.

"...Daichi, you're awake?"

Hearing a familiar voice upon waking up, I saw the dangerous duo.

...Huge. The view from down here's amazing.

No, they're just beautiful, beautiful... wait, is this even the time to be saying that? Idiot.

"...Hamakaze."

“Yes? What is it?”

“...You’re giving me your lap to use as a pillow again?”

There was a soft elasticity against the back of my head. It’s a sensation I’ve felt before.

Hamakaze’s, my female classmate’s, wholesome thighs.

She, who was now my slave, was once the most popular girl in the class.

Thinking about it like that, I should be happy.

“Yep! I thought it would please you, Daichi.”

A slight blush making its way to her cheeks, she gave a slight smile.

...That’s strange. Hamakaze looks prettier than she did before.

The tension’s been increasing, so maybe I’m getting weird?

“...Alright. I’ll stay like this for a bit longer.”

“Do my thighs feel good?”

“...Nope, not at all.”

I turned over, causing her to let out a laugh.

I’m pretty sure she figured out I did that to hide my reddening face.

Eventually, Hamakaze started to pat my head.

It might be because I just went through a battle to the death, but it felt incredibly comforting. Do all girls have such a high tolerance level?

Far from being able to touch girls, I haven’t even really talked to them until now, so it’s not like I have any clue... wait, what am I teasing myself here for?

I kept going back and forth in my head, so I decided to get up and put Hamakaze’s head

in my lap instead.

“I’m switching to offense.”

“U-Umm, Daichi?”

I moved my hands through her hair, not mentioning any of the blood or crud in it.

Doing so much that her hair got this dirty, she’s been giving it her all too, huh...

“...Daichi.”

“What?”

“I’m... I’m so happy, right now.”

“R-Really...”

Please don’t.

As far as relationships and stuff goes, it’s all too much for a virgin like me. I couldn’t even look Hamakaze straight in the eyes.

“...Hamakaze.”

“What is it?”

“After we escape this place, I’ll grant any one wish, so think about it.”

“.....Okay!”

Just as the mood started to feel like some romantic comedy, I saw someone gazing at us silently with cold eyes.

“.....Ah, so you were here too, huh?”

The source of that gaze was a certain red Devil, her crimson-eyed gaze piercing us.

“You forgot about me!?”

Somewhat vexed at her presence being forgotten, the woman puffed out her cheeks in a very easy to understand manner.

“I’m just messing with you, like I’d forget the person who killed me.”

I shrugged. Yeah, I won’t forget.

“You already killed me before, so we’re even now.”

“Don’t f*ck with me!!”

The Devil struck her hand against the ground.

“You killed me yeah!? Look! I should be dead!”

The Devil tossed off the robe she was wearing.

Her body was laid bare for all to see. The hole that should have made an opening in her chest was gone, replaced by two violent bulges going well out of their way to make their presence known.



“I should be dead, but here I am, alive! My body even turned back to normal! What the f*ck did you do to me!?”

“What, would you prefer being dead still?”

“Dying shamelessly upon losing is us Devils’ way!”

“And I should care why?”

“Huh!?”

The Devil, having suffered the extreme disgrace of being alive after a loss, was furious at us.

She might even come at me here soon. Well, not like I need to worry.

Why? Because she’s already *mine*.

“I turned you into my slave.”

“...Huh? Me, a slave...? Screw that...”

“You can check your status if you want to see. Go ahead, give it a go.”

“Y-You’re full of shit... If you’re lying... wait, no way...”

“Hurry up and see for yourself.”

“...Open.”

Her information appeared.

Akina Leadred

Job: High-Grade Slave Lv. 74

Stamina: 5200

Mana: 3800

Strength: 6700

Resistance: 2900

Dexterity: 4000

Unique Abilities:

- **[Devilish Aura]** Mana value is decreased by the difference in levels between the caster and the target x 100. Moreover, it will not recover until the caster either faints or dies.
- **[Devil Flame]** Requires 100 Mana to invoke. Omits the need for an incantation and strikes with a might equivalent to a royal rank flame orb.
- **[Curse of the Demon God]** Able to stop serving a Hero. Reduces all status values by 1000. Moreover, magic will become unusable.
 - Removal condition fulfilled. Remove condition? Please answer with YES or NO.

Special Condition:

- **[High-Grade Slave]** Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master, Katsuragi Daichi, is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

“...What the?”

The Devil opened her eyes wide, slowly understanding her position here.

She didn't have any of that indignancy she'd had a bit ago.

She sat down cross-legged and immersed herself in thought.

“No way. But, hmm, in that case...”

She mumbled to herself for a while, but then suddenly, the Devil's—no, Akina Leadred's shoulders started to tremble. I may have been the one to tell her to give it a look, but I'm the one that wants to be surprised.

I'm not sure why, but she doesn't have special abilities. She has unique abilities, the same as me.

“Hey, Leadred. There's something I want to ask—”

—you. I stopped before I finished my sentence.

Because Leadred started to chuckle.

She gradually grew louder, eventually blurting out ambiguous things.

“I see... so this Hero, he’s... our’s huh...? Kuhahaha! Interesting! Very interesting! That woman... a human... she finally... ahahahahaha!!”

Leadred continued to laugh as she banged a fist against her knee.

“Hey, Hero!”

“Wh-What? Don’t say that you don’t want to be my slave.”

I was a bit flustered at her calling for me so suddenly, but I managed to cover it up a bit.

My dignity as her master will go away if I shirk away here.

“No! I’d be happy to serve you! But answer me this first so I can know whether you’re my true master or not! Yeah!?”

True master...?

What’s she going on about?

Even without whatever it is, I’m still going to be your master.

Did one of the gears in her head break from the resurrection?

I was just questioning Leadred’s sanity, but she seemed to take my silence as an affirmative and asked me the question.

“You! In your unique abilities—you have **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**, don’t you!?”

“—!!”

A tremble ran through me.

What’s going on? How did she find out about my ability!?

Did she see my status window somehow!?

...No, I need to calm down!

I can use my head to make the best decision. Right now, Leadred is already my slave. She can't attack me.

And if we end up fighting together, I'll need to eventually explain my ability to her anyway.

There's no need for me to get so flustered over her knowing it.

She already declared that she would serve me. She's just making sure that I'm her true master.

Me telling her the truth about it shouldn't be a problem.

"...Yeah. It's true, I have an ability named **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**. If you think I'm lying, I can show you my status."

"I see... so then you're..."

Leadred staggered over to me with shaky steps.

Hamakaze and I prepared for the unlikely chance she decided to attack, but it ended up being needless worrying.

Leadred stopped, kneeling down on one knee and bowing her head.

"We have waited for you... no, for Your Honor. We hoped. We wished. For Your Honor, the one suited to reigning all—"

Then, she concluded.

"—For the Hero who shall guide us, save us."

"Me... a Hero?"

"I was sealed in this place so that I could serve you. To show our Hero the way to liberate my other sealed comrades. I have obeyed my order, always. And now, we shall destroy the human race together."

Oh, shit. My head hurts...

"...Give me a sec."

I stopped her, trying to hold back the headache.

"I'm already a Hero. You get that part, right? Rather, that's all I should have to say."

"Yeah, I'm aware. Your Honor is a Hero."

"Right? I can't go and destroy the human race, now can I?"

I have no idea what that simple-minded Goddess would do to me if I did that.

She may even get so angry that she erases my existence entirely.

"Your Honor being a Hero is exactly why your goal must be to wipe out the human race."

"I've never heard about any Heroes ending humanity though!?"

Leadred tilted her head to the side slightly.

I get the feeling we're not on the same page here...

She does seem to be aware that I'm a Hero at least. Maybe her definition of Hero is different?

"Leadred. Tell me what a Hero is to you."

Looking as though she was planning on following my orders after all, Leadred began to talk about what she envisioned a Hero to be.

"A Hero is someone who does their utmost to protect us from the cruel monsters that destroy our homes and take our belongings. Someone who has the courage to take the lead and strike at the enemy, a person unafraid to use their bodies to protect their allies. Someone who alights hope in our hearts, someone who drives off the darkness of despair."

She started to look at me with a reverent gaze midway through, speaking as though intoxicated.

“...I see.”

I see that I don't understand what's going on at all.

The kind of Hero she described was exactly the kind of Hero I see upon imagining them.

Looks like I'm going to need to find some place to settle down and talk about this with her again later.

Come to think of it, I forgot after she called me her Hero, but there's something else that's really important.

“Leadred. There's something else I'd like to ask you...”

“So long as I can, I will tell you anything.”

“Will I be able to return to the surface by going to the bottom floor of this dungeon?”

Our original goal was to escape here and give Samejima the same pain he'd given us.

The faster we can get out of here, the better.

Rather, I don't think I can beat someone stronger than Leadred.

“I am already getting the teleportation magic formation ready, so there should be no problems if we use that.”

“I see! You're getting it ready then?”

Wait, she's getting it ready?

Not it's getting ready?

My question about it was quickly resolved.

“This is the final floor of **Rigal Den**. I, Akina Leadred, was serving as its Guardian.”

She spoke with a smile entirely unlike what she had during our fight.

“Dungeon Clear. Congratulations, Hero.”

Chapter 12

I'm Back, Surface

"You sure? To be honest, Hamakaze had already lost herself the moment you launched that first attack. Your **Devilish Aura** stripped away her mind after all."

"But she was still able to move?"

"That's because of an ability I have named **Absolute Command**."

"So it was that!"

Leadred appeared to already know about it.

I guess with her already knowing about my being a Hero and my **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**, it should go without saying she knew about my **Absolute Command** as well.

"Hamakaze showed that she was still able to move when I commanded her to dodge that first attack of yours. That's why I decided to fight you."

"...You're saying that that was when you came up with that trap?"

I was afraid of dying again, so I made a plan to use in the fight.

Entirely unlike the musclehead I was fighting.

"You did beat me around like a rag doll though. But well, it turned out alright. My role was just to distract you. After that, I just needed to give instructions in a way that wouldn't get your attention."

"So that shouting was..."

"Exactly. The shouting was the signal to kill you. She heard me and pierced you with her dagger and invoked her magic."

“I was tricked, then defeated admirably... I guess? Being killed like that is refreshing.”

Leadred guided Hamakaze and I to the back of the room.

My mood?

As good as could be. That much should be obvious given that I’m talking about my strategy so much.

I mean, I cleared the dungeon. It was as painful as it is joyful, but seriously. I did it.

Today’s an awesome day. Let’s make it a holiday. Yeah, let’s.

I was so happy that I could actually feel my elation.

“You seem happy, Daichi.”

“You can tell?”

“Yeah, I want to be able to understand everything you think and feel, Daichi.”

...You should stop with that, I’m not used to getting so much pure goodwill from anyone.

If not, my weakness at it will show up on my face. It’d get misunderstood.

Sorry for having such stupid desires.

“—Hero, this way.”

The time arrived sooner than expected due to Hamakaze and I talking and feeling safe for the first time in ages.

The room was simple, lacking much of anything at all.

The only thing in the cubic room was a magic formation.

It looked as though it was constructed for the sole purpose of being used to teleport.

I'm getting a bit anxious here...

"Leadred. Will this really bring us to the surface?"

"It will work so long as you fill it with mana and recite **Teleport**. Just make sure to do it at the same time as me. If not, the magic formation won't work and the entrance will seal itself off, followed by the dungeon's termination."

"That's a terrifying thought..."

"It's because you first have to defeat the Guardian to enter this teleportation room. It'd be like me taking everything down with me."

I guess I can understand.

I probably would have made a similar trap.

After giving hope that they'd finally be able to return to the surface, I'd dash that hope and let them fall into despair.

I want to do that to Samejima.

Seeing as how she could make a trap like this, I think we're going to get along nicely.

"Well then, are you two ready?"

"I'm ready whenever."

"Yeah, no problems here."

We joined our hands together to form a ring in the middle of the room.

Once we started to fill it with mana, a clear blue light filled the room.

Tiny, snow-like crystals formed in the air, dancing as though to bless us.

"Let's go, then. Three, two, one—"

" " " *Teleport!!* " " "

Blue sky, white clouds. A sun blazing brilliantly.

No smell of blood, no stale air, and no walls surrounding us.

Looking about, it was a green meadow as far as the eye could see.

A gentle breeze brushed my cheeks.

I'm back from that hell.

I'm back...!

Emotions welled up from the bottom of my heart.

Unable to endure those emotions, I shouted out with all I could.

"I'M BAAAAACK!!"

Eleven days since I came to this other world.

Four days since my classmates had forsaken me.

With seven deaths total—I cleared the dungeon **Rigal Den**.

Chapter 13

Trance Labyrinth (1)

There existed two goddesses in this world. However, they belonged to opposing sides.

Goddess Claria. The great goddess all of us humankind worship. Lauded to be a beauty tempered through many centuries of refinement, it's said that she was a wonderful woman of bountiful love.

Then there was the goddess who opposed that goddess.

Her name: Messiah. The very incarnation of evil, she controlled demons. Causing all sorts of brutalities, she invaded our towns and took them for her own. It's said she left no survivors.

These two warring goddesses involved the entire world in their conflict.

Claria, to defend the people. Messiah, to seize the world.

Their strengths virtually even, the careful balance tilted all at once due to a certain existence.

That existence was Hero Terias.

Having received Claria's divine blessing, he held a powerful ability and used it to defeat each and every one of the demons Messiah sent at him.

Then, finally, Claria and the Hero succeeded in sealing Messiah away.

Rostalgia knew peace once more—



“—Phew...”

I closed the book I was reading.

I gained the knowledge I wanted with this world's history books.

I was currently at the fourth floor of the royal library, a part of the history area.

There was something that I wanted to do before we set out for the next dungeon, so I was still in Wrystonia.

For lodging, we had a three-person room at an inn. To get the money for it, I pawned off a gem Leadred had.

A Guardian's finances really are different, huh.

The royal library required an entrance fee as well, so I got that from Leadred as well.

A slave's things are their master's things. I shouldn't care about it. I shouldn't care... at all...

As I was reading and struggling with a conflict to my pride as a man, someone came up behind me and spoke.

"Daichi. Everything's ready."

The girl's name was Hamakaze Shuri. My very first slave.

Apparently, it looked like she cleared the mission she imposed on herself.

"Really now?"

I put my book down onto the mountain of them next to me and took her hand.

"Alright then, show me the way."

"Certainly! I'd be delighted to."

Hamakaze snuggled up close to me.

...It felt nice so I didn't say anything... It went without saying that the looks we got

from everyone else hurt, though.

What Hamakaze meant by *everything* earlier was the reward I'd promised her.

She wasn't wearing her usual adventurer clothing. Recently, she'd been wearing a maid outfit. Same with Leadred.

When I asked why they were wearing that, Hamakaze just answered by saying she heard that boys liked that kind of thing.

It wasn't much different from attitude change she had down in the dungeon, though.

"You have some strange tastes, don't you. For you to want to be with a guy like me..."

The reward Hamakaze decided to ask for was for us to be together for the day. In other words, she wanted to be with me.

"Meanie."

"Why?"

"You should know how I feel."

"...I have no clue."

Recently, Hamakaze started to take a more proactive attitude. I knew why. I knew what she felt, too.

She's in a position where she could be abandoned whenever.

That thought was definitely pervading her mind. Even I'd been like that in the past.

Playing the jester so that you won't be hated. Wearing however many masks you need.

Her skinship here is just another part of that. That's why I'm not hoping for anything weird. Right now, the one who's hurting the most is Hamakaze herself.

While that is true, the dilemma here is that I can't release her from her chains—from me.

There's nothing else I can do but to accompany her like this every so often.

"So, what're we going to do? Don't hold back now, you've got me all day today."

"Right... umm."

She stopped for a moment. However, she then continued to talk, glancing to and from me all the while.

"Honestly, I just want to go to one place. I've wanted to go there with you this whole time."

"Couldn't you have asked to go there for your reward then?"

"No, it would've been my loss that way."

"You're pretty shameless, aren't you?"

"I guess you're just rubbing off on me then, Daichi."

I might be, so I couldn't exactly say anything in response.

"Well, alright. Where did you want to go then? Give it a go."

"...Please don't say no, okay?"

"I won't break my promise, just say it."

"Alright. The place I want to go to is..."

After pausing a moment, Hamakaze smiled in looked almost like loneliness before telling me where.

"—The royal palace."

Since coming here, all I was met with were weird looks. Struggling by myself, suffering, being abandoned, being eaten.

The place it all started.

Wrystonia's royal palace.

"Man, it still looks huge, doesn't it?"

Likely due to being fortified against incoming assaults, the gate was pretty big.

I didn't hear any response. There was no one else around us. It was silent.

"....."

She just kept staring at one spot.

I didn't know what so special about that spot, but I didn't think it was something I needed to know either.

"....."

She just kept standing there in silence, staring at it.

Like a doll. Like she'd lost her soul.

Tears trickled down her cheeks.

I wonder what she's thinking about?

It wouldn't be weird for her to be here, normally. From what I understand, she only allied with me in the dungeon out of her fear of *death*.

Same for her revenge and her goodwill for me, she might only be doing that because she thinks she has to to keep staying alive.

So when she said she wanted to come here, all I could feel was a cold *oh* feeling.

".."

My chest hurt.

It was only a short moment, but it felt like it took ages as she turned back to me.

“...Daichi.”

“What?”

“...I’m happy I could come back here.”

“How come?”

—Because I can see everyone again.

That’s all I could figure she’d say next.

But my prediction turned out to be off.

“—Because I figured out my feelings are the real deal.”

Hamakaze was smiling.

She ran up to me, who was stuck there in blank surprise, and hugged me.

My mind finally thawed and started to work again.

“Hamakaze?”

“I saw Samejima from here.”

“...So you’re saying that your feelings for him are real, then?”

When I said that, Hamakaze looked like she was taken aback.

“That’s not what I meant... Wait, are you *jealous*?”

She immediately went back to smiling though. Smiling as though in tease.

No, it’s just, well, *that*. I was just confirming so that I didn’t assume wrong that she meant her feelings for me and go on the offense, making it some horrible

misunderstanding like I did in the past. I was just confirming!

“Anyway, if not that, then feelings for who?”

“With all due respect, you’re being pretty roundabout here, Daichi.”

“You knew that already though, yeah?”

“Yeah. But, Katsuragi... that’s what I like about you.”

“——”

A surprise confession.

My mind stopped working yet again.

“I know that I’m being selfish, but please hear me out.”

She gazed into my eyes.

“Katsuragi, I like that no matter how much I complain or say bad things, you’re still kind to me.”

“You’re just imagining it. You can still take that back.”

“Katsuragi, I like that you did your best to become stronger so that I wouldn’t die.”

“I-I just wanted to have a strong tool. I wasn’t thinking about you at all.”

“For that, you even went through a horrible role back there. Katsuragi, I like that you gave me a reason to live.”

“N-No... I just...”

She held my mouth shut with her finger.

“Katsuragi, no matter what you say or think, it doesn’t matter. My feelings for you won’t change.”

She brought her face close to mine.

...No matter how many times I look at her, she's so beautiful.

Her cheeks were dyed a slight pink, her eyes moistened by tears. Flowing black hair, tender pink lips.

Her gaze grew warm. At a distance where I could hear her breathing, her nose touched mine.

Our lips met.

"I love you, Katsuragi."

My second kiss from her tasted sweet.

"Hamakaze, you..."

Should I believe her?

No, that's not it. Thinking about stuff like that's bad.

What am I doing here doubting someone who's shown me so much goodwill?

"...Will you accept me?"

It was the same question she asked me before.

I can't answer her halfassedly this time.

I'm being desired by her. This is the first time I've been desired by anyone.

—No, that's not it. Stop trying to find a reason. I already know, don't I?

Right here... right here is the girl who'll probably become my special person.

"Shuri."

I pat her head. From there, I moved my hands down through her hair and onto her

shoulders.

I could feel her trembling with my fingers. She was nervous. Or maybe it was me doing the trembling?

“.....”

Hamakaze closed her eyes. I know what that meant as well.

She was waiting.

For me.

“...Shuri.”

“.....Nn.”

This time, I'll be the one to kiss her. I brought my face closer—

Chapter 14

Trance Labyrinth (2)

Having left the royal palace behind, we were looking through the kingdom's largest trade district.

It really was bustling in activity. There were tons of shops and even more customers filling them, it seemed as though they were thriving quite well.

What stood out in particular among them was a shop selling weapons and armor.

There were rumors going about concerning the Heroes summoned by the kingdom saying that they made it to the fifty-first floor of **Rigal Den** and making it back safely.

It also looks like the Monster House's existence is well-known now, too. Skilled adventurers were grouped together preparing to head down into **Rigal Den**.

Their goal was obvious. If they managed to make it through a part of the dungeon that not even those Heroes could, they could work for the kingdom. That simple goal was what drove this rush.

"There really are so many things, aren't there!"

Shuri was looking at all of the various items for sale, her sparkling eyes darting to and fro between them.

I wonder if all girls like shopping so much?

"Daichi! Let's take our time looking around later!"

"Yeah, sure, sure. We have the money. There's something you want to buy, right?"

"Yeah!"

Lots of adventurers inevitably meant lots of guys.

In other words, as someone walking around with such a pretty maid, I was being glared at by a lot of people. There were even a few people trying to rip me off by asking for crazy prices for flowers.

“Hey, you there. You got yourself a pretty good woman, eh? How about you let me have *geh*—!?”

I kept getting provoked.

Retaliating to his glaringly obvious provocation, I stripped him of everything that looked like it was worth something. The look on his face was glorious.

He kept on pleading for mercy, but I pretended to not hear him. If he wanted that, he shouldn't have acted like. He should be happy I only went that far after he made a move on my woman.

“Daichi, we're here.”

“Oh, so this is the Adventurer's Guild...!”

Hamakaze and I had arrived at the Adventurer's Guild. This was our original destination.

Also, as we'd decided to head to the next dungeon, we'd be leaving the city in two more days.

“...Oooh.”

I let out a gasp in admiration. Passing through the door, I could see just how big it was.

With a wide, long room, there was a small bar area far in.

There was a wooden counter split up into seven areas, each area having its own window. Each one was responsible for something. Starting from the right side, there was Registration, Quest Reception, and Payment Reception, each having two windows.

This time, however, I ignored all of those.

My goal was the last counter area—Information Sales.

I told them what I wanted information on.

The information I received was concerning a certain dungeon.

It looked as though it had currently been conquered up until its twenty-seventh floor. As for how fast it's being cleared... like molasses, really.

It's going so slowly because the dungeon is like a labyrinth with complex paths needed to take in order to finally reach each of the stairs.

Moreover, the walls and floors are mirror-like crystals, making it easy to lose your way.

Because of those reasons, it was given the name **Trance Labyrinth**.

After purchasing a map of the labyrinth and various supplies we'd need, we spent the rest of our free time to look around the shopping district as I'd promised.

We looked around clothing shops, book shops, greengrocers, food stalls, restaurants, general stores, even slave dealers.

“Daichi! What do you think of this one?”

What Shuri came out of the fitting room wearing was an orange dress.

Innocence was the first thing that came to my mind upon seeing her.

Her being shorter than the norm turned into one of her good points. Her innocent appeal went up by her choosing an outfit like this dress.

It was only a single color, but since it had a little bit of a gradient, it didn't have a bad balance to it.

She spun around in place and the hem fluttered, letting me catch a peek of her slender white legs.

Dangerous. Very dangerous.

Forcing myself to look up, the first thing I saw was her collarbone, followed by her thin neck, then her childlike face... she was looking at me, her head tilted to the side. Light sweat gave her face a charming sheen.

Gah, she's so cute.

"Daichi?"

"...It's nothing."

"But why'd you sit down so suddenly then? Did you hurt yourself?"

"N-No! I-I just didn't want to stand anymore, that's all."

Please don't ask my why.

"O-Okay?"

Fortunately, Shuri didn't seem to feel like inquiring any further.

"So please, just buy that. It really suits you. See, the price is a good match."

"Yeah! I'll buy this one then!"

Shuri ran over to the counter to buy it.

And I somehow managed to keep my pride as a man.

"Aah! Today was so much fun!"



After that, we went around window shopping, ate a meal, and after having a generally good date, we returned to the inn.

“That was fun.”

I was pulled this way and that across the city and was honestly tired, but after hearing Shuri say how much she enjoyed it, I didn't feel like I lost out on anything.

“Still though, you pretty much only talked with me, are you sure that's all you want?”

In the end, the only thing I bought for her was that single dress.

Other than that, we really only walked around talking with each other.

“Yep! I'm sure as sure can be!”

“You don't have to hold back if you have something you want—you know that, right? You played a huge role in the dungeon back there.”

“...You know, Daichi, girls can like more than just having people buy them stuff.”

I think I hit a nerve. She looked like she was pouting.

“That's not what I meant, but I apologize if I said something wrong.”

“You don't have to apologize, just listen to me, okay?”

Shuri clasped my hands.

“Girls like being near the ones they love, feeling their warmth, spending their days together with them... just that's enough to make us very happy.”

“.....”

Her grasp grew stronger. Her cheeks were red. It wasn't due to the evening sun, either.

She was probably embarrassed.

I was embarrassed, too.

It was like it was getting hotter.

My heart was pounding.

I truly felt that I could stare into her eyes forever.

Chapter 15

Trance Labyrinth (3)

The time changed to night, the location to our lodgings, **Wrystonia's Moon**.

Two days' stay with morning and evening meals costs a total of 10,000 Col. I could tell from what I saw back on the quest board in that Adventurer's Guild from earlier, but this is a pretty decent inn.

Subjugating fifty Rigals gives 5,000 Col. Shit pay is shit.

Us even staying here is thanks to Leadred.

And right then, Leadred was standing in front of me in a maid outfit. I can't even anymore.

"Welcome back, Hero, Shuri."

The reason her phrasing and tone went back to normal because I asked her to.

I mean, there's no way I could've left it like that.

That said, she went with talking to me like a 'guy friend'. Or maybe that's just how she prefers to talk?

She wouldn't budge on calling me Hero, though, which killed my hopes.

"I'm back. Sorry for being so sudden with it, but about heading to the dungeon day after tomorrow—"

"Hero."

Leadred spoke, interrupting me.

"Hm? What's up?"

“I actually managed to come across some good information.”

She unfolded a piece of paper that was in her pocket and handed it over to me.

Leadred said that she'd gone to secretly gather intelligence today. It's probably about something that'll get in the way of us conquering the dungeon.

Putting that thought aside, I looked over the paper.

“...Eh?”

About halfway through reading it, I was surprised.

You're kidding me... Hey, seriously now...

“Hah... ahahahaha!!”

I couldn't hold back my laughter.

It was hilarious.

Incredibly so.

This has got to be what people mean by divine ordinance.

“Daichi? What does it say?”

Shuri looked at the paper from behind me. I passed it over to her.

“See for yourself.”

Taking it, she read the page.

She soon reacted the same as me, surprised.

It was recruitment guidelines to be an escort.

Not an escort for some big shot merchant or lord though, oh no. The page was for

escorting—

[Hero Escort Quest. We are looking for those to work as escorts for traveling to **Trance Labyrinth**. Social status irrelevant. Strength desired.]

—the Unlucky Heroes, my classmates.

“So what’s our Hero Enslavement Strategy?”

“We could leave Samejima alive, not killing him while we pick off his companions one by one, or maybe confine them? Those guys’ll definitely start doubting and blaming each other.”

“Nah, I’ll kill them for a bit then make them my slaves. That way, I’ll be able to avenge these past years and work them all to the bone. I can just sell the women off to brothels if I get tired with them, I can also release them if they’re not worth the slave slot. I’ll be able to see them suffer even more that way, two birds one stone.”

“Sounds good.”

“Alright!”

We looked over the flyer and rearranged our plans for the future.

[The Heroes wound up losing their fighting spirit. They need to grow accustomed to dungeons and conquer them in order for them to regain confidence in themselves, so they’re looking for escorts to cooperate with them.]

Summarizing all the stories Leadred overheard, that’s basically what’s going on.

If it’s this kingdom, the *escorts* are obviously going to be treated as *shields*.

Pawns to be cast away at the first sight of danger.

The city’s adventurers seem to be aware of that as well, so it seems that there hasn’t really been anyone applying at all.

I mean if you were confident enough in your skill to act as their escort, wouldn’t it be better to just aim to assault the dungeon yourself? Everyone’s got to be thinking why

should they bother doing something as annoying as being the Heroes' escort?

I wonder if that Ginger bastard even realizes that? If he does, then he's a foolish king for putting out a quest like this.

That our discussion is progressing towards accepting the quest is amusing. To us, the answer's obvious.

Every last one of us holds a grudge against those Heroes.

"Alright, now that we've decided on what we're going to do, let's give out the assignments. I'll be the only one to accept the quest. You two will head to the labyrinth. Any objections?"

"Eeh!? I'm not going to go with you?"

"Daichi! What about me?"

"Yeah. Shuri, they know your face. And you, you're not even human in the first place."

"...Oh well."

"Yeah, can't be selfish here."

The two withdrew. However, proportional to what I can't do, the girls have a lot they need to prepare for.

It has to do with what I came up with the moment I heard about this. I've been cursing those bastards and thinking up ways to get my revenge on them every day, so I have a lot of ideas when it comes to what to do with them.

I think I'll be using one of those methods this time.

Well, I have a lot of things I need to check with Leadred before I can implement it though.

"Leadred, I have some things I need to ask you. Can you answer them?"

"Yeah, of course. I'll answer anything I can."

“Good, then first off...”

I started to explain the revenge scenario I’d constructed in my mind to her. Getting her advice and checking on exactly what I’d need to do it, I pieced it all together.

We kept going back after forth until the plan was **perfect**.

It was day break when we were finally satisfied and went to bed.

My body shaken and warm sunshine making its way through the open curtain, I opened my eyes.

It appeared that Shuri woke me up for some reason.

“Good morning, Daichi.

“Morning.”

Rubbing my eyes, I greeted her back.

I didn’t sleep that long, but it was a good rest.

A moment’s negligence wasn’t allowed in the dungeon. Moreover, with its hard floors, it was a poor environment both physically and mentally.

Compared to that, I had a soft bed here. There was no risk to my life, either. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to call this place heaven in comparison.

“Looks like you had a nice rest.”

“Well, yeah. I feel like I could sleep anywhere as long as it’s not a dungeon.”

“Yeah.”

She smiled in agreement.

Seeing that smile, I embraced her small body. Not resisting, she settled into my arms.

I buried my face into her neck and smelled that faintly sweet scent peculiar to women.

“So relaxing...”

“D-Daichi, we have a lot to do today, so we shouldn't we hurry up and start?”

“I need to replenish my Shurinium first. It's a great drug. Gives me courage.”

“...Oh well then.”

She seemed to understand what I wanted to say.

I didn't want to say it since it's pathetic, I'm seriously grateful that she takes my feelings into consideration like that.

A dozen or so minutes later, I let go of Shuri.

After eating breakfast, we separated into two groups. I was a bit sad that we wouldn't be able to see each other for a while, but I controlled myself and just pat the two on the head.

“Hero. Let's give it our all so that we can smile next we meet.”

“Daichi, good luck.”

“I'll meet you two there. Don't overwork yourselves.”

“I know.”

“Don't worry about it, I'll protect her. Cya.”

Saying that, the two of them shouldered their luggage and left the inn.

After seeing them off until they were out of sight, I started working on my part.

I'd sent a letter to the royal palace yesterday stating that I wanted to accept the escort work and got a reply saying that they wanted me to take the exam this morning.

They wanted to test my abilities.

I was wearing an iron longsword with leather armor, looking like an adventurer in every respect. I had potions for emergencies in my pouch, along with medicinal herbs meant to treat poison and paralysis.

And now, right in front of me, was someone I hated—Ginger.

“So you’re Yuuji, then?”

Yuuji was the alias I came up with. It was the name I registered at the Adventurer’s Guild with yesterday, so there’d be no problem in using it.

By the way, I took the chance to register when we went out to shop. I didn’t know that you couldn’t even buy stuff here without being registered at the guild. Thanks to that, I have yet another embarrassing memory to deal with.

That aside, he used my name, so I guess it’s fine even for a newcomer like me. It’s actually probably easier for them to deal with people in my position as shields, honestly.

“Yeah, I’m Yuuji. I wanted to help, so I applied.”

Hiding my true thoughts on the matter, I played the part and bowed my head.

“Hmph. Then let me see your strength. We’ll be entrusting important personnel to you, after all.”

“Yes, with pleasure... What should I do? Should I show you my magic?”

“Yes, yes, that’s fine. I just need to see how strong you are.”

“Understood. I’ll show you now, then.”

Everything proceeding as planned, I used spirit rank magic back to back and finished off with **Flame Ball**, a soul rank magic.

I compared Samejima and the others’ abilities with this world’s common sense and adjusted my strength to be around the upper lower-class so as to not arouse suspicion.

Let's just say that it was enough to please the foolish king.

Receiving notification of being accepted, I was guided by one of the kingdom's soldiers. From what he said, we would be leaving for the sortie right away. It looked like this soldier and I would be taking turns being their nanny.

That made things easier for me. Strangling him so there wouldn't be any traces of blood as soon as we were alone together, I made him one of my pawns. I was wanting an insider to use, so that worked out nicely.

His misfortune aside, I came to know that our guess of this being the kingdom's attempt to have the Heroes quickly regain their dignity was correct.

That worked out for me, so I had nothing to add.

Having him explain various things concerning our task, we walked through long, quiet passageways with no one in them.

"There are four heroes that you have been given charge of, Daichi."

"Just four?"

That was way less than I thought there'd be. Only four of the twenty-nine, huh...

"Yeah. Many of the Heroes remember the fear they felt from the last sortie... Most of them still hold that pain in their minds."

"...Pathetic."

Even though I was the one to get eaten by demons because of you all...

Let's stop there. I'm getting too angry.

I clenched my fists and endured the anger.

"So what? These four are the ones who got rid of that pain or something?"

“Yes. Besides them, ten others are alright. They divided the into three groups this time so that they can acquire experience efficiently. The group you’re in charge of is well-balanced, Daichi.”

“Oh, too bad.”

“What do you... Ah, we’re here.”

“Alright. You can leave now... Right. Go finish preparing so we can leave.”

Saying that, I drove the soldier away.

“Understood. Excuse me, then.”

With a bow, the man went back the way we came.

...They won’t see through me, right?

I still felt a bit anxious, but I managed to convince myself that they can’t hurt me.

“...Okay.”

I confronted the door in front of me. When I open this door, *they* will be there.

The people who thoroughly trashed me and threw away Shuri.

...I got plenty of strength from Shuri this morning... I can do this. I won’t wait.

Putting my hand on the doorknob, I sighed.

“...It’s time.”

Turning the knob, I opened the door.

There was a black-haired guy standing by himself, a dyed-blond girl, a bespectacled girl with braids, and a girl wearing her hair in a side tail.

I didn’t see Samejima there.

But that's alright.

I'll make sure he gets the best of the punishments.

It wouldn't be interesting if I didn't save him for the finale.

Before I get to that, shouldn't I have some fun with these ones?

With this, it starts—let the curtain rise on our revenge drama.

Chapter 16

Guide Us, Hero (1)

“So you’re the guy who’s supposed to be guarding us this time huh? Yuuji or something?”

The person who spoke was the sole male in the party I was tasked to guard.

A person I remembered well.

One of Samejima’s entourage, Mahara Keito.

He hadn’t changed at all. With his average build, he was a Japanese male through and through. Actually, he was looking a bit fat.

It was proof that he was skipping his daily practice drills. Looks like Mahara’s pretty much just lazy.

“Mahara! You shouldn’t talk to him like that! Sorry about him, you’re here to help us.”

The girl—named Tamaki Yui—reprimanded Mahara after misunderstanding my lack of a response for being offended.

She was the class chairman, basically someone who would act as the facilitator. To put it another way, she supported my classmates’ bullying me as well, *helping* me in a bad way.

I’d always think something along the lines of *should a class chairman be doing this* whenever it happened. But then I’d remember that she was always treating people well, so she was popular among both the teachers and the underclassmen.

...Huh?

Wait, then doesn’t that mean that she wasn’t treating me as a human?

...Let's stop there. I feel like I'm sinking deeper and deeper.

"It's alright, don't worry. I'm Yuuji, an adventurer. It'll just be for a little while, but I look forward to working with you all."

Saying that, I held out my hand.

The girls introduced themselves one by one and shook my hand.

"M-My name is Hayase Fuuko. P-Pleased to meet you."

"Minamoto Kureha."

"Tamaki Yui here! Good to meet you!"

Hayase's presence was a bit weak even back in the class, so now I'm finally able to match a face to her name.

She was one hundred percent an observer. She never once acted violent against me. In other words, she's not one of my targets.

...Really, killing her feels like it'd be a bit overboard.

Let's have her play that role.

On the other hand, this fake blonde, Minamoto, looks like a straight up bitch. She's a leading figure in the group that hangs out with Samejima. I can't even count how many times her foot's trampled me.

Therefore, capital punishment for her.

"Yeah, thanks for the introductions. It's probably rushing things a bit, but we're going to be heading out to **Trance Labyrinth**, so could you tell me about the party composition and who the leader is? I'd like to get a good grasp on how you all work."

"Minamoto and I are the vanguard with Mahara and Hayase following up the rear. I'm the one who gives out instructions."

I see. It was a typical composition. Hayase was set to be on standby along with me and

Mahara wasn't so good at doing risky stuff in the front lines.

"Pretty good composition you have there. You must've thought on it well."

"Yeah, thanks!"

"I'll also be defending you all, so don't worry about dying. How about we head out now? To the dungeon, that is."

"Yeah! Everyone, let's do it!"

"Should I show you my strength?"

"O-Okay..."

".....Tch."

My former classmates all left the room in succession.

Yeah, let's all go together. It'll be your execution site, though.

Smirking to myself, I followed after them.



Nothing happened on the road at all. Everyone just talked with one another with the exact same lack of tension as when they headed into **Rigal Den**.

Looks like they didn't learn their lesson...

I'd watched over them on the way in near shock at their nonchalance, but I also came to know more about them.

First of all, their special abilities.

Mahara had **Replicate**. He could use any magic he'd seen before. In doing so, the magic's mana consumption and the like would be modified to be within his limits.

Minamoto had **Variate Sword**. She could change her sword's hardness and its length

up to eight meters.

Hayase had **Grand Library**. A non-combat type of ability. Once she learned something, she would remember it for eternity. Moreover, it could do something like retrieving things whenever she wanted.

Tamaki had **Frost Witch**. It would increase the effectiveness of her ice magic by one level. However, it could not surpass divine rank.

Every one of them had an overpowered ability, but I felt Tamaki's ability was the most frightening. Spirit rank would become soul rank, soul rank magic rank, and so on.

I'm glad I learned about it before I did anything. Even if she's way below me in levels, she might've been able to injure us a bit. Shuri can only use soul rank magic, after all.

I told them about **Heart of Steel** as it was the least impressive of my abilities. Hayase was there and I didn't want to risk giving any false information that could damage her trust in me, so I didn't lie about it.

Their statuses were as bad as I'd expected, but I did find out a few other interesting things.

Mahara Keito obviously has a thing for Tamaki. He hadn't left Tamaki's side at all since we set out.

Unfortunately, this girl he'd set his mind on talked to me so that she could avoid Mahara.

With this girl asking me to help her out, it looks like she isn't on too great of terms with the other girls on the team.

I should probably think of this team as one that was put together haphazardly.

"Excuse me, Yuuji?"

"What is it?"

"Why are we going to **Trance Labyrinth**? Wouldn't **Rigal Den** have been a better choice...?"

...This girl, asking that even though she already knows why...

Even with Tamaki knowing full well why, she asked while pretending to not know. She did it so that there wouldn't be a pause in our conversation.

She really, really didn't want to talk with Mahara... Well, it's obvious how much the idiot loves to run his mouth and brag just by listening to him the moment he opens his mouth.

“Rigal Den is chock full of adventurers right now, so it'd be a bit awkward to get through. That being the case, it will be quicker for you all to raise your levels in **Trance Labyrinth**, a dungeon that people don't tend to like.”

“Oooh? So that was the reason. Then... then...!”

Geh. She's still going to continue?

It started to make me feel fed up, so I stopped the conversation in its tracks and called out to everyone.

“Alright, we'll be exploring the dungeon from now on. Everyone, ready your weapons and focus. Get in formation.”

Tamaki and Hayase listened to what I said and took out their short swords. The other two, well, yeah.

They wore expressions that screamed how little they gave a f*ck about what I said.

“...Hey, you're a guard hired to protect us yeah?”

“Yeah, that's right.”

“Then don't tell us what to do.”

“...Huh?”

The heck's this guy going on about? Does he not remember how close they all came to dying because of their pride?

“We’d be fine even without you here. We would’ve been fine that last time, it’s just that they swarmed us all at once. We wouldn’t have lost if they didn’t.”

“It’d be better for you to stop being so arrogant. You’ll live longer.”

“If it gets dangerous for us, we’ll just have you protect us. You’ll protect us even if it costs your life, you *are* our guard, after all.”

Mahara grinned in ridicule and strutted inside as he brandished his rod.

“Since that’s how it is, be sure not to mess up.”

Minamoto followed Mahara inside.

“Those two...”

“Sorry about them, Yuuji. They are too overconfident in themselves...”

We’d been left behind. Hayase was flustered and Tamaki bowed her head in apology.

I just laughed dryly and tapped them both on the shoulder.

“I don’t mind, so don’t worry about it. More importantly, we should follow them in. The monsters that appear here are stronger than those in **Rigal Den**.”

“O-Okay.”

I played the role of a gentleman to get them to lower their guard. It looks like it worked, as they both seemed to relax.

“You don’t need to be so respectful to me either, you know. I’m the same age as you both.”

“Really? But you seem older...”

“I get that a lot. It’s all good though, I’ll make sure to protect you two as your senior in dungeon exploring. Just stick close to me.”

I gave as reassuring a smile I could. It was hard to smile so much in a single day, my cheeks felt like they were going to fall off. I'm definitely not used to doing this.

“Alright...”

“Thank you for escorting us so properly, Yuuji.”

“Yeah, of course.”

I pulled on the two girls' hands and lead them inside.

Chapter 17

Guide Us, Hero (2)

It had been a few hours of hunting after joining back up with Mahara and Minamoto and we'd made it down to the twentieth floor.

I'd say that it's gone well so far.

The demons we've been encountering are Wight and Wight Lancers.

Wights were monsters that are corpses that turned into skeletons. Wight Lancers were, as the name suggested, Wights that wield lances.

Although they have a slightly higher resistance value compared to the others, the troubling part about them was that all of their attacks had the added effect of being poisonous. Even a scratch meant you were down for the count.

Since it would cause you to be poisoned, you'd have to ingest a remedy that could cure it.

Minamoto had taken one of those attacks head on and was currently being treated. Her fatigue had built up to the point that she couldn't evade the lance in time, causing her to get hit.

"Minamoto, here, please drink this."

Hayase gave Minamoto a drug specifically made to counter the poison, boiled Yanu Leaf. Taking it from her, she drank it straight away.

Once she did so, her complexion improved remarkably quickly. It appeared as though the poison was neutralized.

Even so.

"You're awesome, Hayase."

“Right?”

The person to respond was Tamaki. Behind her was Mahara, looking thoroughly discontent.

That guy, seriously.

“Hayase read a ton of documents about medicine in the palace, so she’s never wrong with the dosage. That’s why we’re able to keep fighting without having to worry about special conditions!”

Tamaki struck a pose with her finger up in the air. Look’s like *someone’s* in high spirits.

But it looks like Hayase’s worth more than I’d thought.

This world’s medical care is still in its early development. There are potions for things like stamina and mana recovery, but there are many items treating other status conditions still to settle.

To use that Yanu Leaf as an example, while it is effective in treating the poison, it will have a harmful effect on the body if taken in too large a dose and may itself become a poison to the body. Such is the risk.

Which is why people have no choice but to make it on the spot.

“Oh? Hayase’s a pretty important person for this party then.”

“Th-Thank you very much.”

Hayase seemed to be shy after being praised by me. Or maybe it’s just her nature to be shy?

“Minamoto, are you alright now?”

“Yeah, I’m good.”

She stood up and moved about to stretch her body and check her senses, but it didn’t look there was anything wrong.

“You should drink this potion too just to be safe. Here, catch.”

I threw a test-tube-like vial with a potion in it over to Minamoto. She caught it with both hands.

“You’re our guard, so don’t expect a thanks.”

Only saying that in response, Minamoto walked off.

“H-Hey! Seriously... Tamaki, Hayase, let’s go too. We can’t let her go off alone.”

“Okay!”

Hayase stood up and quickly started gathering her luggage together. Tamaki’s lack of a response was due to her being pulled on by Mahara.

With that, the our formation spontaneously turned into Minamoto in the front, Mahara and Tamaki in the middle, and Hayase and I following up the rear.

Keeping Minamoto in my field of view, I kept a constant distance behind the others and talked with Hayase.

“Yuuji, why did you become an adventurer? I mean, adventurers have to fight monsters...”

“Hmm, I never really had a reason in mind. I guess it’s just that my parents did it, so I did too.”

“Y-You’re doing something so scary for that!?”

“I don’t have talent for anything else, so it’s not like I could just stop. Besides, it’s not so bad once you get used to it... Wait, Hayase, are you scared?”

Her body shook slightly as she looked at me looking as though she might cry.

Bulls-eye, huh. Rather, it was pretty easy to tell.

“...Yeah. I mean, I don’t have any abilities that let me fight like you guys. I just get in

everyone's way. And I feel like I'm going to die right off the bat whenever we get attacked by monsters. Dying is... is scary."

Dying is scary.

That's something everyone can agree on.

I find it scary too. Even if I can revive, there's still the pain I have to go through, the strange cloudiness in my mind, and that strange woman in my dream.

There might be a limit to that ability too, so it's not like I'm sure I'll revive indefinitely. There's lots of things about it that I just don't get.

But nothing's going to change if I just stay afraid of it. I know that firsthand.

"Th-That's a bad thing, I know. For a hero like me to be so weak... I'm sorry, please forget I said anything."

"I wasn't thinking that at all."

I placed my hand on top of Hayase's head and gave her a pat.

"Y-Yuuji?"

"Everyone starts at the same starting line. Scary things are scary. There's no helping that feeling. It's proof that we're alive."

"...R—... Really?"

"Yeah. Hayase, it'll be alright. Just do your best from here on. It might sound cheap, but your effort won't be in vain. Just keep moving forward at your own pace. If you keep with it, you'll turn into a great hero someday. I'm sure of it."

"Yuuji..."

She thought of something, rubbed her eyes, and patted down her robe. The next time she raised her head, the feeling Hayase gave off was entirely different from the Hayase Fuuko of before.

“Thank you, really. I feel like I can have courage now, too.”

“That’s great.”

“Yuuji, it’s all thanks to you. So, umm...”

The girl started to fidget about with her fingers. Clenching her fist with all she had, she then clapped herself on the cheeks to rouse herself and took my hand.

“U-Umm!”

“Hm? What’s up?”

“Yuuji... umm, are you dating anyone right now?”

What crossed my mind was Shuri and her smile. I think that our relationship counts as that, but saying that would be embarrassing since it’s like saying I want to be with her.

“No.”

So I answered no. When I did, the girl’s face lit up in a very unusual smile for her, a smile similar to a sunflower blooming in the summer.

“Th-Then... when I become a hero! W-We can—”

“You two are pretty lovey-dovey over there!!”

Having been looking out for a chance to escape Mahara’s grip, Tamaki took advantage of the mood where we were and came over.

She spoke loudly so that she’d make her intention to join our conversation rather understood.

“Wh-Wh-Wha-!? Tamaki, what are you talking about!? I wasn’t saying anything like that! I-I was just—!”

Hayase blushed deeply, shaking her hands in front of her head in denial.

.....Oh.

Sorry, but I'm not some thickheaded protagonist. I already understood, I just decided to not notice.

"So, whadya think, Yuuji? What's it like having such a cute girl interested in you?"

She prodded me with her elbow. Come on.

"I'm so envious, Hayase. Yuuji's treating you so nice, I want him to treat me nice too~"

Tamaki took my arm with hers to further show what she meant.

This doesn't make me happy at all.

I get the gist of her strategy, she doesn't have any goodwill toward me at all. She's not even making my heart throb.

Besides, it's all going to end with a certain calamity in a bit.

".....Hey, guard."

Ah, here it is."

But the timing's great. It's about time for *it*.

Let's make use of this guy's emotions while we're at it.

"Get away from Tamaki, it's disgusting."

Mahara's eyes darkened. Is this that *love makes you blind* thing?

"Yeah, sure. I agree."

"You catch on quick. Then hurry up and—"

"You *are* disgusting."

"What...!?"

Mahara glared at me like a demon. I probably would've shriveled away if it were the past me, but now that I've seen what's basically a real demon, I couldn't see him as scary at all.

"Give it a thought. What did Tamaki look like when she was listening to you talk and what about when she's with us?"

"Huh? She was obviously happier with me. Right, Tamaki?"

"Ahaha, hah..."

Tamaki forced out a smile and looked away, averting her eyes.

Understanding what that meant, Mahara's face dyed red in anger.

"...You bastard!"

Why am I the one he's mad at?

I guess he figures I stole Tamaki from him. It was a very unjust, selfish interpretation of the truth.

The mood was tense.

Minamoto came back calling out into our stalemate.

"Hey! I found the stairway! There's a Monster House here too!"

"" —!?" ""

Monster House.

Of all the things it could have been, that was the worst possible thing any of the three wanted to hear.

Each of them reacted in their own way, but Mahara was the first to recover.

"Just you watch, Tamaki! I'm gonna go beat those f*ckers up!"

“Eh—h-hey!?”

Mahara ran off, ignoring Tamaki calling after him.

I guess he was desperate to show off to her. It’s great that he’s so easy to understand. Thanks to that, I won’t even have to do anything.

“You two wait here! I’ll go rescue them!”

“M-Me too—”

“No! I won’t be able to guard you inside the Monster House as well as get them out. Besides, you’ll be playing the important role of treating their injuries. Wait on standby here.”

“O-Okay...”

“Tamaki, stay here and defend Hayase. You two should be fine if you stay here.”

“U-Understood!”

“I’m relying on you!”

Emphasizing her role’s importance, I took off after them.

I’d be troubled if Tamaki and Hayase were to die already. I haven’t worked them as hard as I can yet.

When I picked up my speed so that they wouldn’t get away from me, I saw Minamoto and Mahara stopped in front of a door.

Mahara’s shoulders were heaving up and down, so I guess he’d just arrived too.

“See this pattern? If I recall, this is the same as the one back then.”

What Minamoto said was correct.

This was definitely the same magic formation as the one back when we encountered

the Monster House in **Rigal Den**.

It wasn't something that just anyone could form.

Not unless you were the lord of a dungeon, that is.

"What should we do? Head in?"

"Of course. Nothing about a Monster House is scary if you already know about it beforehand."

Mahara stood by with his magic and, hearing him, Minamoto took out her weapon.

"Hey, you better not interfere. Only help if you think it's getting dangerous."

Mahara gave his warning.

"Sure. Let me see you flounder about as you try and show off to Tamaki."

"Tch...! Minamoto, let's go!"

"I got it I got it, don't order me about."

Mahara enthusiastically opened the door.

With that, the two stiffened.

"Eh?"

"Huh?"

What they saw was something very different than what they'd imagined.

Humans were weak to sudden changes and unexpected events.

Impatience, indecision, doubt.

Those things affected one's ability to take action.

So I pushed them into the room from behind.

“Ah—”

“Wha—”

With that, they were inside the room.

Within the red devil’s killing range.

There weren’t many monsters.

Just a single devil.

“—Kill them, Leadred.”

The devil smiled wickedly upon hearing my order and responded.

“—With pleasure.”

Chapter 18

Guide Us, Hero (3)

She swung her war sword.

She wasn't careless with her attack, making certain that it would land a killing blow through its nigh-invisible speed. Due to Minamoto having a special ability that allowed her to increase her sword's hardness to the limit, however, she managed to deflect the blow and change its directory a small margin.

...Even so, it sliced right through her right arm.

"Ahhhhhhh!!"

Her death wails echoed through the room. Even so, the devil wouldn't wait.

"**Devil Flame.**"

Scores of royal rank balls of fire appeared in the air. With a wave of Leadred's hand, they all shot out at once.

"O' water spirits! Become the shield that protects me! **Water Wall!**"

Mahara erected a shield in practically the same instant, but her attack wasn't so weak as to be blocked by a mere soul rank magic. The fireballs penetrated through the wall and rained fire down upon Mahara and Minamoto.

"Uaaaah!!"

"Kyaaaaah!?"

This room was a re-enactment of the final staircase room from **Rigal Den**. Minamoto and Mahara making it through this was practically impossible.

Even I'd barely managed to tie against Leadred back then. They didn't even match up

to my status combined, there's no way they could win.

The current situation actually proved that.

“Haah! Haah!”

“F*ck, it huuurts...!”

Mahara was so bad off that the only reason he was still breathing was thanks to the magic he'd used. Even so, just doing that was all he could manage. How pathetic.

Minamoto had already lost her will to fight. I mean, obviously. She'd lost her sword arm from the elbow down, after all.

“Hey now... that's all ya bastards can manage...?”

Approaching them was a devil shouldering her bloodstained war sword. Leaning her head back somewhat as she looked down on them, a fiendish feeling filled the room.

“Dammit! O' water spirits!”

“Devilish Aura.”

Before Mahara could finish casting his magic, Leadred invoked her unique ability and took his mana.

Out of gas, Mahara's magic didn't activate.

“Wh-What... ugaah!?”

Finding himself unable to use magic, Mahara panicked. In the instant he looked away from Leadred, she closed the distance between them and struck him hard.

Slamming into the wall, he vomited and crumbled down.

“You're filthy.”

Leadred grabbed Mahara by the hair and threw him once again into the wall he'd hit.

I used stamina recovery magic on the wide-eyed, careless, half-dead *hero*.

“Uh... y-you...”

“Enjoying your grave, Mahara?”

“Wh-What are you—!?”

Something shot over into the wall immediately next to Mahara, followed by the sound of a person sliding down the wall. It was Minamoto, her head was hanging forward limply.

“Eh, wha... M-Minamoto...?”

Mahara crawled over to her on all four like a baby, it looked like he'd dislocated his back.

However, the devil came from above and stopped him.

“Ah! You recovered, huh!?”

“Aheee—!?”

His eyes meeting hers, Mahara foamed at the mouth and fainted.

Seeing her eye to eye with no mana to speak of left to use, it was a natural enough reaction, not to mention the mayhem she'd wrecked against them just a moment ago.

Well, it's not like we'll just let him sleep though.

“Hero.”

“Yeah, I know. O' spirits of light, bring serenity. **Magic Heal.**”

Once I recited the mana recovery incantation, a light wrapped around Mahara, waking him up.

Leadred kicked him before he could get a hold of himself.

“Ugoh—...!”

Sounded like some bones broke, one or two of them.

“Leadred. I got this guy, so I’ll leave Minamoto to you. Ah, and don’t kill her yet. Just beat her up.”

“Got it.”

Leadred looked happy.

She was probably lumping these heroes together in with those that defeated her in the past.

“Now then, maybe I should just kill you now...”

Pulling out my long sword, I thrust it through Mahara’s leg so he couldn’t get away.

“Aaah—!?”

The pain caused him to fully wake up from the haze still clouding his mind. His face was quickly covered with tears.

I stamped my foot down on his head and ground it against the floor.

“So? How do you like kissing dirt?”

“Wh-Why... Why are you doing this!?”

He answered my question with one of his own.

“What’re you answering me with a question for? Didn’t you learn to not do that in elementary school? Whatever, sure. I’ll let you know since I’m in a good mood right now. Open.”

I took my foot from his head and lifted him up by his hair just enough to see my status.

With that, his face paled.

“Y-You’re... K-Katsuragi...?”

“Yeah, I’m Katsuragi Daichi, the person you guys all bullied. I take it you get my reason why now, yeah?”

I took my sword out of his leg and held it against his throat.

Understanding dawning on him, Mahara bowed his head and begged desperately.

“I-I’m sorry! I didn’t have a choice back then!”

“Why?”

“Because Samejima would’ve targeted me instead! R-Really, I didn’t want to do any of that either! I apologize for everything, I’ll do anything! So please, forg**ibuuu**—!?”

I struck the top of his head with an axe kick, my heel hitting his skull.

“Shut up... You know? Have you put any thought into it? I mean, wouldn’t Hayase, someone who didn’t do anything, also have been one of Samejima’s targets?”

“W-Well...”

Mahara started mumbling, probably trying to figure out what excuse to say next. So stupid.

“It’s fine. Die.”

“P-Please, wait! Please... please don’t kill me! I-I’ll do anything!”

Mahara clung to my feet in desperation.

Comical. Honestly, it amused me.

So I gave him an option.

“Sure... I want to rape Tamaki. Give me a hand with that.”

“I-I...”

“If you don’t want to, you could always just die?”

I pierced his shoulder with my sword. Mahara shook his head back and forth.

“I’ll do it, I’ll do it! Please let me help...!”

He kept on pleading desperately. Handing over his beloved woman for his life... seriously, he’s hopeless. Well, seeing him like this does make me a bit happy.

“Oh well then. Sure. I’ll let you live.”

“Th-Thank you so much...”

Hearing that he could live, Mahara looked relieved. He was thoroughly experiencing the joy of being alive.

“Hey, stand up.”

“O-Okay.”

I reached my hand out to Mahara, who looked like he wouldn’t be able to stand with his own strength. He took my hand and stood up.

—And I rammed my sword through his gut.

“.....Eh? Huh?”

Mahara looked like he couldn’t understand what had just happened.

“Wh-Why...? Y-You said, if I helped...”

“Oh, that was a lie.”

I answered back with a smile. Pulling my sword back out, I pushed him back.

He landed on his backside.

“A... lie...?”

“Yeah. Unfortunately, I already have the one woman I’ll ever need. I don’t feel anything for Tamaki. You thought I was serious?”

“No... way...”

The burst of hope he’d gained was quickly replaced with despair.

Mahara looked like a puppet with its strings cut.

“Hero. I’m done over here. Ah, she fainted, though.”

“Got it. Sorry, mind bringing her over here? Line her up next to this one.”

“Alright, understood.”

Leadred gripped Minamoto by the neckline of her now-tattered shirt and threw her forward to land next to Mahara. A weak groan came from Minamoto.

“S... save... me...”

“P-Please... stop...”

Ignoring them, I lined my sword up with their necks. I’d clad the blade with wind-type magic, so it was plenty sharp enough to cut through these guys’ bodies.

“Sure. I’ll make it quick, don’t worry—die.”

I gave it my all and swung my sword.

Bright red blood and two heads rolled down through the air.

Chapter 19

Guide Us, Hero (4)

◆ Tamaki Yui's Point of View ◆

After we'd escaped **Rigal Den**, about half of our classmates pulled back from fighting. A fear towards demons had taken root in their minds, after all.

However, we—the rest of us who were better off mentally—were sent out to capture a new dungeon. Led by a man named Yuuji as a bodyguard.

As someone who calculatingly caught Hayase's heart and smiled even during my obvious pestering, he's a pretty weird guy. He's such a kind person that he even headed off to save Mahara, who's been launching this complaint and that at him this whole time, not even thinking of abandoning him.

"I wonder if everyone's alright..."

"Th-They'll be fine. Yuuji and everyone are strong."

"Hmmm? So you name off Yuuji, but Minamoto and Mahara are *everyone*?"

"Ah, I-I didn't have any deeper meaning to that!"

...Her face just keeps getting redder and redder, huh...

Hayase's already Yuuji's slave at this point. Well, given her position and the way she's usually treated, there's not much helping that.

Her love of books coupled with her quiet personality and shyness, I'm pretty sure this is the first time she's been talked to like that. Hayase herself seems to be enjoying it though so I'll let it be~.

...Still though.

“They’re taking a while, aren’t they.”

I took a look at my watch and saw they’d already been gone for an hour. I guess it takes a good bit of time to take care of a Monster House.

...Or.

The worst case scenario crossed my mind.

I don’t want to see anyone die anymore.

I lost my best friend back in **Rigal Den**.

Her name was Hamakaze Shuri. As the class mascot-like characters, Shuri, Nanami, and I were good friends.

Even after coming to this world, we encouraged each other to do our best at being heroes.

However, on that day... Shuri was slow in escaping and was left behind. Nanamin¹ tried to go help her, but Samejima stopped her.

But I can’t blame Samejima for that. I’d also given my life the priority, after all. I hadn’t even tried to help her.

“.....—”

I shook away the bad thoughts clouding my mind.

Just standing around on alert for so long in such a dark, humid cave is hard to endure for long.

Even looking around, it’s all the same. Just my reflection in the crystals.

How depressing...

It happened just about as I thought that.

“Oh, Yuuji!”

I heard Hayase's joyful voice from beside me.

I looked like Yuuji had returned. We ran over to him quickly.

Still floating that same old gentle smile of his, Yuuji patted Hayase on the head. What was different, however, was the blood and wounds covering him.

It looked like the fight was a close one.

"Sorry, I made you wait. It took quite a while. Are you alright?"

"Y-Yes! Tamaki defended me!"

"That so? Tamaki, good work."

He patted my head gently, too.

H-Hmm... this... this is embarrassing.



“D-Don’t treat me like a child! You can stop patting my head, too!”

He smiled as though troubled when I said that.

“No, well, I had to do this—so that you wouldn’t escape.”

In the next moment, I saw Hayase-san... collapsed, behind Yuuji.

Huh? What?

“H-Hayase!?”

I shook off his hand and went to go to my fallen classmate. However, I was kept from moving by my arm being gripped.

“Yuuji!? Why—let me go!!”

“Don’t worry. Hayase isn’t dead, I don’t intend to kill her either.”

“Huh? Wh-What are you... kyah—!”

Yuuji grabbed me with his arms and pulled me into an embrace.

“Y-Yuuji!? This isn’t the time to joke around!!”

“This isn’t a joke. I am very serious here. Even now, I’m looking forward to it.”

He brought his face close to mine and whispered sweetly into my ear.

“To—killing you.”

However, what he whispered wasn’t of love, but of a death sentence.

“Wh-Wha—!?”

Before I could finish, I felt a forceful impact to the back of my neck.

My... sight’s... fading...

With that, I lost consciousness.

Chapter 20

Enslavement and Two Demons (1)

“Well done, Leadred.”

I clapped Leadred, who'd taken the two heroes' consciousnesses away, on the shoulder.

Neither were dead. She just struck them on the back of the neck with her sword to make them faint.

“I'm good taking this one to the guy waiting outside, yeah?”

“He's one of my slaves too, so yeah. And... right. Perhaps I should leave a message for her?”

In order to make good use of Hayase, I told Leadred about what I thought up.

“...I see. In other words, say that it wasn't me, but you, Hero, that carried her over?”

“Yeah. I'll take care of matching the consistency on my end.”

If I use **Absolute Command**, it should work out.

Hayase favored me acting as Yuuji. I'll make sure to put that to use.

“Understood. I'll take this one, then.”

“Please. I'll take Shuri and Tamaki. Is that room good to enter now?”

“Shuri's cleaned up all the demons in it, please give her praise later.”

I could just picture Shuri going all out in cutting down the demons.

Pfft.

It brought a smile to my face.

“Got it. We’ll meet up later.”

I held up my fist and Leadred met it with her own.

“First though, three people. Good job.”

“Oh, thanks.”

When I said thanks, Leadred scratched her cheek awkwardly. She then held Hayase close and headed to the room with the stairs leading up.

“Now then.”

It would be easy to kill her with them unconscious and all, but the circumstances wouldn’t allow for that.

Besides... Shuri was friends with this one, huh.

“Haaah. Guess I’ll just carry them over there for now.”

Shouldering Tamaki’s delicate body, I started walking to the room that was recently used as an execution ground.

“Daichi!”

Upon opening the door, Shuri, who’d been standing right next to the entrance, ran over to me.

She’s so praiseworthy, like a small, adorable pet.

“Welcome back. Are you injured at all?”

“Nope. They were careless.”

“Really? That’s good.”

Shuri placed her hand on her chest and sighed in relief. My eyes being forced to the up and down movement of her chest was inevitable.

“More importantly, I wanted to ask you what you wanted to do with this one here, Shuri.”

I placed the hero, Tamaki Yui, on the floor.

“Eh. She’s... Yui?”

Shuri was surprised by their unexpected reunion.

“Yeah.”

“You brought her here, so... her too?”

“Yeah, I’ll be making her a slave.”

“Is that... so.”

Shuri looked down upon hearing my response. I guess she still found having her close friend killed hard to take.

“Sorry, but I don’t intend to stop, even if you say no. I need to have strong pieces to play to go against Samejima.”

“...Yeah.”

Her answer was short.

“Are you dissatisfied?”

“No! It’s just... well...”

Shuri started to say something, but closed her mouth. Her eyes looked here and there.

“Just, Yui is so cute... umm, she might... take Daichi away from... me...”

“Sorry, Shur—... huh?”

I started responding to what I thought she'd say, but was taken by surprise.

It's said that maidens in love have many troubles, but still, it shocked me.

I guess I need to clarify our relationship here, huh.

“Shuri.”

“Y-Yes?”

“There's no one for me but you. No one. As long as you like me, that feeling will never change.”

“D-Daichi...”

She hugged me, her cheeks growing pink.

Looking at her, I realized something... This girl... she wasn't sad at all.

...Could it be...?

“Shuri.”

“What is it, Daichi? The Shuri that you love is right here for you.”

“...That was on purpose, right?”

Her body stiffened in my arms. She looked up with a timid expression.

“...You found me out?”

She stuck her tongue out and pretended to look dumb.

“Showing your master something so cute is more than I deserve, but please don't do it too much.”

“Sorry. I thought I should cheer you up somehow...”

She clutched the hems of her clothes and wiped her eyes, looking at me. How sly.

“Fibber.”

“Ow—”

I brushed away her hair and flicked her forehead.

“Shuri. Please don’t do stuff like that in the dungeon. You can do that as much as you want after we go back to the surface.”

“In that case, please hold me when we resurface.”

“...This is why I—!?”

Her tongue invaded my mouth. Our saliva mixed, her black eyes stared into mine. Our breathing grew rough.

A few moments later, she gradually released me.

A transparent string extended between our lips. Captivating. The woman within her childishness definitely made an appearance.

“Please hold me, alright?”

“...Alright.”

“Yay, I got you to promise.”

“Doing it like that’s unfair.”

“I had to endure being away from you so long, Daichi, please forgive me.”

“...Oh well then.”

With her leaning against me, I stroked her head for a while.

Her eyes closed in embarrassment and—

“...What are you two doing, not getting that one back up?”

—we stopped.

Like rusted machines, we turned around slowly.

Seeing the red-horned devil glare at us with a look so unamused it could kill, all we could do was smile wryly.

Chapter 21

Enslavement and Two Demons (2)

...So cold.

This is... is... where am I?

Everything before I blacked out's fuzzy. At times like this, one should take it slow, think through it... I arrived at **Trance Labyrinth**, then Mahara, Minamoto, and Yuuji all went to the Monster House... Yuuji came back... then Hayase collapsed...!

Right, Yuuji—no, that man struck my neck...

...Hayase's in trouble!!

“Hayase!”

“Kyaah!?”

When I sat up, I heard a small scream. It wasn't Hayase, but it was a nostalgic voice, one from a person I knew well.

I looked to who the voice came from.

Upon doing so, I saw the best friend I'd deserted in **Rigal Den**—I saw Shuri.

“Sh-Shu... ri...?”

“Oh, you're awake, Yui.”

There was no doubt about it. The girl smiling at me was unmistakably my best friend, Hamakaze Shuri.

Eh, but how?

Shuri, she... but how?

She defeated all those demons...?

...Is this a dream?

I pinched my cheek. It hurt.

It's not... a dream.

I teared up and couldn't hold them back, the irreplaceable friend I thought had died was still alive.

"Shuri!"

Seeing my friend so close in front of me, I reached my hands out for her.

Glancing at me like that, Shuri backed up a step. She'd refused my embrace.

"Sh-Shuri! Why!?! This is our touching reunion!"

"Sorry, but this isn't touching for me."

Her words pierced my chest like blades.

I felt like cold water splashed down onto my head. My excitement slowly receded, leaving only self-loathing.

...Right. Even though I'd done such a terrible thing to her, I didn't think about the way she felt at all...

"Shuri. That Tamaki girl woke up?"

"Yes, Daichi. Just now."

".....Eh?"

—What brought me back out of my negative spiral was the voice of the man that was meant to be our guard.

“Yo, Tamaki. How did you like your first time being knocked out?”

Upon looking up, I saw the betrayer, the wicked fiend, the corners of his mouth curved up.

“...Where did that gentleness of yours run off to?”

“Sarcasm right away is it?... It was an act.”

Yuuji gave it away, seemingly happy with how things played out.

Even with things how they are, I was prepared to get away the moment he let his guard down.

I didn't tell that man, but I had another Special Ability.

Incantation Omission.

I can invoke a magic just by using its name. By just saying a magic's name with over fifteen hundred mana on my status, it's possible to utilize the magic.

It's a Special Ability very few people in this world are said to have.

Yuuji shouldn't have a reason to think I can use it.

“You're good at tricking people. Hayase seemed to like you especially well?”

“That part surprised me. It's unfortunate for Hayase, though, the only one for me is Shuri.”

“Wha—.....”

Yuuji hugged Shuri from behind her. It sent chills down my back.

My precious friend was being played around with by a man like that. That alone was plenty enough for me to attack him.

“Stop it right there! Shuri, duck!”

I'll shoot a point-blank magic at him!

I jumped up and launched a magic.

“Freezing Lance!”

I took the lance in my hands and aimed it at his face.

However, just as I was about to hit, I was stopped by the person I never thought would do so.

“...Yui, what are you doing?”

Gripping the tip of the lance, she looked angry. She was staring at me with clear hostility.

It was practically overawing, but I didn't back down.

I had to bring her back.

“Let go, Shuri! I will help you!”

“Help... You dare to say something like that after abandoning me back then?”

“That was—!”

Her cutting words pierced me again. Even so, nothing she said was wrong. I knew that. It was obvious.

But that's also the reason why I'd lost my composure. I had to bring Shuri back to herself no matter what.

“I'm sorry! I'll apologize as much as it takes! But please just listen to me! That man is dangerous! Believe me, at least just for now, come here!”

“Daichi is dangerous?”

“Yeah! That guy attacked me and Hayase... he might've even done the same to Mahara

and Minamoto.”

“If you’re talking about those two, they’re dead.”

“He attacked—eh? Dead...? Eh?”

It felt like I just heard something unbelievable.

Two heroes were killed?

By an ordinary adventurer?

Or maybe... by Shuri?

“Wh-What are you...?”

“It’s like this. Here—”

The one to say that wasn’t Shuri, but Yuuji. He suddenly threw something round over to me, I caught it.

I felt something disgusting on my hands.

The eyes looked like they’d been crying. It was missing teeth. The nose was crooked. Some of its blonde hair was dyed red.

What I held was one of my classmate’s severed heads.

“Uaaaaah!?”

Throwing it as far as I could so that I wouldn’t have to take another look at it, I wasn’t able to hold back my nausea and threw up.

“Oooeh! Haah... haah...”

“Hey now. That’s your classmate’s head, you should be more careful with it.”

Yuuji looked at me like he had nothing to do with it at all. He was ridiculing me, and enjoying it.

He's... crazy...!

"You... fiend...!"

"Saying stuff like that, talk about playing innocent. Right, Shuri?"

"Yes, Daichi. It's as you say."

"Shuri..."

She appeared to be very thoroughly brainwashed by him. She must be suffering on the inside.

The fact I can't do anything here even with that is...!

What power?

What hero?

I can't even save my friend here in front of me.

"You manipulated my best friend, you captured me... What do you want!?"

"...Just one thing, really."

Yuuji grabbed me, who was sitting down, by the nape of the neck and raised me up. He lifted me up easily, so far that my feet couldn't even touch the ground.

"Kah—... ah..."

Being squeezed like that, I had trouble breathing.

...I can't... breathe...

"I... want to get my revenge on you all. Particularly on Samejima."

"Why... what did, Samejima... do to...?"

“You still don’t get it? Shuri’s been saying my name for a while now though?”

Shuri...?

I thought within my fading consciousness.

It’s true, she hadn’t been calling him Yuuji, but Daichi.

Daichi...?

I don’t know anyone by that na— ... oh.

I do. One person.

Similar to Shuri, there was a boy left behind that day.

His name was Katsuragi Daichi. The class’ punching bag.

N-No way...

He can’t be alive. I saw it myself. Back then, a monster dug right into him. It ate him.

“No... way...”

“...Looks like you finally realized.”

“Ah—”

He suddenly dropped me, causing me to fall on my butt.

It hurt.

“I’m Katsuragi Daichi. I returned all the way from hell to get my revenge.”

He put the sword that had been at his waist against my neck and grinned.

My disbelief quickly turned to fear. I couldn’t stop my teeth from chattering either as I started to cry.

It's because I understood that the bloodlust coming from him was the real deal. Otherwise, there's no way I would've been frightened by someone like Katsuragi.

He's going to retaliate for everything we've done to him until now. That thought filling my mind, all I could see for myself was death. Feeling death near me, I couldn't help but instinctively think back through my life... I'm scared.

Dying... is scary...

"Now then, Tamaki. I'll give you two choices.

"Wh-What...?"

"Will you die here and lose your life forever? Or will you devote your life to being my slave?"

The offer he gave me was tempting.

"If you become my slave, you can be together with Shuri. I'll even promise that I won't harm you anymore."

"R-Really?"

"However, the moment I think you're acting weird, me, the red devil over there, and Shuri will kill you, no mercy. If you still want to, Tamaki, I'll let you live."

"I-I'll be your slave! Please! I'll devote my life to you! S-So please, don't kill me!"

My mouth obviously clung to the bit of hope I'd been given.

I could live. I didn't have to die. That alone was enough of a reason.

"That so? You chose well, Tamaki. Good job.

"Th-Thank you."

Seemingly satisfied with my prompt response, he re-sheathed his sword.

Released from the three's bloodlust, I could finally feel happy at being alive.

“Tamaki Yui. With this, you are my provisional slave.”

On that day, I went from being a hero to being Katsuragi Daichi’s slave.

Chapter 22

Enslavement and Two Demons (3)

Having added Tamaki as a party member and done with getting a bit of my revenge, we shifted back to focusing on conquering the dungeon, our original purpose for going here.

The reason I'd come here was to add new demons to my group.

When I'd heard what Leadred had to say a while back, I understood the fact that I am a hero.

Just not one with much integrity.

I also came to understand that she lost to Hero Terias and was sealed in that dungeon. Some time passed since then and that seal was undone by a single woman.

At that time, she was given a prophecy.

—Our Hero will, one day, come to us. If you follow that person, demons will certainly obtain their glory.

She'd been waiting there forever since.

She was told that the holder of **Revenge of the Grudgebearer** would be their hero.

Back to the topic at hand, I was thinking about how the other dungeons might have had other demons who would work as my followers similar to Leadred.

If so, capturing the nearest dungeon was the most obvious path to take.

I want to gather as many powerful people as I can. They probably wouldn't have been killed off, even in places like this.

Monster Houses aren't even threats to us anymore, they're actually welcomed.

I mean, Monster Houses are really great experience farms.

“Tamaki, give your status a look.”

“S-Sure.”

“...Yui? As Daichi’s slave, you need to be more polite to him.”

“A-Alright, Shuri—I get it, so can you please stop it with that face? It’s scary!”

That back and forth playing out, Tamaki and I both opened our statuses to look at.

Katsuragi Daichi

Job: Hero Lv. 68

Stamina: 4250

Mana: 5600 → 4100

Strength: 4900

Resistance: 4500

Dexterity: 2900

Special Abilities:

- **[Heart of Steel]** Double resistance value during combat. Prevents poison, paralysis, hypnosis, and mental corruption 1/3 of the time.
- **[Indomitable Mentality]** Mana cannot go below 100.
- **[Absolute Command]** Appears upon those revived by the Lich King being lower leveled. Any order the slave receives will be followed through with until given authorization to stop.
- **[Magus of Slaughter]** Damage inflicted upon enemies will also damage others of the same species within a 10 meter radius.
- **[Brutal Mind]** After killing three members of the same species, attacks gain a paralytic poison effect against that species.
- **[Incantation Omission]** Can omit the necessary incantation when invoking a magic. However, mana consumption increases to 150%.
- **[Lich King]** Able to form contracts with creatures that have died, reviving them and bending them to your will. Every other time the user dies, gain a slot.
- Current: 0 Open Slots

Unique Abilities:

- **[Revenge of the Grudgebearer]** No matter how many times you die, gather strength from the abyss of death and resurrect.
- Current: 7 Deaths

Tamaki Yui

Job: Hero Lv. 28

Stamina: 720

Mana: 1780

Strength: 1100

Resistance: 840

Dexterity: 350

Special Abilities:

- **[Frost Witch]** Increase the effectiveness of ice magic by one rank. Cannot surpass Divine Rank.
- **[Incantation Omission]** Can omit the necessary incantation when invoking a magic. However, mana consumption increases to 150%.

Special Condition:

- **[High-Grade Slave]** Master: Katsuragi Daichi. Any attack against your master, Katsuragi Daichi, is blocked. Forced obedience until released.

“Woah, so weak.”

Leadred, thanks for your honesty. It’s true that comparing only her numerical values to ours, she won’t be useful during one of our actual fights.

“At least we could use you as a shield...”

“So cruel!?”

“I mean, you are a slave. It’s your role to defend me, your master.”

“Aww... Th-That is true... it is, but...!”

“So, Tamaki. Defend Shuri with your life. I’ll kill you if you let her die.”

“Not you!? But okay—... I understand!”

Tamaki, seemingly motivated by the prospect of protecting Shuri instead of me, went

over to her in smiles.

...Well, I'll be killing her at least once no matter what happens though.

"So, Hero. What are we going to do now? Raise her level?"

"There's no reason for us to go that far, I'll just bring her back from death if she dies. We'll keep going down, no need to stop."

"Alright. Should we head off now then?"

We walked in a line with Leadred in the lead since she's the strongest among us.

Our goal for right now is to make it to the fortieth floor, check things out, and make our plans for what happens next based on what we see.

Our enemies' strength hadn't changed this entire time.

If forced, I might say their stats went up a bit, but barely at that.

"Hmm... we'll make it to the fortieth floor easily if things keep up like this."

"Right? The only thing that'll take time is finding the stairs down, I don't think the fights themselves will be hard."

"With you saying that, Leadred, I'm a bit relieved."

"It feels weird for it to be this easy."

"It's all thanks to Daichi. Those filthy heroes that always treated Daichi like that had no ability to judge character."

Err, Shuri. You were originally on that *filthy hero* side too though?

"At any rate, just try to not relax too much. You have to get a hold of yourself at times like this."

I urged the two girls making a racket behind me to pay attention.

As predicted by Leadred, we later made it to the the fortieth floor's staircase room without any difficulty.

Floors forty-one to fifty-nine went without anything really happening.

Leadred and Shuri gained about five hundred to each of their stats. Tamaki got over twenty-five hundred mana, but her other statuses didn't improve much at all. She was different from Shuri, who grew evenly. Perhaps she was a specialized type?

No one got any new Special Abilities, though now they'd both reached the level of top-class adventurers.

We, who'd all thought it would be smooth sailing the entire way stumbling at the sixtieth floor's staircase room. We're even in a heated battle right now.

"Damn this thing! It's getting on my nerves!"

The one to curse was Leadred.

I understood how she felt.

"The fcker won't stop jiggling...! Magic doesn't work on it either, you're fcking kidding me!"

Leadred attacked the small, hostile monster. However, it sidestepped to the right and used its momentum to headbutt her side.

It had a soft, jelly-like body so it didn't do any damage to Leadred, but only in the physical sense.

"Tch! Poison!?"

Leadred leapt away from it. Having been on standby, Shuri immediately began treating her with light-attributed healing magic.

In other words, Tamaki and I were the only ones left to fight it.

"Wh-What the heck is with this thing..."

I kept my sights on the monster, a poison slime—I decided to call it that since Leadred didn't know its name either.

We were confident in being able to defeat it when we opened the door and saw it by itself in the center of the room.

It was no exaggeration to say that we thought it'd be an instant kill. But when we went to attack, something strange happened.

It reacted at speeds so fast that it must have a ludicrous dexterity value. We couldn't pin it down with magic either. Just brushing against its body was enough to get afflicted by a top-grade **Deadly Poison** status condition.

This guy's absolutely definitely not any ordinary slime.

The slimes I know of are no where near this strong.

I even died once. I got hit by a surprise attack, but it was half on purpose.

The reason being that I'm relatively weak against poison and I wanted to strengthen myself towards the boss fight.

I was able to endure it by thinking of it as protecting Shuri and the others.

Fortunately, Shuri was able to use healing magic enough to get rid of the poison, but it was a fact that we couldn't just carelessly charge in.

Was its aim to drain our stamina and mana?

It had already been an hour since we started the fight.

If so, its strategy was working brilliantly.

"Hey Katsuragi! Haven't you thought up some plan!?"

Tamaki yelled out with a complaint. Shut up and find one yourself!

And for you to yell that out so loud... see? Now it's locked on to you.

“Ah—hey, time out! Time out!”

Unable to put up a fight, Tamaki got tackled by the slime.

Naturally, she was afflicted by the **Deadly Poison** status condition.

However, I thought of something. A way to make it through this.

Tamaki would be needed for it. I ran over to where she collapsed and drove away the slime before shaking her shoulders.

“Geh... Katsuragi...”

“You alright, Tamaki?”

“Its attacks are nothing, but that poison is a bitch...”

“One sec, I’m going to check something.”

I brought up the status screen and saw that **Deadly Poison** was appended on to Tamaki’s status conditions.

It stated that its effect would decrease the person’s stamina value by one hundred per minute and that if it hit zero because of the effect, the person would die.

In other words, Tamaki only had nine minutes left. I’ll have to deal with it quickly.

I sat her up and grabbed her by the nape of her neck.

“Hey—! What are you doing to a sick person!?”

“I’m going to use you to stop it from moving! You’ll be doing a suicide attack in a moment and it’ll definitely try tackling you again. Use that moment to catch it! Okay!?”

“Of course not! Wait, you’re using me as a shield, aren’t you!?”

“Give it up! Repent for everything you did to me till now!”

“No way! Let go of me!”

Tamaki tried to get out of my grasp. Oh come on, what a troublesome woman!

When I put my empty hand over her eyes, she stopped resisting.

“What’re you doing!? I can’t see! It’s dark and scary!!”

“If you don’t do what I say, I’m going to throw you at it!”

“I’ll do it, just let go of me!”

“So you want to become my shield!?”

“I want to be Master’s shield!”

“Good! Then go, Shield!”

“Dammit! Using me like a shield either way! Whatever, I’ll do it!”

Tamaki prepared herself and answered with a grin despite her tears and approached the slime.

Sure enough, it just hit her back with a headbutt.

“Shield! Capture it!”

“Understood, Master!... Gufuh—!”

Shield timed it well and succeeded in capturing the slime in an embrace against her stomach.

She then finished it off a zero distance ice-type magic and held it up overhead.

“I did it! I did it, Master!”

“You did. Now for your reward. Give it to me and head to Shuri for treatment.”

“Thank you. I won’t forget your *kindness*. I’ll definitely repay it...!”

Even with her saying that with gritted teeth, she didn't feel threatening at all.

Irritated, I grabbed her arms and pinned them behind her back, taking away her freedom one more time.

It went without saying that the woman was overly afraid and screamed.

"What're you doing!?"

Forgetting the fact that she's my slave, Tamaki flared up.

"Did you forget that you're just a tool to me? Stop complaining."

"B-But shouldn't you at least give me a minimum level of respect?"

"For me, this is the minimum level."

"Huh!? The heck!"

After defeating that powerful enemy growing confident, Tamaki seemed to not understand her position.

The lighthearted back and forths we'd been having was probably the cause.

Tamaki's statuses were low, so we didn't think we could make use of her except like this. Rather, you could even say this was her main role.

Even so...

Judging by her attitude, she's not reflecting on anything.

Her rebelling like this is annoying. I died a bit ago, so I gained a new slot.

I guess it wouldn't hurt making her a proper slave before we get to the final floor.

Yeah, let's do that. Maybe even make it hurt a bit.

"Tamaki."

“What?”

“Could you die?”

“...Eh?”

Standing behind her, Leadred stabbed her war-sword through Tamaki’s left breast.

“...H— ... uh...?”

“Devil Flame.”

Leadred burned Tamaki’s face with her flames to make sure she’d die.

“Leadred. Don’t kill her so fast. You need to miss her vitals on purpose.”

“Oh, I get it.”

Tamaki’s hands were convulsing.

I could tell what she was feeling.

The heat, the pain, the agony.

Those three were definitely dominating her thoughts. Once a few moments pass, her nerves would stop working right and the pain would lessen, but that would just make her fear death all the more.

I’m a veteran when it comes to dying.

I know most of the things a person would feel and think as they die.

“She’s not breathing anymore... You should hurry up and enslave her. It’s better to do with a fresh corpse.”

“Yeah.”

Her expression was distorted by pain. Her eyes were burnt and filthy snot ran down

her face.

I felt a bit better seeing her like that.

Laying Tamaki down on the floor, I held her hand up and began enslaving her.

“I shall bestow you with new life, a second life. Make a pact with me and become my servant. **Binding Resurrection.**”

Tamaki’s body began restoring itself.

The wound through her chest closed, her charring disappeared, and the various parts of her face returned to how they’d been.

With that, Tamaki’s enslavement was complete. She’d wake up after a while. I’ll never get tired of the way they react after waking back up.

Tamaki couldn’t escape any more.

“...Daichi.”

Shuri had grown bored while I was looking over Tamaki and patted her lap.

I don’t think there’s a man alive that could turn down an invitation like that.

“Leadred. Let’s take a break. I’m going to take a short trip to dreamland, so please watch over Tamaki for me.”

“And if she tries to escape?”

“Killing her would be a waste, so just keep her from wanting to attack with **Devilish Aura** or something. If she doesn’t do what you want, feel free to break a bone or two.”

“Understood. Heal yourself to your heart’s content.”

Leadred waved her hand. She was already watching over Tamaki.

...I think she just didn’t want to see us flirting, but that might’ve been my imagination.

“So, Shuri. I’ll be taking your offer.”

“I don’t mind, please feel free for however long you want. I enjoy watching you as you sleep.”

As Shuri was who said that, I couldn’t just laugh it off as a joke.

But I wonder why I feel so comfortable being spoiled by her?

I seriously can’t tell which one of us is the master, really.

Relaxing completely and thoroughly enjoying the elastic feeling against my head, fell into a deep sleep.



After each of us took turns sleeping for a few hours to recover our mana, we restarted our dungeon conquering.

Leadred, Shuri, and I were talking about the slime we’d fought.

Tamaki was having to take care of the monsters by herself. By the way, I used **Absolute Command** on her so that she couldn’t say even a single word.

After coming back as a slave, Tamaki kept on yelling and showering me with abuses. Persistently at that.

I was getting fed up with it so I decided to punish her by hunting monsters solo. I even had Shuri and Leadred land the killing blows with magic so that her level wouldn’t increase.

Tamaki would indirectly get some experience if I killed them, after all.

“Don’t you think that our levels jumped from that slime earlier?”

“Yeah. I could tell from that fight that compared to you two, I’m still powerless though...”

“I was surprised too. It was the third time I’d ever not been able to cut something with

my sword. But thanks to that, I did get an idea for who the dungeon's guardian is."

Proud, Leadred smiled.

"Really!?"

"Yeah. That monster used poison and has a soft body. They're perfect measures against my attacks. There's only one person that could do that... Just... haah..."

Her smile changed into a fed up expression in an instant.

"What's wrong?"

"That guy's really annoying. I don't think we'll be able to avoid a fight with him."

"Eh, seriously?"

Honestly, I thought that we'd be able to have Leadred, who was also a demon, persuade him for us. I'd prefer it if we were able to settle it by talking.

However, unfortunately, it looks like we won't be able to go ahead with that.

"Seriously. He won't listen to what you say unless he decides you're worthy to serve."

"Is that so..."

"But then couldn't Daichi use his power to enslave him?"

"Either way, we'd have to kill him first. More importantly though, I don't have any slots open."

Although I could release Tamaki in exchange for gaining the demon who was overwhelmingly stronger, having more pawns for me to control would be even better.

I died twice in the battle against Leadred, so unfortunately, I'm pretty sure that I'll die at least one more time. Call it a hunch.

"Moreover, his strength is comparable to mine."

“Woah... What is the demon’s name?”

Hearing Shuri’s question, Leadred waited a moment to drag it out before responding.

“Fantra Angas. Back then, he was a tactician and was declared as the strongest demon in ice-type magic.”

Chapter 23

He Who Revived From Death (1)

“We’re still not at the final floor?”

Pulverizing a Wight Lancer coming her way with an ice pebble, Tamaki complained.

“Stop complaining and keep on doing your job, Shield.”

Which is why I decided to snap the whip and keep her going.

“Don’t call me that! How could you treat me like that back there... I only had three hundred stamina left!”

“It turned out fine. You can do a lot of things in three minutes yeah? Like defeating a monster like that Light Giant.”

“You could have told her to wait out those three minutes, too.”

“Shuri!? Wouldn’t I have died if he did that!?”

“Yui. I have told you before, but be more polite towards Daichi.”

Shuri had splendidly taken control of the topic like it was nothing.

“But... come on, think about it, Shuri. He’s *that* Katsuragi, right? The clumsy, fat, underhanded nerd. I keep trying to figure out what’s going on, but Shuri, you could definitely find someone way—”

“Yui.”

Shuri interrupted Tamaki, her tone more serious than usually. The fact that it held an anger to it was obvious.

“Wh-What?”

“You don’t know about Katsuragi’s kindness. You don’t know Katsuragi’s strength. You don’t know Katsuragi’s suffering. None of us, not even me, even attempted to get to know Katsuragi.”

“That’s...”

“Even if Katsuragi returned to looking like how Katsuragi used to, I am confident that my feelings for him wouldn’t change. This is not me atoning for anything, no. It is how I honestly feel. I love Katsuragi.”

Shuri came over and locked arms with me. Her expression looked truly happy. Accordingly, Tamaki wasn’t able to say anything in return.

“Which is why I won’t forgive you if you continue to speak bad about him.”

Shuri’s sharp glare pierced through Tamaki.

“I absolutely will not forgive you.”

She repeated herself, this time more forcibly.

“.....”

Tamaki kept her mouth closed. She kept quiet. She might’ve finally started to realize just how strong Shuri’s feelings were.

And that it was stronger than her feeling of friendship with Tamaki.

...I mean, it’s even making me feel embarrassed.

“.....”

Everyone stayed silent and the mood grew awkward. It’d be great if this doesn’t end up influencing our teamwork in the upcoming fight against Fantra.

...Well, I guess I can just use **Absolute Command** on her if push comes to shove.

“...Sorry, Shuri. I still don’t get it.”

Saying that, Tamaki went back to exterminating monsters, restarting our dungeon conquer march.

For the first time since coming here, a dark cloud seemed to hang over us.

“Finally at the seventieth floor, huh.”

I muttered to myself, feeling mixed emotions. **Rigal Den** stopped at the sixtieth floor, so this was the first time I’d been so deep.

The stairway room for this floor was easy enough to find.

Fantra’s mana was pouring out of it, after all. His mana was strong enough that it wouldn’t lose to the crystals’ mana.

I could tell he was extraordinary from the density of the mana and Leadred seemed to be convinced.

With her leading the way, we came across a pair of doors with a very different style than the ones before. They really did look just like a set of modern doors.

There were even doorknobs on them.

I’d like to know what’s going on.

“...Hey, Leadred.”

“What?”

“This Fantra dude, you said he’s a tactician right?”

“It’s as you say.”

“Then what’s up with these doors?”

Leadred sat down, her hands holding her head. Looks like she didn’t expect this either.

Giving your position away to your enemies was generally not a very good idea.

I even started thinking that it may be because of Fantra's strategies that the demons lost the war.

"...Can we hurry up? I want to get back to the surface as soon as possible."

"...Weren't you supposed to be a hero?"

"Oh come on. There's no way I would've expected us to do this all in one go. Besides, you could probably take him on yourself with that strength of yours right? You could even revive if you die."

"Yui."

"I mean, wouldn't it be better to have Shuri watch you do it all too, Katsuragi? That way, you could do whatever without needing to worry about her."

"I didn't ask for you to step in, Yui."

"Shuri, your safety is all I care about. Getting you to give up Katsuragi would make me happy enough to jump around in glee."

"I want to be beside Daichi forever. I won't regret my decision, even if my weakness causes my death."

"Is he forcing you to say that? Shuri, you're really acting weird."

"I know I am, but I don't care anymore. I'm not going to let anyone hold me back. I'm going to do what I want. Besides, didn't I tell you?"

Shuri pointed her dagger at Tamaki.

"I said I wouldn't forgive you if you insulted Daichi again."

They stared at each other, their emotions refusing one another... This is bad.

"Shuri."

“Let it go.”

I grabbed Shuri’s hand and Leadred placed the tip of her war sword against Tamaki’s nape to de-escalate the situation.

“Now’s not the time to be infighting like this. Don’t worry about what she says about me. Besides, I don’t want you to dirty your hands over something so trivial.”

“...Alright.”

Saying that, Shuri reluctantly withdrew.

I’m no longer interested in Tamaki. If she dies during the fight, good. If she lives, good.

If I can make use of her, good.

I used **Absolute Command** on Tamaki. Forcing her to shut up, I had her grasp the door knob.

“Tamaki. You’ll be spearheading our attack. Sound good?”

“.....”

She shook her head back and forth frantically.

She’d prepared a **Freezing Lance** in her right hand. Leadred was on standby to her left. Shuri and I would jump in the moment she opens the door, followed by Tamaki launching her **Freezing Lance**. That was the plan.

“At worst, are you ready to die?”

The three nodded. Seeing that, I began the countdown.

“Three, two, one—let’s go!”

Pushing on both doors, they opened internally. Seeing that, we all jumped in.

However, inside, there was a problem with the floor.

That is, it wasn't there.

"Eh...?"

"No way..."

"Wha...!?"

"——!?"

"" Uaaaaah!?" ""

With no place to land, we all screamed as we fell. We couldn't see the bottom because of how dark it was.

"Shining!"

The light illuminated the area, but the hole seemed to continue on forever.

"Everyone, join hands!"

We all grabbed the hand of whoever we were next to so that we could form into a circle and avoid scattering.

We continued falling for a while, but we could eventually see the end.

—The ground was filled with needles made of the same crystals and ice we'd seen so far.

"Come oooooon!?"

We'd definitely all be wiped out by that if we hit. However, fortunately, they were made of ice.

And it just so happened that one of my slaves was an expert at fire-type magic.

"Leadred!"

Letting go of mine and Shuri's hands, she kicked off the wall to get far enough away

from us that we wouldn't take damage from what she was about to do.

She began to recite the incantation of a magic that would solve our predicament.

"O' emperor of fire. Burn down everything that blocks my way. Leave nothing standing, reduce all to ash."

A red glow swirled around Leadred's right arm before turning into a spiral of fire that would burn everything.

"Pillar of Prominence!"

The blaze ravenously devoured the ice. In just a moment's time, the ice needles all vanished.

"Berserk Tempest!"

I used **Berserk Tempest**, a magic one rank higher than the one Leadred used, to put out the burning flames.

With that danger taken care of, Leadred put her arms up to somersault forward and absorb the blow.

"Shield! Soften Shuri's fall!"

"Alright!"

I imitated Leadred and managed to succeed in landing. As a result of Tamaki giving it her all to protect Shuri, she was unharmed.

Shield was probably happy about finally being able to help Shuri, too.

"Sh-Shuri. Are you hurt? Are you alright?"

"Y-Yeah. Somehow. How about you, Yui?"

"I killed our momentum by layering layers of ice under us before hitting the ground, so I'm alright. I'm just happy you're not hurt."

Tamaki's smile was one from her heart.

She was lying, though. She didn't manage to negate the fall's impact with her ice by much. I saw the look of pain on her face when she landed.

Shuri should've been aware of that as well.

Which was why she was extending her hand to Tamaki to help her up.

Even I was aware that I was getting envious over seeing them like that.

Maybe I might've kept Tamaki instead of throwing her away because I wanted to see interactions like that?

I'd like to have a same-sex friend like that some day. Though of course, Samejima or any of my classmates would be impossible.

Leadred's Leadred, but she's still a woman.

"If you're safe, that's good. Now come on, the person behind that trap is making his appearance."

Chapter 24

He Who Revived From Death (2)

The light sphere I'd created a bit ago floated above my palm. The light it emitted reflected off of the clear crystals, quickly lighting up the room.

At the furthest end of the room was a man sitting on a splendid throne, his legs crossed.

He had wavy golden hair. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that his features were like they'd been sculpted perfectly.

With the exception of one thing.

His eyes held no light to them. Instead, they held a dull feeling.

I couldn't feel any vitality from him at all. Although his eyes were moving, he looked like he was dead.

It felt contradictory, but I was confident in it. I'd seen those eyes many times since coming to this world—they were the eyes of a dead man.

“Greetings, heroes, one and all. I serve as this dungeon's guardian. I am the leader of the undead, placed as the Chief of Staff of the demon army by Messiah—I am Fantra Angus.”

Giving a brief introduction of himself, Fantra Angus smiled chillingly.

“I believe I'll be killing you all now—my regards.”

Fantra suddenly proclaimed his intention to fight. I tried to smile fearlessly, hoping that he wouldn't see through me.

“Hey now. Cutting straight to a fight is bad manners. Can't we get along?”

“You’ve said something amusing. Shall I put it bluntly? Someone of your ability is not worth serving.”

“You’re saying that without even fighting me?”

“I can. After all, I’ve seen all of your fights coming here.”

Picking up a crystal that was placed in a bowl to the side of his throne, Fantra showed it to us.

“Would you like to know why this dungeon is lined with crystal?”

“To drive us crazy?”

“Nonsense. Its true purpose is to observe adventurers. I provide a trace of my mana to those crystals. Everything that holds my mana becomes my eyes, my hands, my feet. They become my servants.”

Fanta continued talking in a haughty manner.

“They allowed me to appreciate your battles coming here as well. I *was* surprised that you had Leadred with you, though. The way she fights is brutish and inelegant.”

Fantra smiled in ridicule, snorting through his nose.

He was holding our fights in derision. It was making me get annoyed.

“Beauty has nothing to do with fighting though?”

“Oh, it does. Those who are mighty have the ability to fight with elegance and absolutely must maintain it as they kill their enemies. Fighting as you all do is simply out of the question. You must put measures in place so as to cope with any and all situations.”

Finally looking as though he was done with what he wanted to say, Fantra stood up.

“Allow me to teach you how those who stand above the rest fight.”

He thrust his right hand forward. We all took our stances, wondering what sort of

attack he would open with.

“Bloom—Ice Crash.”

Fantra snapped his fingers.

The crystals at each of our feet cracked as petals clad in cold air at absolute zero shot up through them, robbing us of our heat.

“””” Fireball! “”””

All of us judging that to be dangerous, we all shot fireballs at our feet, just barely managing to escape once the restraints loosened.

There was no doubt that we’d all burnt ourselves, but it was many times more preferable over being trapped in that ice.

“You judged the situation fairly and used fire-type magic without hesitating. I thought that you’d be just a little more afraid of the pain and not be able to resist, honestly.”

“Pain’s better than dying.”

“What drivel. You could have died without having to feel any pain if you had just stayed still.”

“Sorry, but I don’t plan on dying here!”

Kicked off the ground toward him and keeping a low profile to the ground, I swung my sword to try severing his legs. Fantra dodged it by jumping. However, Leadred, who’d dashed forward alongside me, was in the air waiting for me. She brandished her war sword and swung it at full speed to decapitate Fantra.

Our attack consisted of a slash from above while he was busy keeping his attention on me below. He shouldn’t be able to deal with it.

“Multi Guard.”

However, against my expectations, he prevented Leadred’s surprise attack with an ice shield. Convinced that he prevailed in this exchange, Fantra never once stopped

smiling.

However, there weren't just the two of us. There were four.

Tamaki, who was hiding behind Leadred, and Shuri, who'd taken a roundabout way to move directly below where Fantra's leap would take him, invoked their respective magics.

"Freezing Lance!"

"Cyclone!"

Both their speed and their power were perfect. They'd even managed to do it in sync.

However, that still didn't manage to land a hit on him.

"This is why you are naive! Ice Storm."

As the two's magic missed and hit the walls on either side of the room, a large amount of that ice began to swallow their magic.

It then, somehow, managed to surge along the two's magic to try and freeze the girls themselves.

"Shuri!"

I leapt toward Shuri, grabbing her and rolling away to the side.

I heard an explosion in the air behind me at the same time. It was hard to see through the steam, but I could make out the appearance of the devil launching a magic attack at the ice.

Exposed to the extreme heat of the fire, the ice rapidly sublimated and exploded.

Leadred and Yui managed to make it through the counterattack, landing near Shuri and I.

"You guys injured?"

“We’re good. And you, heroes?”

“No problems here. More importantly, listen to me. Shuri, Tamaki, go and destroy the crystals. Leadred and I will make sure to keep that bastard busy in the meantime.”

Understanding just how large of a role the crystals’ existence influences the fight after that brief exchange, I told them our next plan.

“And sorry Leadred, but you’re going to be taking the hard job with me.”

“Don’t worry about it. Besides, I’ve been wanting to go head to head with him for a long time. Now’s the perfect chance for that.”

She was grinning like she actually found this fun. That’s great.

Taking my stance again, I turned around to see Fantra staring at us in pity, sighing.

“Do you not understand? I told you that these crystals are my eyes and ears. No matter what sort of attack you’re planning, I will know of it in advance.”

“Yeah, and thanks to that, I also know that if we get rid of the crystals, your strength will go down too.”

“Hmph, so you intend on concentrating solely on breaking my crystals?”

He slowly moved his gaze over to Shuri and Tamaki, who were busy doing something about the crystals.

I had no intention on allowing him to stop them, however.

Leadred fired a **Devil Flame** at him. In response, Fantra deflected it with an ice sphere.

“You should focus less on them and more on us, eh?”

“Oh, Leadred... Why would a woman such as yourself fall so low. To think that you are helping a hero... I suppose it shall remain a mystery as to why. Could it be that you were defeated?”

“The heroes’ cooperation exceeded my expectations. Hey, Fantra. I believe this guy is

going to be the one who'll lead us. How about it? Can we group up?"

"You are well aware of my personality, Leadred. Whether you fell or didn't fall, everything will be decided by whether or not he can win against me."

"Guess I expected as much. Well then, let's get to it."

Leadred held her war sword up to her right so that it was perpendicular to the ground. She then lowered her stance and lifted the heel of her right foot slightly.

I raised my sword as well, pointing its tip directly at his throat.

Producing an ice sword in response, he took a posture with his right arm and leg forward in front of him, his body only half-facing us like a royal swordsman. It was similar to a fencer.

We faced him. Silence ruled the space between us. The first one to break that silence was—

"Hyah!"

—Leadred.

She sent a shockwave out from her war sword, but Fantra evaded it. So as to not give him the chance to regain his posture, I clasped my sword's handle with an underhanded grip.

A straight red line was trained on Fantra's body.

"Line Drive!"

"Multi Guard!"

The ice wall crashed into pieces. Making my way through the scattered fragments, I advanced forward.

I closed the distance between us in a leap, I struck. Fantra crouched low and went at my legs with a sweeping blow.

Acting as though he'd tripped me up, I swung my sword at him.

Fantra parried it.

"Hah—uoooh!?"

Having accidentally let down my guard after being so certain that my attack would hit, I was thrown by what was similar to an overhead throw.

I managed to land on my feet after rotating midair, but looking up I saw an ice knife flying right for me.

"Kuh! **Wind Slice!**"

Managing to slice through it with my sword so that it only grazed my cheeks, I frantically fired a wind blade at him.

"Oraaah!!"

Leadred went in for a pincer attack with my magic. When Fantra parried her warsword with his sword, he snapped his fingers. Immediately after, an ice wall appeared, blocking my wind blade.

"Hey, he didn't chant anything!"

"**Freezing Sword!**"

I followed up with another attack from below. He blocked it with another ice sword he created in his empty hand.

The moment our swords met, I heard an unpleasant ringing sound coming from my own. His ice was corroding my sword.

"Take this!"

Fantra jumped up and spun like a top. I tried to ward off his centrifugal force-enhanced ice sword and counter, but just barely landed a blow on his abdomen before being forced back.

I backed up to put some distance between us.

“Tch. He’s as annoying to fight as ever...”

“It’s like he’s just way too good at using his body.”

My shoulders were heaving up and down as I breathed, even Leadred was sweating.

Yet Fantra wasn’t even out of breath. His face, starkly missing any sweat at all, had an uninterested smile on it.

What’s more of a problem, though...

“There’s no blood coming from his wound.”

Chapter 25

He Who Revived From Death (3)

There was a hole where I stabbed. However, there was none of the red liquid that should have been seeping out of it.

So I guess him being an undead includes that stuff?

“You’ve still got a long way to go. Leadred, even if he can’t give it his all because you are in the room, this hero here was only able to land a single wound on me after working with you. I can only say that that is disappointing.”

Even that single wound was removed through the crystal’s light.

“Are you finally coming to understand your predicament?”

“In your territory, you are where you’ve laid your traps. So what. We’re prepared.”

The crystals around us were being destroyed. There were barely any around us left.

Shuri and Tamaki were doing their best, around half of the room’s crystals were gone.

I still don’t understand how he’s omitting his incantations, but while predicting him using magic was difficult, it wasn’t impossible.

The longer we drag this out, the more of a disadvantage we put him at.

The battle should tip in our favor.

So long as there’s the four of us, we can fight. We can kill him.

Taking in a deep breath, I sighed.

“Get ready for me to kill and enslave you.”

Saying that, I refocused myself. I took position at a location without any crystal.

The present conditions were perfect.

—Nevertheless, seeing us look so confident, Fantra laughed out loud.

“Enslave *me*? Impossible! You still haven’t understood anything!”

Snap!

Fantra snapped his fingers, the sound ringing in my ears.

“—When did I ever say that I couldn’t use magic without the crystals?”

The moment I realized the meaning behind his words was the same moment I realized an ice spear had pierced my chest.

“...Goho!?”

I spat out a glob of blood that made its way to my mouth. Keeping myself from collapsing to the ground, I fell to my knee.

But this is bad. I know, because I’ve experienced this pain many times now.

The pain of dying.

My head was filled with an intense pain. No blood streamed out of the wound. The spear was emanating cold air, freezing my body.

“...Aaah!”

Ignoring the pain, I gritted my teeth and forced myself to pull out the ice spear. It was fortunate that the wound was frozen solid, it had numbed most of the pain.

“Hero—geh!?”

Leadred had tried to move over to me, but her legs were caught by ice chains that sprouted up from the ground. Unable to kill her momentum, she fell over, the chain then entangling her and robbing her ability to move.

“Dammit, what’s with this ice!”

“Freeze.”

“——!?”

He froze Leadred’s mouth so that she wouldn’t be able to cast magic.

“Leadred. You should stay there for a while. I don’t wish to kill a comrade of mine, either... Now then.”

The sound of his footsteps ringing in my ears, Fantra approached me. He then suddenly kicked my face up.

“Gah—...!”

“I cannot forgive you, hero.”

He then pulled me up by my hair and punched me. Over, and over, and over again.

My nose broke. My teeth broke. My cheeks caved in. The consecutive beatings numbed my ability to feel anything. I could barely even open my right eye.

Seeing the distorted smile on Fantra’s face, I could tell that he was a sadist. His face was just like Samejima’s. He was a criminal who enjoyed torturing people.

“...Because... I am, weak?”

“That too, of course. However, the main reason I cannot forgive you... is that Messiah fell in love with you!”

His anger surging again, he threw me down and trampled on my wounds.

“Uwaaaaaah!?”

The ice that was blocking my wound cracked, causing pain to course through me. Even hearing my screams, his anger hadn’t abated at all.

“Receiving Messiah’s favor to this extent with your level of strength, compared to the greatness that is myself, one who has been graced by the goddess’ favor... I cannot forgive you!”

Stop, it hurts... stop it...!

“You stole it! I have been here, always, always thinking of her, and you... you stole her heart!”

I got my power from Claria. Not the demon goddess!

“By defeating you here, I will prove that I am stronger than you! And when I do, she’ll notice too! She will be disillusioned about you, who can’t defeat me. She will give *me* her love!!”

I had neither the words nor the energy to answer him. Preferably, he’d hurry up and kill me. I’ll be able to get stronger and kill him when he does.

Seemingly satisfied after stamping down onto me for so long, Fantra kicked me away with his foot, his breathing rough.

“Don’t worry. I’ll let you taste how I’m feeling before I kill you.”

I had a bad feeling about what he meant.

That feeling was becoming a reality.

“First, I will kill the girl you hold dear.”

Fantra turned away from me, pointing his bloodied hand to Shuri.

“...How dare you do that to Katsuragi!!”

She pressed both her hands out before her.

“Ah, don’t—Shuri!”

“Hoh. You intend to challenge me with magic? Amusing.”

Shaking off Tamaki's grip on her after losing her cool, Shuri began reciting an incantation. I'm not sure when she learned it, but it was the magic I was most proud of.

"O' Emperor of Wind! Cut down those who would hinder my right to rule!"

"O' Emperor of Ice! Freeze those who would hinder my right to rule!"

Stop, Shuri. Run away! Don't fight him head on, run! You can't win against him!

However, I couldn't even use **Absolute Command**. My thoughts couldn't reach her.

"Exert the might of your storms! Revert all to dust and return them to the earth!"

"Bestow eternal sleep. Take from them their pain, their fear. Give but a peaceful, eternal dream."

Move, move! I tried to gather all the strength I had left. I just have to move a little, that's all. So please, move! Please, listen to me!

"Berserk Tempest!!"

"Blizzard Prison!!"

The imperial rank wind-type magic manifested simultaneously with the ice-type magic, colliding.

What decided which would prevail between two equal-ranked magics colliding?

The answer was simple. One's own ability.

"Kuh—!"

Accordingly to that principle, Shuri was pushed back. The way things were going, she would soon fall prey to that ice.

"Wiiiiind!!"

Finally able to force the words out of my mouth, I supported my body with wind so

that I wouldn't collapse back down. I also road it out, moving towards her faster and faster.

However, I still wouldn't make it in time.

Shuri would be killed.

I invoked a second usage of **Wind**.

Make it in time, make it in time, make it in time!

My thoughts were racing. I'd only just activated the magic, but it felt like hours.

Shuri was losing, and fast.

—I'd forgotten something.

“Shuri!!”

There was someone else that thought of her as important to them.

Tamaki jumped into Shuri, pushing her out of the way.

Tamaki was now in the same position she had been in.

Shuri was out of the range of that guy's magic. With that, her safety was guaranteed.

I had no need to move there anymore.

...However.

“Move.”

“Kyah—”

Not releasing the magic, I pushed Tamaki away over next to Shuri.

“K-Katsuragi...!?”

Tamaki looked at me with eyes that bespoke how unbelieving she was of my actions.

“Don’t get the wrong idea. Saving Shuri is my job.”

Saying what I wanted to say, I was satisfied.

His magic rained down on me.

“Triple Guard!”

I heard someone reciting magic, but my sight had already gone pure white.

Chapter 26

He Who Revived From Death (4)

◆ Tamaki Yui's Point of View ◆

“Move.”

“Kyah—”

In an effort to protect Shuri, my feet moved without me thinking at all.

I pushed Shuri out of the way and should have become that magic's food.

However, Katsuragi was there instead.

“K-Katsuragi...!?”

That man looked to me and spoke.

“Don't get the wrong idea. Saving Shuri is my job.”

Why did he come to help? Why did Shuri decide to follow this man?

For a moment, I felt like I caught a glimpse of the answer why.

I'd thought that Shuri was being forced into interacting with him. It was the first time I'd ever seen Shuri so crazy about someone, after all.

However, Katsuragi endured the pain, even with that hole in his chest, even becoming tattered. All to save Shuri.

No hesitation could be seen in his face at all.

Ignoring the fact he'd die, he came to help Shuri.

Getting turned into an ice sculpture through ice-type magic means he wouldn't feel pain until it melted or was destroyed, but that also meant he wouldn't die. In other words, Katsuragi's ability wouldn't activate.

For Katsuragi to do that even while knowing that—he really did love Shuri.

Thinking that, my mouth moved on its own.

“Triple Guard!”

I deployed a layer of soul rank ice-type magic in front of Katsuragi's upper half. I actually wanted to protect his entire body, but I knew that my magic wouldn't hold a candle against Fantra's. Therefore, I shrunk its area to increase its defense.

This way, Katsuragi would be able to kill himself and activate **Revenge of the Grudgebearer**.

Fantra's magic covered Katsuragi. The area I put up the three-layered ice shield was safe.

“Katsuragi!”

I ran over to him. His lower half was frozen solid.

“Are you alright!?”

“...For you to worry about me, did some natural disaster happen?”

“Sh-shut up!... I was wrong.”

Katsuragi's expression looked bewildered despite his current situation. Like he'd seen some rare animal.

“...Seriously, did you get hit on the head?”

“Is it really the time to make jokes like that? More importantly, now's your chance to heal! It sucks to say it, but can you die?”

“No, my arms got frozen. I can't.”

“I’ll kill you then.”

“A high grade slave can’t attack their master.”

“Oh come on! In that case, I’ll look through your pouch!”

I looked through Katsuragi’s pouch. There was a potion, three yanu leaves, and a map. No good. He didn’t have anything that could cure the frozen status!

“Katsuragi! Don’t you have anything else!?”

“...Wait a second...”

“Hey, stop ignoring... me!?”

All of a sudden, Katsuragi drew his face close to my ear and whispered into it.

“—!?”

I couldn’t hide my surprise at what he told me. Even I knew how flustered I looked. But it was true that this was the only thing that might work.

“I-I’ll just get Shuri and...”

“We don’t have the time for that. There’s also the possibility that he’ll get in the way. Besides, this is also better off for Shuri’s sake.”

“B-But, it’ll be my... my first...”

“Is this really the time?”

“D-Do I really have to...?”

“Yeah.”

Katsuragi was determined. I knew it too.

I knew that this was necessary.

I prepared myself for what was about to happen.

“I could use **Absolute Command** if you really don’t want to.”

“Th-That’s not it! A-At least, let me first...”

“Sorry, but there’s no time for that.”

“...I know! I know already!”

I put my lips onto Katsuragi’s, acting as though I was entrusting my weight to him. With an overbearingness unthinkable for Katsuragi, he unreservedly violated my mouth with his tongue, wrapping around mine.

Th-This guy...!

However, the fact that I didn’t find it so revolting was vexing.



“Puah...”

After the long kiss, he let me go.

“The rest is on you. I’m wagering it on your friendship with Shuri.”

Friendship. Something impossible to the Katsuragi that entered high school.

He’d entrusted my fate, Leadred’s fate, and Shuri’s fate to the emotion he put the least faith in, an emotion I’m sure he’d long forgotten about.

In that case, I’ll have to respond.

My feelings for Shuri as my best friend won’t lose to anyone.

“Leave it to me. After all, I treasure Shuri a hundred times more than you, even. I’ll definitely win—just watch.”

Hearing my confident declaration, Katsuragi smiled.

Following that, he fell unconscious inside the ice.

Chapter 27

He Who Revived From Death (5)

◆Hamakaze Shuri's Point of View◆

“...How dare you do that to Katsuragi!!”

Suddenly hearing a sorrowful scream, I lost myself in anger and invoked the imperial rank magic **Berserk Tempest**.

“**Berserk Tempest!!**”

“**Blizzard Prison!!**”

Our enemy also used a similarly strong imperial rank magic. At that moment, I lost any semblance of calm I may have had. Shamefully, I had forgotten what would happen when two similarly ranked magics collided with one another.

As what was obviously going to happen, I knew that I would lose to his **Blizzard Prison**. However, that was alright.

This was my mistake to bear. I would die, but it was my responsibility. Besides, I'm certain that Katsuragi will come out on top in the end.

But for some reason, I was pushed to the side.

—By Yui, my best friend.

She'd been talking with me this whole time, apologizing... worrying about me. I only ever gave her the cold shoulder in return.

Even with that, she decided to save me, even volunteering her body to do so. So that the mistake she made on *that day* wouldn't repeat itself...

But even then, it was too early for me to be surprised. Someone had then pushed Yui

out of the way.

That someone was a gentle person. A very, very warm-hearted person. Someone who made those with him happier.

That someone was Katsuragi.

He saved me. Although he sometimes did terrible things, he wouldn't stop, even if it got hard.

That's just they kind of person he was. He probably couldn't bear leaving Yui to die, either. He's the kind of person who wouldn't stop being kind to those who were important to him.

I felt my chest tighten.

Then, a thing I'd hoped wouldn't happen became reality.

Yui kissed Katsuragi. He didn't look like he didn't want it, either, and responded.

"Ah..."

I felt my body suddenly lose its strength.

Katsuragi was telling Yui something. Yui said something back to him, causing Katsuragi to smile.

He was trapped in that ice.

"...Ah... ah..."

Katsuragi had to have said something to her. And Yui definitely has to have started liking him now.

If not, there's no way she would have kissed someone she hated so much.

There's only one way I can confirm it.

I need to hear it from Katsuragi's mouth directly.

I need for him to say I'm wrong. For him to tell me that I'm the only one he loves. For him to embrace me, whispering that I was his into my ear.

So that that can happen... I mean, so that I can get him to do that...

"...I have to kill Fantra."

Looking toward the annoyingly loud man—the man who put Katsuragi in that ice, I absolutely had to kill him.

I stood up, my eyes dead set on him.

I couldn't think straight.

My mind felt clouded. Like a bomb went off in it.

In that case, who needs thinking?

I just need to kill him. Yeah, that's good enough. As long as I can be with Katsuragi, that's good enough for me.

"Demonslayer, activate."

My body had felt like it was made of lead moments before, but now it felt like feathers.

I can't waste any time. I have to end this within five minutes.

"Oh? You couldn't possibly still intend to fight me? Haven't you come to understand the difference between us after that little magic display of yours?"

"I'll win if I don't use magic."

If magic is a threat, I just have to make him not use magic. With how I feel right now, I feel like I can do that.

"How idiotic of you. There's no way you could!"

"I won't know if I don't try—no, I can do it."

I picked up the dagger I'd dropped and swung it through the air a few times... Yeah, fast.

"I don't mind letting you go, you know? I'm feeling *thoroughly* refreshed right now. Besides, you are someone who's been forsaken, just as I have been. I don't like beating up brokenhearted women."

"...Shut up. I haven't been *forsaken*. He had to do that."

Yeah. Katsuragi would do anything if he had to do it. He wouldn't even hesitate if that something was killing someone. I have faith that what he did with Yui was something he had to do.

"Hah, sure. If you want to have at it, then have another taste of my magic!"

Fantra snapped his fingers.

Simultaneously, I—accelerated.

An extremely short moment passed, maybe not even a second.

My speed exceeding what Fantra's eyes could follow, I arrived behind his back.

"...Eh?"

Fantra still hadn't realized where I was. I pulled my arm back behind me—

"Behind you."

"Wha—...!?"

—and swung my fist straight into his face. The punch's impact sent blood all over his face.

".....!"

Losing his ability to see or hear, the man fell back a few steps and snapped his fingers again.

Light gathered on his face, restoring it.

“Y-You...! What are you!?”

I punched at the face again. However, as there was a layer of ice to act as a shield between my fist and his face this time, the punch didn't go through.

I couldn't let him open a distance between us.

I got in close so that I could get into my dagger's range.

“Yah!”

“Multi Blockade!”

Realizing that he wouldn't be able to stop my attack with his ice layers, he immediately switched to using walls.

Taking off into the air and putting my feet together, I flipped vertically in the air drop kicked him. Fantra wasn't able to hide his surprise at my sudden change in tactics.

“Guh...!”

He crossed his arms above his head to receive my attack, but his slender arms had no way of stopping my attack and couldn't take the shock, easily breaking.

“Aaaah!? How dare yooou...! Ice—”

“I won't let you!”

Hearing him begin his incantation, I kicked him to the wall with my shin. He made a crater in the wall before falling limply to the ground, unable to get back up.

I couldn't miss this chance.

Fantra started getting back up, so I severed his arms.

I didn't stop attacking him, either.

Grasping his neck and shoving him against the wall, my right hand paid his face another visit. Finally, I jumped and drove him further into the wall with a roundhouse kick.

His head hung limply, he wasn't breathing anymore.

"It's because of you that Katsuragi's..."

Stabbing my dagger into where his heart should be, I tore the area up with all I had. I changed my grip on the dagger into an underhanded grip and swung it at him again.

Vertically. Diagonally. Horizontally.

I mangled him.

So that he would never appear before us again.

I turned him into a lump of flesh.

Finally, once there was nothing left for me to slice apart, I stopped. The remains before me didn't look like a living creature anymore.

"Haah... haah... haah..."

I'd definitely killed him.

His skull was caved in, his heart was torn apart, his body was mangled. He didn't even have fingers to use for his crystals, so he shouldn't be able to use magic anymore even if he were alive.

I'd won. Now Katsuragi can go back to normal!

Filled with a sense of accomplishment, I looked to Katsuragi in expectation.

However, Katsuragi was still encased in ice.

"Eh, why...?"

Fantra was defeated. I'd taken his life with my own hands.

But why isn't Katsuragi released yet!?

Did I do something wrong!?

Can only Fantra release the magic?

Or is there another reason?

"Shuri! Behind you!"

I heard Yui shout, bringing me back from my sea of thought.

Once I turned around, I saw that Fantra had almost completely regenerated and was approaching me with a sword in his hand. I tried avoiding him by leaping backward—but suddenly, my body felt like it was experiencing multiple times normal gravity, making it so that I only barely took a single step back.

Why did it have to happen now...

Demonlayer ended...

Right after that, feeling like my chest was being pierced through, I collapsed.

Chapter 28

He Who Revived From Death (6)

◆ Tamaki Yui's Point of View ◆

This is bad, this is very, very bad.

Shuri was killed; a stab through the chest. Even now I just want to dash out and go to her.

But I have to stay calm. If I'm defeated, it really will all be over.

I'd originally been planning to cooperate with Shuri to get this done. I'd bring Leadred's chains to Shuri and the three of us would break them together.

However, Shuri wound up being defeated. There's no way I could break the chains binding Leadred with my strength alone.

She was getting colder and colder. Breathing must have been getting difficult for her, too. The reason she's still alive is probably only because of how strong she is.

In other words, right now, everything's resting on my shoulders.

"Ahahahaha! You must be mortified by your situation, girl. As a precaution, I imbued a technique into this room's crystals to revive me when I lose consciousness. Though thanks to that, the crystals are all out of mana!"

Fantra lifted up his foot and smashed it down on Shuri's head.

"Oh, did that hurt? What you did hurt me, hacking my body into pieces."

He mashed her head against the ground.

Not yet! I have to buy some time. If I let my anger control me it'll be the end for all of us.

I clenched my fist strong enough to break my nails.

“You moving that fast was thoroughly unexpected. After I kill this hero here, I believe I will make you my slave... Now then.”

He corrupt eyes moved to land on me.

“Open.”

I looked over my status. My remaining mana... thirteen hundred eighty.

There’s only one way I can think up that has the possibility of beating him. Until I get the chance to go through with it, I’ll have to focus on avoiding him with all I have.

Shuri earned me about six minutes with what she did. I’ll have to double that to make it out of this.

I’ll attract his attention until then!

“Girl, what you did a little while ago surprised me.”

“What?”

I maintained a bravado so that he wouldn’t realize how scared I was.

Hiding my true feelings was a specialty of mine. This whole time, I’ve just lived as my surroundings told me to—*be a good girl*.

I lie to myself!

“I’d originally thought that the hero loved this girl here, but for him to actually prefer you...”

“You’re misunderstanding something here... he likes her too. As well as me. So much that he can’t choose either of us!”

I was desperate. Anything was fine. Compared to my life, anything would be a cheap price.

“I heard you talking earlier, you said there was someone you love so much it’s driving you mad? Her name was... Messiah, right? How did you display your love to her?”

The basics of conversation. Steer the topic to something the other person is interested in.

He was so envious of Katsuragi that his personality did a one-eighty flip, he’ll definitely bite onto it!

“Hmph. You’re wanting to prolong how long you have before your death?”

Why is he so calm at a time like this!?

“Th-That’s not my intention at all. I was just purely interested.”

“Don’t lie to me. I can hear it in your voice. You can’t hide it.”

Geh... I was at a loss for words. Fantra began to speak in pride.

“I assume that you had meant for me to grow angry, yes? Unfortunately, I have already defeated the hero. The person who took away Messiah’s love is no more. Now, she will shower me with her unending love! Oh, my goddess!”

...Exaggeratedly, he took a praying pose similar to a nun.

“Which is why there’s no point in you attempting to resist. Your struggles are in vain, girl. Give up.”

“...No, I—”

“I told you to give up.”

He threw his ice blade at my feet. I could tell from his tone that he meant that his next attack would be lethal.

“Leadred can’t move. The slave girl is dead, and that *hero* is trapped in my ice, unable to die.”

Fantra snapped his fingers three times in a row.

Another ice blade appeared in his right hand with ice shields and tiny, gravel-like spheres circling him as though to shield him.

“Even being driven into a corner, you, the weakest among all four of your group, are but a trifling matter to deal with.”

Fantra took a step forward, followed by another as he shortened the distance between us. I retreated accordingly.

“...Now, I wonder how many minutes you’ll survive?”

His line signaled the start of our first.

“Hm. I believe I’ll begin with this.”

Saying that, all of the ice spheres floating about him shot toward me, showering me like hail.

“Triple Guard!”

I produced three layers of ice to act as stairs going upward. Just as I dashed up them at top speed, the ground where I had just been was scraped as though bullets had ricocheted off of it.

“As powerful as ever...!”

“Come now! Are you sure you can take your eyes off me!?”

“Shut up already, I know!”

He shot another wave of that same ice. I tried jumping down this time to avoid it, but he wouldn’t allow me to get off so easily.

“Hah!”

Fantra was coming to make this a close range fight.

I had no way to move my body midair like Katsuragi or the others could.

So I had no choice but to take him head on.

“Freezing Lance!”

With a spear made of the same material as his sword, I managed to deflect his attack.

“So you’ve resolved yourself to use ice-type magic against me!”

Pushed back by the deflection, Fantra’s body landed after spinning around once in the air. Keeping my motion going to turn away from him, I put my all into running.

“...Alright then. You’ll die either way. Let’s continue this game of tag.”

Fantra created and fired off more of his ice. I used my triple ice shield to deflect them, knocking as many of the leftovers away with my spear. Even so, I couldn’t stop being hit by some of them.

“Freeze!”

I aimed at the floor underneath Fantra, freezing it to have him slip. However, let alone running, he was just walking on it unimpeded in the least.

“Come now, this is child’s play.”

Fantra deliberately sent his heel into the ice, breaking it. Seeing that, I smiled.

What I did just now was a trap to camouflage something else. Its true purpose was to freeze Shuri’s wounds.

Shuri wasn’t dead, she had just fainted due to the aftereffects of **Demonlayer**. She had collapsed after his attack hit her, so conveniently for me, he interpreted that as her dying.

It would be bad if her wound was left frozen like that for a long time, but there’s no problem if it’s just for now.

I’ll be able to settle this if I can just last a little bit longer.

Shuri is able to use recovery magic, so there's a chance she'll be able to close her wound if she uses all of her mana on it.

After making certain that her wound was closed with ice, I gathered my attention onto Fantra so that she wouldn't find out about her emergency treatment.

I stopped running.

"Hoh? Our game of tag is at its end so soon?"

"Yes. I can defeat you now."

"Heh... what an amusing jest. Sure, give it a go. I'll even wait for you to invoke your magic."

"How kind of you. As I am oh-so-weak, I'll accept your offer."

I raised my hands and began reciting the incantation.

"O' spirits of ice, become the three shields that will protect me. **Triple Guard.**"

The three shields were deployed close to one another in front of my palms.

"You still intend to do something by defending? Those shields will do nothing to stop my attacks."

"I wonder about that? By all means, give it your best shot. Or perhaps you, the person lauded as the strongest ice-type mage, is scared?"

"I won't fall for your blatant provocations, girl."

"Oh, too bad. How about this then? **Triple Guard.**"

I invoked three more shields to form and apply themselves to the front of the three already there.

"Triple Guard, Triple Guard, Triple Guard!!"

I'd prepared fifteen shields in total.

I'd already reached the limits of my mana.

I'm feeling dizzy, but I can't lose here!

I pulled my hands back until they reached my chest.

“—I'll show you that shields aren't only for defense.”

I thrust my palms straight out.

The fifteen overlapped ice layers struck Fantra all at once, pressing him into the wall.

“Guh...! But if that's all you have... **Freeze Gun!**”

Fantra shot an ice bullet at the wall of ice. However, it only managed to break through two layers.

“What!?”

Fantra let out a startled cry.

Our back and forth up till here was a precautionary measure. I deliberately gave him such easy to understand provocations, going so far as to recite the magic's incantation on purpose so that he would know its rank.

I also predicted that Fantra would one-up my magic by attempting to overcome it with a similarly magic similarly in the soul rank.

A bout between magics of the same class would be won by whoever had more mana. That was an unchangeable fact of this world.

However, this guy didn't know of the existence of my special ability, **Frost Witch**.

“Gooooo!”

The surging ice walls pressed Fantra further into the wall. It kept pushing him further and further in until stopping.

“Oooof!”

Similarly to me, Fantra was pushing back with a magic of his one. One a rank higher, **Multi Blockade**.

“Kuh...!”

“Haaah...!”

Our magics pressed against each other, the ice layers and walls not moving an inch. The first one of us to use up their strength... was me.

“Aaaah!”

He turned the tides on me. Throwing me into the other wall, I powerlessly collapsed.

However, I was overflowing with satisfaction. I'd managed to successfully reach my targeted time.

I played my role well.

“I'll let you know that that was a good plan you put together. I actually had to struggle.”

Fantra walked over to Katsuragi, who was still trapped in the ice.

“Although you and this girl have so many things to you to praise, this man was a letdown. Either way, becoming the demons' hero would have been impossible for him.”

“Is that so? He does have a few good points too, you know. For example, not knowing when to give up.”

“Saying that in this situation feels somewhat empty...”

Fantra tapped on the ice holding Katsuragi. He did it as though he'd already won.

“I wouldn't mind leaving him like this... but I should reward you all for your efforts, no? Allow me to kill him before your very eyes. **Freezing Lance**.”

Fantra hoisted his spear, aiming to toward Katsuragi.

“Eh...? What are you doing? You do know that he’ll revive if you kill him, right?”

“Oh yes, I am quite aware. I also know that there is a period he stays unconscious.”

“S-Stop! Don’t kill him! You don’t have to do that to him anymore! Don’t hurt him!”

Hearing me let out a grief-filled scream, Fantra smiled pleasantly.

“Good! That expression, it’s so invigorating! Now that I’ve seen that... I *have* to kill him!!”

Fantra’s spear stabbed straight toward Katsuragi’s head—

“Wha...?”

—but before it landed, its tip was held in place.

What?

It was a hand.

Who’s?

Only one person could.

It was stopped by a hand that thrust itself out from inside the ice.

“H-How!?! How did you break my ice!?”

Fantra stood there, trembling.

It could be said that there was no helping it.

Because the hand was from the boy who he had trapped until just then.

The crack spread from the area his hand breached like glass. The sound of ice’s breaking was like a countdown.

Then, it entirely crumbled.

“Ah... ah.....!”

His spear pulled forward, the shocked Fantra staggered forward a step, nearly falling.

The newly resurrected youth gripped his face, squeezing tightly.

Bloodlust seeped from his body, unable to be contained.

“—Yo, Fantra. I came back from hell to kill you personally.”

Saying that, Katsuragi Daichi smiled devilishly.

Chapter 29

He Who Revived From Death (7)

◆Katsuragi Daichi's Point of View◆

"How... how!? How are you alive!?"

"...Shut up, you f*cking fake corpse."

I tightened my grip on his head and heard the dull sound of a bone breaking.

"Aaaaah!!"

"I just told you to shut up."

Still keeping hold of his face, I slammed him to the floor.

"Gahah...!?"

His chest slammed against the ground, Fantra had trouble breathing. Given how he had his middle finger on his thumb, it looked like he still intended to resist.

I stamped down on his fingers.

Fantra couldn't even scream properly.

"You don't need your fingers anymore, right?"

Saying that, I broke the fingers on his right hand one by one. For his left hand, I pulled them backwards at the knuckle far enough so that his bones could be seen poking through his skin.

"Uaaaah!?"

I couldn't even catch what he was trying to say anymore. If he thought I was going to

end it at that, he was dead wrong.

When I came to, I saw how messed up Shuri was. I saw Tamaki collapsed. I saw Leadred bound.

I still had to pay back their share of the fun.

I put my hand on Fantra's abdomen as he was rolling about, wracked by pain.

“Wind Cut.”

The wind blade tore through his body mercilessly.

“S-Stop...”

I'd managed to have him beg for his life. I didn't stop, obviously.

I'll only kill him after I punish him so much that he would prefer death.

“Earth Chains.”

Chains sprouting from the ground took Fantra's arms and legs and pulled them away from each other. Following that, the chain morphed into having spikes.

Naturally, the spikes dug into his flesh as it tightened.

“——aah!?”

“Man you cry a lot. Maybe you don't need that mouth of yours either? Guess I could remove your nose while I'm at it?”

“——!?”

“Wind Slice.”

The small, compressed wind blade sliced through his nose, soundlessly severing it from his face.

“———!?”

He let out a soundless scream.

By then, Fantra practically couldn't breathe.

Foam started to bubble at his mouth as he started to struggle. His eyes growing vacant, he looked like he was about to faint.

“Water Ball.”

I doused his body with water, making sure that he wouldn't have the luxury of losing consciousness. The water soaking into his wounds, Fantra tried to struggle free again.

However, he couldn't move. He couldn't escape the pain he felt, either.

All he could do was suffer.

“...I'm still not done with you, you still have to go through Shuri's and Leadred's repayment. So let's finish it with the next one, I don't have the time to play around with you anymore.”

“.....”

Fantra couldn't say anything anymore.

Flecks of blood covered his skin. His expression was that of a person staring death in the face.

Convinced that Fantra had lost his will to live, I called for the person most deserving of the honors, the one who was currently trying to stand up and pat the dust off herself.

“Tamaki!”

“Wh-What? Oh, that stuff at the end was just an act okay? I'm talented in that stuff!”

“Yeah, you could definitely be an actress or something.”

When I followed along with her lighthearted remark and joked back with a feeling of

gratitude for what she did, she looked at me dubiously.

“...Are you really Katsuragi? The Katsuragi I know would never smile like that.”

“Don’t make me hurt you, Shield.”

“Yep, you’re Katsuragi alright.”

Tamaki laughed like a mischievous child who succeeded in a prank.

What kind of punishment should I... no, now’s not the time for that. Let’s just focus on this guy for now.

But there’s something I’ll have to do first.

“Tamaki. You get to perform the finishing blow.”

Hearing me say that, Tamaki looked puzzled.

“Eh, why? Why don’t you do it? The crystals are all used up, he won’t be able to revive himself anymore...?”

As Tamaki said, the crystals that had been glittering around the room had all lost their light.

“Idiot. Even without using the crystals’ mana, he could always just use his own. It’s not like I believe him when he said that that was all of the crystals either.”

“Oh, true.”

Tamaki clapped her hands together in realization.

“Huh? Then he’ll revive even if we kill him...”

“If that’s all then don’t worry. I had a chat with someone.”

“A chat? With who?”

“Someone beloved.”

Not my beloved, but this guy's.

Tamaki just tilted her head in confusion, but it was best off for me to only say that much, at least while Fantra could still hear us.

“That aside, you were the leading figure today. You did great, Tamaki. You should get to kill him.”

“Well, if you insist, guess I won't hold myself back. Nothing to do but to do it.”

Tamaki shrugged like she had no choice, but she grinned all the same.

“Triple Guard.”

In the air above Fantra, who was teetering between life and death, Tamaki created her sheets of ice.

“Crush!!”

Her arm outstretched all the way to her fingertips, she swung it down in an arc.

The snow-white shields crushed his existence.

Chapter 30

A Best Friend and a Lover

We were talking about what had happened up until the point I revived as we headed to the room that had the teleportation magic formation in it.

“Still though, that was a close one. I was dipping in and out of consciousness midway, so I didn’t see all of it.”

Unleashed from her chains, Leadred was busy using a small ball of fire to warm herself up by moving it from one part of her body to another. I’d given her my robe so that she wouldn’t catch a cold.

“Sorry... I was defeated. I don’t know what happened.”

Shuri put her arms around my neck and leaned against my back, apologizing. Ever since she came to, she’d been acting spoiled and has been clinging to me.

I mean, it’s definitely a good thing for me as a man.

Those things touching my back...

They were battling against my ability to think.

I’d rescued the two of them without any other problems happening after Fantra was dealt with.

As Shuri’s chest had been stabbed through, I was carrying her on my back. Leadred refrained, instead opting to walk on her own.

“Not being able to die when you’re trapped in ice is common sense¹. Yet, Hero, you came back with **Revenge of the Grudgebearer...**”

“Oh, yeah. I used **Deadly Poison**’s effect.”

“” Deadly poison? “”

“Yeah! The **Deadly Poison** status effect!”

Shuri and Leadred responded at the same time, their voices overlapping. The person to answer them wasn't me, though, it was Tamaki.

“Remember when I took out all those things from Katsuragi's pouch when he wasn't able to move because of Fantra's imperial rank magic? One of those things stood out when I was looking through it—I saw a yanu leaf.”

Seeing her best friend still looking confused, Tamaki continued.

“You'll get the **Deadly Poison** status effect if you overdose on yanu leaves. That is, you'll lose a hundred stamina every minute, regardless of how it happened. Moreover, if you run out of stamina during the effect, you'll die. In other words, him being trapped in that ice didn't matter.”

“I see. But when did he eat it? I didn't see him eat anything?”

“That was what that kiss with him was for.”

Tamaki put on airs to look like she didn't think anything of it and glossed over the matter.

“I put the yanu leaves in my mouth. That way, I could pass them to him by pretending to kiss. So—”

Tamaki pat her best friend's head with a gentle touch.

“...Katsuragi didn't throw you away, Shuri. You don't have to keep up your act anymore, alright?”

The affection in her voice was plenty enough to make Shuri cry.

Surprised at being seen through, Shuri looked up at her and blinked in surprise.

“Y-You knew?”

“Of course I did. You’re my best friend.”

“What you just said... was the truth, right?”

“Right.”

“...B-But, still...”

“Oh, come on! If you’re going to be like that then just keep up with how you’ve been! Go ahead and whisper sweet nothings into each other’s ears! Us third wheels will leave you two alone!”

Tamaki clapped her on the back to pep her up.

“Normies should go explode! Leadred, let’s go!”

Tamaki took Leadred’s hand and ran ahead to the teleportation room.

We were left alone.

As would obviously happen, we looked into each other’s eyes.

There was no one around us.

What Tamaki was wanting to say, what she wished for this girl before me... I knew.

“Katsuragi... do you love me?”

“Of course. Shuri, I love you. More than anyone.”

With that, I—

After joining back up with the others a few minutes later, we were on the teleportation magic formation. It was already shining and was just waiting for the final word.

“Come to think of it, we didn’t manage to team up with another demon did we?”

Shuri, who’d grown much more spirited than before, spoke up about our original

purpose in coming to this dungeon as though she'd just remembered it.

“There’s nothing we can do about that. That guy wouldn’t have made a good person to have with us anyway. More importantly, I managed to get some welcomed information, so I don’t mind.”

“What kind of information? Something about another dungeon to go to?”

“Well, something like that. It was about two people who we’ll pick up to join us.”

“Heeeh, are they demons too?”

“I’ll let you find out when we meet them. Everyone ready to go?”

Leadred shrugged, Shuri clasped my hand, and Tamaki watched over Shuri with a gentle gaze.

Everyone showed their readiness in their own ways.

“Three, two, one—”

“””” **Teleport!!** “”””

We invoked the magic formation.

This time, a sunflower-yellow light pulsed up from the ground and overwhelmed everything, teleporting us to the surface.

We had finally returned from **Trance Labyrinth**.

Chapter 31

The Demon Goddess

After Katsuragi Daichi and the others had left, the only thing left in the silent room was Fantra Angas.

He himself was pressed down below a layer of ice, dead.

However, he was the king of the undead.

He held a technique that allowed him to revive through the use of mana.

Flinging away the heavy layer of ice, he started to move toward the teleportation room after deeming that Daichi and the others had used it.

“I’ll kill you...! I’ll make sure I kill you...!”

Since the time he was first born into this world Fantra had been fawned over and spoiled. This was because of his extraordinary magical talent, and in fact, there was no one who could rival him. He broke the spirit of many promising mages one by one.

Because of his personality, he was banished from his country at a young age and was killed by a large number of monsters in the border lands.

The one to bring him back from his death was the leader of the demon army, Messiah.

She’d held a high opinion of his talents.

Fantra thanked Messiah for giving him his second life, respected her, and fell in love with her. Him being killed by her own monsters was irrelevant.

She was dignified and stood tall. Her sophisticated mannerisms held no wasted movements. Her black eyes held an obsidian exquisiteness to them. Her bewitching legs could be seen peeking out from her dress.

That was the impression Fantra had of Messiah.

—Now, a girl the polar opposite of that woman appeared before Fantra.

“...Who the hell are you?”

Fantra glared at the girl suspiciously. There’s no way any ordinary girl that young would be able to make it this deep into the dungeon.

Judging that she couldn’t be an ordinary person, he readied himself to use magic.

Fantra possessed a unique ability called **Incantation Substitution**.

It was an ability that allowed him to replace the incantation portion of a magic with an action.

He’d used the ability on everyone he came against, easily overrunning them with it.

However, he didn’t use it on this girl.

Because he heard her voice.

“—You’ve forgotten me, Fantra?”

That’s all she said.

However, Fantra would never mistake that clear voice for anyone else. He’d never forgotten it, nor would he ever.

It was the voice of his dearly beloved goddess.

He immediately dropped to his knees and bowed his head. He even shed tears. He’d finally reunited with his Lady.

“You seem to have finally realized.”

“I apologize for my transgression! This Fantra Angas would never disrespect his Lady... I will accept any punishment!”

“Don’t be so formal. I just came along wanting to see you after so long.”

Her remark shocked Fantra.

His great goddess took the trouble to descend for the sake of seeing him?

To bestow upon him her love?

“Could you raise your head for me? I wish to burn you into my memory.”

He listened to her words carefully, not allowing himself to miss even a single one.

Words couldn’t possibly describe how joyful he felt. He’d even long since forgotten about Daichi and the others.

“If you don’t mind... gladly.”

Fantra raised his head as told.

He was supposed to have been able to see his beloved woman’s face upon doing so. However, the girl’s hand was placed on Fantra’s face, blocking his view.

“Crimson Crisis.”

One of the divine rank magics that reigned supreme in this world.

It produced a flame that would consume existence itself, never going out. Be it doused by water or blown away by wind, it would continue until what it was burning was completely wiped out.

“Aaaaaaaaah!?”

Extinguishing one’s existence wasn’t a simple matter of destroying one’s body.

First, it would wipe out one’s memories, followed by their soul, the basis of their existence. This would turn them into hollow containers.

Following that process, Fantra’s memories were being singed away.

Including his past grudges and his feelings toward Messiah.

At that point, Fantra could no longer even shout in heartbreak. He no longer knew what heartbreak was, after all.

“Ah... ueh...”

He let out a sound that couldn't even be considered a word before, finally, the concept called Fantra Angas turned to dust and vanished from this world.

“...Purge complete. I've carried out my promise, hero.”

The youthful girl thought back to the boy who fought Fantra and came to see her, dead.

After dying nine times, his body had grown accustomed to the world that was essentially hers.

However, it was still too soon for him.

She was planning to kill his soul as usual to send him back, but he'd actually done something for the first time.

He'd prostrated himself before her.

[I don't care if you kill me as many times as you want, but in exchange, please kill that undead bastard.]

“—For him to say that, even after already figuring out who I am...”

A smile blossomed on her face as she recalled it.

“I definitely didn't go wrong choosing him...”

She clasped her hands together over her throbbing heart.

A gentle soul. A cruel soul, its opposite.

Despite being emotions that would never align with each other, that boy possessed both.

Aaah, I want to see him again. We'll work together to overthrow the humans and see this world reclaimed.

“This is a service, hero.”

She would give the girls supporting him abilities that she'd regained through erasing Fantra's existence.

Although she wished that she could do more for him, she was only able to bestow him with a single power due to being obstructed by that detestable Goddess Claria's power.

She was concerned about him, but she did tell him where to go next. There, he would be able to find those who would assist him.

They won't do what Fantra did, so don't worry. They are my remaining subordinates, natural born demons. They are different from Fantra, a former human.

The girl cursed the subordinate she'd just killed under her breath.

“Besides, that new girl seems to be engrossed with him, I'll be able entrust her with it.”

It was only a matter of time until everyone would be freed after her subordinates grouped with him.

Closing her eyes, the girl could already see the gallant figure of that youth leading an army to fight against mankind.

It would definitely become a reality.

Ah...

“Hurry... and come to me, Daichi...”

Leaving behind her wish, the demon goddess—Messiah disappeared.

Chapter 32

Entrusting The Girl

“...—ro!..... —ro!”

...I heard someone’s voice.

My body was shaken several times and the fog clouding my mind eventually cleared.

“...Where am I?”

The bright light overpowered my vision. Dazzled, I sat up.

“Hero! You’re awake!?”

Following that, a man reacted loudly. The man was the guard sent along with Yuuji to escort us, Lynn Wade.

He looked different than before, like he was in a hurry. He hadn’t said much on the way here and instead focused on keeping watch, so maybe I’d just gotten used to that... but it really did seem like he was acting differently.

“Yeah... Did something happen?”

“...Well...”

Lynn had trouble continuing.

Looking around, I finally started to regain my usual composure.

There was no one around us. Not Tamaki, Mahara, or Minamoto. Not even Yuuji.

I was back on the surface, but none of them being here with me was strange. They weren’t such terrible people as to leave behind a fallen comrade.

...Well, Mahara and Minamoto might've.

The reason I thought that was because I saw them bully a certain boy in our class.

They used violence against a classmate that hadn't really done anything to warrant it. They'd use reasons as simple as just not liking him to bully him.

To be honest, I couldn't keep watching it. After all, they were just fabricating a reality where someone was below them to make themselves feel better.

To validate their superiority, they abused a human, just wanting to humiliate him.

To top that off, when they felt that they themselves were in danger, they used him as a decoy. However, that was also my sin.

I couldn't do anything. Just like back at the school.

If only I could have told them to stop it, even just a single word... But the thought of them bullying me instead was scary.

I regretted it. If I met him again, I wonder if he could ever forgive me? Even if not, I'd at least want to apologize. It might just be me wanting to do it for myself, but I think it's something I'd have to do.

"Hero? Are you unwell?"

"Oh, no. I was just thinking about something..."

Lynn's voice pulled me back to reality.

Oh right. What what was I doing before I collapsed?

We'd entered **Trance Labyrinth**.

But when Mahara and Minamoto ran off midway, Yuuji ran after them.

Tamaki and I were waiting in a safe spot when Yuuji came back with a few injuries. And then I fainted... right. Someone struck me on my neck.

—Everyone’s in danger!

Realizing that, I jolted up.

“Hero! Please calm down!”

Lynn stopped me by grabbing onto my arm.

“Let me go! I have—I have to help them!”

“Even if you went by yourself, you couldn’t do anything! You don’t have a combat-oriented ability!”

“...”

Hitting my weak spot, I stopped resisted. He was right, my **Grand Library** wasn’t a special ability meant for fighting.

It only excelled when used to support others.

Moreover, my status wasn’t that high, either. That downside came to light after my level hadn’t increased in the previous dungeon.

“Th-Then what are you saying I should do? Leave them?”

I don’t want to abandon them. I never want to do something like that again.

Lynn quickly answered my question.

“Hero. I have a message for you from Yuuji.”

“From Yuuji...?”

“Yes. He went back into the dungeon to save everyone after bringing you here. He also told me to tell you something if you attempted to return to the dungeon.”

“Wh-What did he want you to tell me?”

“To please return to the royal palace and tell them of what happened here, as well as

request for rescue. To quote him: *Fuuko, you're the only one that can do it.* He's relying on you, so we should go as soon as we—"

"I'll do it! Let's go back to the royal palace!"

I shouted, drowning out the end of Lynn's words.



It was as Yuuji said. I might be able to get them a rescue team if I go back to the royal palace. It's something only I could do.

And... he used my first name...!

Just that was enough to fire me up.

The person I like used my first name...!

"Hero? Do you have a fever? Your face is red..."

"Oh, n-no! Rather, let's go! We can't waste any time!"

"Yes, understood!"

We rode back on horses with Lynn taking the lead.

Please wait, everyone!

I'll definitely call for help!



Several hours later, I had returned to the royal palace and told them everything that had happened. Then, when I was returning to the room that was assigned to me, I came across three girls in the hallway.

They were from Minamoto's group. From right to left, there was Inoma, Nijima, and Horitani.

They each had piercings, broke school regulations, and were overall disbehaving students.

"Hayase. How dare you..."

"Wh-What?"

"Playing dumb!? We know you ran away and left Kureha¹ and everyone behind to die!"

“Eh!?”

I couldn't hide my surprise at what Horitani said. Why does she know that?

I mean, it's not a problem for people to know, but...

What matters is that the facts got twisted.

“Th-That's not what happened! There was a Monster House, I would have just gotten in the way!”

“A Monster House!? Why would they go into one of those!?”

“We tried to stop them! J-Just, Minamoto and Maharu didn't listen and ran off...”

“Kureha wouldn't have done that!”

She swung her arm down, slapping my cheek with her palm.

“Either way, you're just trying to make yourself look useful so you don't get thrown away like that Katsuragi guy!!”

“N-No I'm not! Please, listen—”

“F*ck you! Shut up!”

“Ah—”

I took a punch to the abdomen. Horitani's fist went far in.

I staggered forward, unaccustomed to pain. Then, along with the others verbally abusing me, I took a kick to the side.

“You murderer!”

“Gah—”

Unable to do anything but endure their violence, I could only use my arms to protect my head.

How long do I have to suffer this pain? How much suffering do I have to go through?

Tears started to overflow from my eyes. Why did I have to go through this?

What did I do wrong?

“Whatever! Don’t think you’re off the hook! Be ready, I’m going to tell everyone what you did!”

Temporarily satisfied at seeing me fall over, the three of them walked down the hallway.

It was night out. They were probably heading to the dining hall. I obviously didn’t have the willpower to follow them.

I leaned back against the wall.

“Why... why...!”

I couldn’t shed anymore tears. Instead, all I felt was frustration and worthlessness.

Frustration at my weakness. Worthlessness at how helpless I was.

I’m weak, so I couldn’t do anything. I’m weak, so I...

“...What should I do?”

Horitani said that she’d tell everyone that I caused them to die. They’d all definitely label me a murderer and abuse me however they wanted.

I knew that. Because... because I’d seen them do it to someone else already. Because of their own selfishness. Because of their own convenience. They would do the same thing to me.

If I had to be stared at like that... if I had to be thought of like that...

“...I’ll just kill myself.”

My hands approached my neck. If I invoked magic, I'd die instantly.

Just then, Yuuji's face appeared in my mind. The first man to treat me that kindly and acknowledge my existence.

He encouraged me so much, so I felt that I had to do my best.

"...No."

I didn't want to let him down.

"What should I do, Yuuji?"

The hallway had no one in it.

Even so, I heard a voice answer me.

[Do you desire power?]

"...Huh?"

Even once I looked around, I didn't see anyone. Even so, I heard the voice again.

[Sorry, but I won't be showing you my appearance. I won't be telling you who I am, either.]

"Huh? Eh?"

[Calm down. I am conveying my words directly to you through magic. Will you answer my question?]

"Oh, y-yeah..."

[Hohoh, how obedient of you. There is something I would like to tell you first, then. — The person you call Yuuji is still alive.]

"——!?! R-Really!?"

[You shouldn't shout.]

“O-Okay. Sorry.”

There was no one there, but I bowed my head nonetheless.

Yuuji is alive... Just that was enough to ease my mind.

[Tamaki Yui is still alive as well. However, the other two lost their lives due to an accident. Unable to defend them, he will be punished for allowing the heroes to die.]

“N-No way...! I mean, they ran off on their own!”

[This world is a cruel one. That would merely be treated as an excuse. So, the two of them are heading to the next dungeon while recruiting more people to their cause. Here is my question.]

“Your question...?”

[Yes. Will you swear to become their comrade and to support him?]

It was a silly question. She could help and stand beside *him*? Could anything bring her more happiness?

“I swear it. I want to help Yuuji, more than anyone.

[—You are as I expected, child.]

It felt like the owner of the voice was laughing.

[In that case, I shall bestow you with power.]

“P-Power?”

[Yes. Try it out after this. I want you to aid him with this power. He is waiting for you.]

“W-Waiting... for me...?”

[They are heading to a dungeon named **Blazing Execution Grounds**. Early tomorrow morning, you are to leave this place and head there. Make sure you are not followed.]

Am I understood?]

“Yes. I will definitely, definitely go to Yuuji...”

As I said that, I heard the voice laugh once more and break off. Nothing followed after that.

Now there’s only one thing I have to do.

It felt like the pain I’d been enduring lessened. Was it because of my uplifted mood?

I wasn’t sure, but I did know that Yuuji wanted me. He was waiting for me.

I had to meet his expectations!

“Yuuji...”

My mind was filled by him.

Entering my room, I prepared for my journey.

Extra

To the Next City

We were able to safely get out of **Trance Labyrinth**. Well, I guess saying that we got out safely would be a bit much.

At any rate, we were alive. That was good enough.

“So this is what you feel like after conquering a dungeon...”

Having conquered her first dungeon, Tamaki looked around as though she were deeply moved.

I could understand a bit of how she felt.

After being shut into enclosed areas, smelling blood, and battling for your life for so long, the outside world was a spectacular sight to behold.

The blue sky was beautiful. Even the air tasted delicious.

Everything felt more alive.

“Thank you, and good work, Daichi. You too, Leadred, Yui.”

“I seriously thought I was going to die this time. Well, I’ve already died once.”

“I should be the one saying that... Well, we managed to do it, thanks to all of us.”

Couldn’t she have said her thanks a bit more obediently?

Well, that’s probably just how she showed her gratitude. She probably wouldn’t have even said that if it were just a while back.

“More importantly, Tamaki. There’s definitely got to be others like you who went to dungeons in groups yeah? Tell me where they went.”

“I can tell you who at least? Samajima, Nanamin, and Kijima made up one group. Mikima, Suzuki, and Tokubara made up another. Then there was our group. However, I don’t know which dungeon Samejima went to.”

“Huh? Why not?”

“They just headed out right away and didn’t say anything. We had our hands full with our own stuff, so we didn’t exactly have the time to worry about them.”

“Tch. Useless.”

“Yeah yeah, sorry, my bad.”

Sticking out her tongue, Tamaki looked like she didn’t feel bad about it at all. Let’s make sure she feels some pain in this next dungeon.

That’ll be admirable for someone who’s trying to be a shield, yep.

“Daichi. Did the soldier you enslaved at the royal palace not know about the other groups?”

“It was something of a secret matter. No one was told anything outside of the group they were assigned to.”

“What should we do then? Go to the nearest one again?”

Leadred stretched, enjoying the feel of the sun on her body.

Her proposal seemed to be our only option.

Whether it’s the one Samejima went to or not will be up to fate.

But I will definitely kill him. I will find him, and I will end his life with my own hands.

“...Yeah. But let’s go to the nearest town first. We can’t go back to Wrystonia anymore.”

“Eh, but I left all my stuff from our world there, what about those?”

“Abandon them there. You’re my slave for life now. You don’t need those things, we’re not going back to our world.”

“So cruel! Shuri, Katsuragi is cruel!”

“Yui, what Daichi says is absolute, okay?”

“You’re both devils!?”

Tamaki wouldn’t lose to anyone at being noisy, but just then it felt like she was just happy.

She was alive and she was smiling with her cherished comrades.

I came to understand my own inexperience through this dungeon.

I have to get stronger in this next dungeon so that I won’t fall into a crisis like that again.

Reaffirming my determination, I clenched my fist in front of my chest.

Upon doing so, I felt a softness gently wrap around my hand.

“Let’s go, Daichi!”

Saying that, Shuri pulled on my hands.

Already ready to head out, Leadred spread out the map and Tamaki looked at it saying this and that.

They showed it differently, but they were eager in their own ways.

Seeing something I never thought I’d see before all this, a smile crept onto my face.

“Yeah. We’re setting out for the blacksmithing city, **Russell!**”

Noticing the smile on my face, Shuri tightened her grip on my hand as we took our first steps to a new city.



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