

榎本 快晴
illust. しゅがお

邪竜認定

草食ドラゴン、

年齢5000年の

いわれな

「やだこの生贖、

人の話を聞いてくれない」

A gentle dragon of
5000 years old,
it was recognized
as an evil dragon without any cause.

角川スニーカー文庫



THE 5000-YEAR-OLD HERBIVOROUS DRAGON

~I Don't Want This Sacrifice, She Doesn't Listen To What People Say~

- VOLUME 1 -

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[Luk2048 (Light Novels Translations)]

- STORY -

Saying 5000 year-old-dragon has an impressive ring to it, yet that dragon was an extremely harmless, herbivorous being. However, because of his uselessly giant figure and scary appearance, he was mistaken for the Demon King's executive and provided by the nearby village with a sacrificial maiden.

Fundamentally cowardly and timid dragon tried to send her away, but the extremely enthusiastic sacrifice didn't want to give up. Inevitably, he lied: "Okay, I just ate a small portion of your soul, so you can go back already", but the maiden with outrageous assumptions has misunderstood that she became the dragon's kin.

Then, out of all things, she began to manifest strange power on the basis of her wrong assumptions - in turn, the helpless dragon, by some mistake started a rebellion against the Demon King.

Rebellion or whatnot, he wasn't even his subordinate in the first place.

いやあ、そう言われても困るのよ

わしって
草食
なんだけど

どうぞこの私を
お刀ロし上がりください
邪竜様

レーコ

洞窟の麓にある村から
“生贄”として捧げられた少女。
目の前の巨竜を「邪竜レーヴェンディア」と
信じて疑わない。

Chapter 1

Sacrificial maiden tries to be eaten by any means necessary

“Please enjoy me as your meal, Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Even if you say it like that, it won’t work. I’m herbivorous.”

In an extensive stalactite cavern deep in the mountains, there was only one torch shedding light. Holding the flame above her head was a young maiden, about 10 years old, clothed in thin silk garment.

“You do not find me to your liking?”

“It’s not a matter of liking or disliking. I’m no good with meat. Neither fish. I like eating bamboo sprouts though.”

“Although I am unworthy, I pride myself in my flesh being very soft. Please savour me once.”

“No, no, no. Aren’t you weird? If I’ll eat you, naturally you’re going to die.”

“I have resolved myself from the start.”

“Okay... Why do you’ve such a resolve? I don’t think there’s any benefit in getting eaten by me.”

The kneeling maiden raised her head.

“I beg you; do not speak such words, Evil Dragon Lord. If a being of such magnificence as you would greedily devour me, it could only bring me satisfaction. However, for the exchange of my life, I implore you for assistance in defeating the Demon King. You are reigning now as an executive of the Demon King’s army, but you carry the reputation that your true power surpasses even him. Bearing my life, I would like to ask you to borrow your strength for humanity.”

“What? I’ve become an executive of the Demon King’s army?”

Even though I've only been eating plants for around 5000 years?

Well, I knew my body was big and when meeting animals or humans I clearly caused their trepidation, but it didn't mean I possessed a terrifying power. If I had to say, I've had a timid nature and so far I've lived keeping distance from opponents I was no match for. If anything, only my power of insight in identifying someone's strength might be acceptable.

"Please, lend us your strength. Whatever happens to this body of mine, I will not have any regrets."

"Well, I understand your feelings. But I'm not much of a monstrous being. Although a dragon, I'm no different from an oversized lizard with longevity, you know? I've heard little, but the Demon King's army is strong, right? Fighting them, I'd just quickly wind up dead. You are still young, so don't treat yourself so poorly and go home. Your parents must be worried."

"Because I do not have a single relative, there is no one to grieve me. Supposing I would return to the Yoshinba village, I know very well the future of a sacrifice that deserted her duty. At any rate, there is only death waiting for me, so I would like to become the Evil Dragon Lord's nourishment."

"I've been telling you I don't eat meat, besides I'm not evil either. I'd have been much happier if you'd have given me a pot of sweet sap."

"I understand. I will return after smearing my body with sap."

"There's really no need to smear your body with it... Or rather, even if you bring me sap I can't help you out with suppressing the Demon King."

While stirring greatly inside the cave, I stretched my neck and piled up the bamboo sprouts before the maiden.

"Look. This is my favourite meal. I've no interest in eating you."

"So you are saying you will not eat this body of mine?"

"Yeah, that's what I'm saying. If they will get mad at you for returning like that, I don't mind escorting you back. Anyway, I won't do any fighting or-"

“In that case, instead of my body you would rather savour my soul, am I right?”

“Your train of thought is pretty mind blowing, you know that? I can’t even imagine how the soul could be eaten.”

At this point, I steadily watched the illuminated by a torch face of the maiden.

Probably because she was used as a sacrifice, from her cleansed white skin wafted a faint scent of incense. However, maybe as a result of having no relatives, her eyes were filled with vacant darkness.

I could see how strength was useless; since her presence has been emitting magic power, she probably had some slight attainments. I thought it was such a waste. Surely if she wouldn’t have been made a sacrifice and instead accumulated training, she could have become a sorceress. That said, most humans probably couldn’t feel this glimpse of magic power yet.

While I was looking, the maiden pulled out from her clothes a decorated with jewels dagger, but I didn’t sense any hostility. While I was relieved, thinking it looked more like an offering of some kind rather than a weapon, she suddenly pointed the dagger at her throat.

“I will now sever my life and offer you my soul. Please wait for a short while.”

“Wait! Wait a minute. You really don’t have to do this.”

“However, if I do not sever my life, I cannot offer you my soul.”

“I’ve said it many times already; I won’t eat such a thing. You’ll just trouble me with the disposal of your corpse.”

“Do not worry. If it is like that, I will dig a pit and die inside.”

“How’s it possible for you to progress the conversation solely on the premise of dying? It’s the first time I’m so baffled in my 5000 year long life.”

“It is because I have to carry my duty as a sacrifice, by all means necessary. It is the role bestowed upon me by the villagers. I have to be eaten.”

A great one came, I’m amazed. Naturally, I had no intention to eat her. Even so, if she

killed herself here, it'd leave a bad aftertaste. After thinking it through, I said.

"Aah okay, I understand. I just ate it. When one becomes a high ranked dragon like me, one can even eat a soul of a living being. I just ate a small part of your soul and I'm satisfied. You can explain it like that to those village guys, so be at ease and quickly go back."

"Really? You have eaten it?"

"Yes. You don't have to worry. I only ate about two days of your lifespan. Your soul was extremely delicious, so just that much was enough."

"You ate it... That means I have become a member of the Evil Dragon Lord's household, right?"

"Huh?"

I tilted my long neck. I didn't really get the logical structure of her thoughts.

"Y-yes, you can say it like that. In any case, let's send you back to the village. You might get hurt walking barefoot, so you can ride on my back."

"How could I? To cause such trouble for the Evil Dragon Lord... Ah, I see. Since I have become your kin, we are one of body and soul. Considering my body is already Evil Dragon Lord's possession, there is no need for concern, right?"

"That's it, you understand it well."

As soon as I laid down my body on the floor so she could climb easier, the maiden moved her body agilely and lightly landed on my back, sitting seiza-style.

"Well then, let us depart Evil Dragon Lord."

"Where was the village again? Guide me appropriately."

I left the cavern along with the thudding sounds of my feet, and went down the mountain trail to the human settlement. The beasts seeing me were divided between running away and prostrating, there were also some carnivorous animals trying to make an offering or leaving their prey.

Even though I wouldn't eat it...

I think my steps might've sounded like earth tremors. The moment I saw the village entrance, I witnessed a large mass of men gathering, like a reception. Well, rather than a reception, in reality it was probably more of a vigilant readiness for combat with me, the evil dragon. At least that was how they called me.

I could see them secretly holding bows and arrows. If all of them shot at once, I probably wouldn't die, but I would receive a serious injury. It was a bad idea to show how frightened I was, so I purposely arrived at the entrance arrogantly and brimming with an aura of confidence.

"Are you the ones who've delivered this sacrifice?"

An old man with white hair, looking like a village chief bowed his head reverently.

"T-That is so. Evil Dragon Lord, since you have not yet enjoyed your meal, is there anything lacking? If that is the case, we will immediately prepare a different sacrifice..."

"No need. I've already eaten her soul. It was the most delicious thing in the world. Since I want to enjoy the lingering aftertaste, be aware that my tongue won't relish in vulgar tastes anymore."

"I-I have understood clearly. In that case, will you lend us your assistance in subjugating the Demon King, is that what-"

My expression stiffened. I'm covered in scales, therefore humans couldn't notice, but I was quite nervous.

"W-well, let's think about this matter step by step, but at the very least I can promise that I won't bring you harm."

If I'd unskilfully suggested about bringing them harm, they could've just turned the tables and beat my ass. The villagers noisily exchanged glances for a while, but when they understood that at the very least the sacrifice brought some results, as if they were connected, the expressions of relief spread out.

At that moment, out of nowhere a stone came flying and hit me in the temple with a dull sound. In reality, it hurt quite a lot and I was on the verge of tears, but if I showed

weakness here I'd noticeably become full of holes, so I endured firmly while playing a big-shot and faced a direction the stone came from.

"You monster, how could you've eaten Reiko! Eat this!"

There was a figure of a young lad, holding a wooden stick like a sword charging at me. His attire was first-class, with neatly arranged golden hair. He had to be from a good family among the village.

But more importantly, if I was to get hit with that stick I'd undoubtedly flinch. When that happened, I'd quickly become just like a swiss cheese – full of holes.

However, before I could've made my escape, one after another adults leapt upon the lad and pushed him on the ground.

"I-I am incredibly sorry, Evil Dragon Lord! We will behead this impudent brat at once, so..."

"It's fine, really. You can stop brandishing your hatchet over his head like that. I'm not mad at all. Since being hit by such a small pebble felt like a soft breeze of wind."

Actually, it did hurt quite a lot though.

"Incidentally young lad, is Reiko the name of this sacrifice?"

When I inquired, the boy answered while being pushed down.

"Yes! You bastard, I'll never forgive you! You ate her soul and made her into an empty shell, didn't you?!"

"Not at all, I just took a little bite, lifespan of around two days. It's not serious at all, so you don't have to worry. Hey, the one called Reiko. You can get down and show him you're fine."

"Excuse me."

The sacrificial child hopped down from my back. And the baggage was finally gone.

"Now I must say good-bye. That child has also served her duty as a sacrifice, so don't be too cold towards her. After I collect my thoughts, one day let's speak again about

the matter of suppressing the Demon King.”

While I’ve been speaking, in my head I was working out the details of moving my dwelling. Before the talks became substantial, I’d run and seclude myself in a separate place. I had no other way to deceive them.

When I glanced back after moving away from the village, I saw that the boy untangled himself from the adults grasp and rushed over to Reiko.

“Are you okay? Are you fine? Didn’t that monster hurt you?”

“Stop it, Raiotto.”

Reiko with eyes lacking any light put a finger to her lips.

“Not a monster, but Evil Dragon Lord. If you call him in such manner one more time, I’ll have no choice but to attack you.”

“R-Reiko?”

“I’m already Lord’s kin. If you ever disrespect him again, even if it’s you, I won’t show mercy.”

I couldn’t endure it and turned back. While hurriedly returning with my resounding steps, I made the villagers tremble.

“Wait a minute, erm, Reiko right? You really don’t have to pay so much attention to me.”

“We are one of body and soul. An affront towards the lord is an affront towards me. I cannot overlook it.”

I gazed at Reiko while pushing my power of insight to the limit. I could ascertain not only the general strength of beings, but even their special characteristics. Facial movement, heartbeat, breathing, eye movement. Taking everything into consideration, Reiko’s special characteristic was: “Her wrong assumptions are extremely severe”.

I screwed up. I thought so from the bottom of my heart. Because I’ve spoken weird things, the situation was starting to turn sour. Look, the lad was glaring at me with

eyes full of hatred. I couldn't handle humans like that. The girl was just voluntarily going crazy all on her own. Please let me off.

The lad showing blatant hostility was yet again restricted, and baring his teeth started screaming.

"It's not only that monster! Father and grandfather too, how could you've brought such hardship to Reiko?! If you wanted a sacrifice, you should've used me!"

"Ridiculous! As if I'd use a future successor of mine as a sacrifice! What's more, didn't the Evil Dragon Lord also say he's pleased with it? That girl was an ideal sacrifice, able to be exchanged for the highest price. Find me someone who wouldn't use her."

"What "ideal sacrifice" bullshit, you think I'll tolerate such people?! A village where you've to sacrifice a single girl to protect it, it'd be better off destroyed!"

He was screaming loudly.

I feel bad, but it can't be helped. Here I should just tuck the tail between my legs and run. Reiko too, when she lives for a while in the village her weird assumptions should go away.

"Farewell."

After I said so, everyone altogether started prostrating themselves. By the way, when I showed my back to the villagers holding bows, my heart has been beating nervously like never before.

That was why when the village's alarm bell resounded, I nearly jumped without thinking.

"What's happening?!" The old chief yelled.

From the watchtower, where the alarm bell was located, a young man faced our direction and cried.

"It's terrible! Monsters are...! A pack of Kuragari wolves is coming from the mountains! 30, 40... No, even more!"

Kuragari wolves. Always moving as a pack, these evil beasts preyed on human settlements. In addition to their huge numbers, their special power made them twice

as troublesome.

Their shadows cast on the earth possessed will, known as the shadow wolves, creeping around, feeding on humans and dragging them off into the darkness. That is, 40 of them were accompanied by 40 shadow wolves. Essentially, there were twice as many, 80 opponents.

Let's run, I thought. However I was slow, I wasn't confident I could run all the way back to the cavern. Moreover, I could acutely feel the expectant gazes directed towards me from the rear.

"Evil Dragon Lord... No, Holy Dragon Lord! We beg you, please save us!"

Save us you say, what is it that you want me to do. I'm already quivering here.

"You bastard! You've eaten Reiko's soul, now you want to run away?! Don't fuck with me! Being scared of stupid wolves, evil dragon my ass! I'll beat you to death!"

I see. It seems I'll be beaten to death even if I run. I was peacefully eating grass till yesterday, what's with this situation. No more please.

"Ee, chief of the village." I finally resigned myself and faced the chief.

"Ah, Evil Dragon Lord."

"I'll try speaking with them, since I might be able to talk some sense into them."

"Is that true?!"

It looked like I've had the bearing of an executive of the Demon King's army. To such extent, that my appearance alone caused the forest beasts to shiver. Perhaps they'd run from my dignified aura alone... that'd be nice... or so I wishfully thought at least. Otherwise, today would be the last day of my 5000 year long life.

I faced the mountain trail. Kuragari wolves were in the middle of swarming through the sole open gate. The village chief left the gate open for negotiations, but honestly I'd have preferred it closed. I faced the pack of wolves, that were questioning the easy break-in opportunity, and took a single step forward.

"Y-You all, despite knowing who I am, you dare to act like this?"

I spoke to them, but the wolves were just sending me critical gazes while spilling drool, without a sign of response.

“I’m an executive of the Demon King’s army.” I bluffed, since I had nothing to lose either way.

The wolves, eyes blazing, were slowly but steadily nearing the village. I’m sorry villagers. It’s no good already. They aren’t listening at all.

“I see. Evil Dragon Lord, in short they have come after inferring our plan of rebellion against the Demon King, is that right?”

With a thump, a weight landed on my back. I recognized the voice. It was the sacrificial maiden Reiko.

“No, I think it might be a coincidence. Wait never mind that, it’s hopeless. No more, no more, no more, it’s my limit already.”

“I agree. I, your kin, am also at my limit.”

Reiko pulled out the jewelled dagger from her clothes.

“To direct killing intent towards the Evil Dragon Lord, to forgive the foolish existence of those beasts – it is beyond my limit.”

“Ha?”

While I was stunned, from Reiko’s body surged an enormous amount of magic power.

Before, there certainly was a trace of magic power. However, what I was feeling right now on my back, was a presence rivalling those so called archmages. This hasn’t happened more than a few times in my 5000 year old life. It seemed like the villagers too, despite not possessing any special power of insight, felt the energy Reiko was emitting.

It was more terrifying than the wolves, so horrifying that it was hard to stand straight. Has she unleashed all of her latent power just on the basis of her wrong assumptions?

“My body and soul were offerings to the Evil Dragon Lord, thus my body is that of a human no more. Filthy bastards like you are not fit to be the Evil Dragon Lord’s

opponents. I will erase you instantly.”

Haa, she's an amazing one, being in high spirits without any self-awareness.

Reiko, who performed a somersault and landed in front of me blocking the wolves, looked over her shoulder showing me a dangerous smile. Her eyes, which should have been black, became the same pale blue colour as mine.

Honestly, I drew back. She was scarier than the wolves.

“Come at me, beasts. I'll finish you in an instant.”

Along with Reiko's provocation, Kuragari wolves' figures disappeared. No, instead of disappearing, my eyes just couldn't follow them. When I thought about it, shimmering in mid-air were the wolves real bodies, and the ones flickering on the ground were probably the shadow wolves.

But when I noticed it, everything was already settled. Reiko, sweeping sideways her jewelled dagger launched an explosive magic power, turning the beasts into ashes and dust, not leaving a single trace. After a while, the only thing left behind was a slash chiselled on the ground, which looked like a giant claw.

“**[Giant Claw of the Dragon King]** - how is that for a glimpse of the Evil Dragon Lord's strength?”

Though my claw could barely cut a tree in an hour...

While I was thoroughly spooked, Reiko crumpled down to her knees. The only one who ran over to her while panicking, was the aforementioned lad. The others (me included) couldn't move even an inch.

“Hey! Reiko! Are you okay?”

“Sleepy...”

“Hey monster! What the hell did you do to Reiko?! She wasn't able to do this before!”

Although it was terrifying, she just became able to. If I could, I'd really like someone to share my thoughts with, like “Humans are scary, aren't they?”

“A-Anyway!”

The one who clapped his hands and alleviated the situation was the village chief.

“Evil Dragon Lord, no, Holy Dragon Lord, the seeds of enmity between you and the Demon King were sown here, isn’t that right? In that case, let us grandly celebrate this beginning of the war. Everyone, prepare the feast!”

When the loudly echoing cheerful command blew away the lingering terror, men started noisily running around preparing the banquet. While I was getting a malicious stare from the lad, “I want to return to my cave...” was the only thing I could think about.

Chapter 2

Sacrificial maiden is scarier than the Demon King

I haven't eaten anything since noon, so I was thinking it'd be nice to eat some fresh green grass while watching the banquet bonfire. However, my stomach was supposedly full of sacrifice's soul, so I was just sitting here not eating anything. Being idly illuminated by fire, I revisited today's events.

— I wonder, have I done something wrong?

No, even when I reflected on it, I didn't think there was anything to blame me for. The main reason I've fallen into this state of affairs was this sacrificial girl acting abnormally crazy. I faced Reiko, who was sitting seiza-style on my back, and while maintaining as much dignity as possible, I said.

"Hey, Reiko. I'll wage war on the Demon King alone, so you may stay at this village and protect it."

"What are you speaking; kin are those who share the fate of their Lord. If Evil Dragon Lord intends to cross blades with the Demon King, I will carry my duty as one of your sharp nails."

Why was her loyalty so uselessly high? I could flee if I could just abandon the village.

Nevertheless, despite her being so terrific, it seemed her body couldn't keep up with the enormous amount of awakened magic power. Since a while ago, the weight balance on my back was crumbling and her head kept clumsily falling down, probably because of drowsiness.

"How about getting some sleep? You don't have to force yourself to stay awake."

"As your kin, I couldn't sleep leaving lord unattended..."

"You've just become my kin, so there's still a burden on your body. It'll be a problem if you force it and ruin your physical condition. It's an order, sleep."

“Then, as you wish.”

Suddenly, the weight on my back collapsed with a flop sound. Sly means were necessary to make her listen, but it increasingly deepened her wrong assumptions, so it felt like I was falling into a vicious cycle.

At this time a man in his prime, who looked like a banquet manager, drew near us.

“Evil Dragon Lord, how are you feeling? From this point forward the village’s traditional dance will take place, I hope you could enjoy it.”

“Ah, yea, I will.”

“I feel honored! I made sure the performers dance with the preparedness for death as an appropriate ceremony for the beginning of Evil Dragon Lord’s war, so if it’s not to your liking please behead them at any time.”

“Ee... It’s okay, I’ve no such hobbies.”

“Wow! As expected, in comparison to the Demon King, Lord is full of compassion!”

“Being more merciful than the Demon King, couldn’t you give me a better compliment...? By the way, about this girl called Reiko.”

I lowered my back and showed her figure.

“I-Is there anything you are dissatisfied about?”

“It’s fine. It’s not like I’ve any complaints, really. Look, if I disappear there will be no one to protect this village, right? I was thinking of leaving this child here as insurance, so wouldn’t you guys also help persuade her? She doesn’t listen and says stubbornly that she wants to come with me.”

“I’m extremely grateful for your consideration! However, that girl has already been offered to you, Evil Dragon Lord. If she’s to be of assistance in subjugating the Demon King, by all means please take her with you. While we, men of this village, will protect it...”

I intently gazed at the man with my trained power of insight. I see, even though he was saying that, in his heart he was scared of Reiko. I guessed that, rather than receiving a

monster attack, raising inside the village the same existence as the monsters was far more troublesome.

However, she was an ordinary human. Though there was no doubt she was scarier than some crappy monsters.

“In that case, there’s someone I’d like to speak with. Where’s your son?”

There was no need to use my power of insight here. The man in his prime and the rebellious young lad Raiotto had the same golden coloured hair, his clothes were similarly first-class. Just from these conjectures I could guess their parent-child relationship.

However, maybe because he made a wrong guess why I called for his son, his face quickly turned pale. He threw himself on his knees and hit the ground with his forehead.

“I-It is true my son had made a terribly discourteous blunder towards you, Evil Dragon Lord. But please, I beg you to at least let him live. In exchange, I’ll prepare as many other sacrifices as you’ll desire, that’s why...”

“It isn’t about anything disturbing like that. I just want to have a little chat with that child. From what I’ve seen, that child seems to be the closest to Reiko, so whether I take her with me or leave her here, it’d be better to understand her character more thoroughly, wouldn’t it? Oh, but it’s going to be bothersome if he rages, so let me meet him while he’s restrained with a rope.”

If he rushed at me again, this time I wouldn’t be able to hide my weakness. The lad’s father was clearly distressed, but in the end he shrugged his shoulders giving up.

“In that case, this way please. He’s locked up in a barn.”

“You didn’t have to worry about it that much.”

The place I was led to was a shabby looking stable entrance. He must’ve provoked considerable anger from the villagers to be stuffed into such a place despite his high social standing. Or they might be just trying to show me he was repenting.

“Oh, what’s happened Holy Dragon Lord? Priest, you’ve also came. Did you, after all, decide to sacrifice your son for the beginning of the war celebration?”

A person appeared from the stable's shadows, as if lying in wait. Looking closely at his face while hiding my astonishment, it was the village chief I met earlier.

"That's not it. Evil Dragon Lord said that he only wants to speak with him."

"However, he made such a discourteous blunder. Surely you don't expect he'll get out unscathed. Holy Dragon Lord, that child is the heir to our village's priest family. He has his rough sides, but his soul is polished with prayers. If you do get tired of the banquet, by all means please enjoy him as your dinner before the war."

"Chief...!"

"It's the priest's duty to use their body as pillars when necessity arrives. Besides, how can a foolish child, who pointed his weapon at the Holy Dragon Lord, live? Wouldn't being eaten and becoming Holy Dragon Lord's flesh and blood fulfil his long-cherished desire?"

I was standing awkwardly between the two adults quietly arguing. I've had no intention to eat him even if they begged me.

When I cleared my throat, both the chief and priest became flustered and stopped their verbal fight.

"In any case, you two may retire. From here on, I want to speak only with Reiko and that lad."

"Yes, as you wish."

Showing feelings of mutual hatred, they left in separate directions.

"Hey, wake up Reiko. Inside the barn is that lad Raiotto, could you bring him outside for me? My frame is too big to enter."

"Understood."

Although she was sleeping a second ago, she jumped with a quick movement and landed lightly. The way she was abnormally lively following orders was scary.

When Reiko standing before the door slowly stretched her hand out, despite her not touching it, the latch started coming loose making a creaky "gii—" sound. "Don't open

it eerily like that, just normally is fine”, was what I thought from the bottom of my heart.

The moonlight flowing through the door revealed to me the lad’s figure, with his whole body wrapped in ropes.

“Raiotto, foolish human child. You’d better be grateful that you got off with just this light punishment for opposing the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Hey, Reiko! What are you saying, open your eyes!”

I agree, please open your eyes right now. Somehow, I felt quite a lot of sympathy towards the lad.

Reiko easily picked up Raiotto over her shoulder, who was bound like a caterpillar, and carried him outside the barn. He was struggling, though before the superhuman strength of the maiden whose pupils were shining pale blue like a dragon’s, resistance was completely futile. She threw Raiotto rolling on the ground.

“You monster. You want to eat me?”

“Why is everyone saying that? I’m not much of a glutton. I only wanted to talk.”

“Talk? Hmph, I don’t have anything to talk about with someone like you.”

“...Raiotto.”

Reiko crouched and began forcefully pinching his cheeks.

“Ouch, ow-swtop it! It hwurts!”

“Disrespecting Evil Dragon Lord is unforgivable.”

“Y-You fwucker! How dare you make Reiko do swuch things!”

“You two get along so well.”

I intended to give an honest opinion, but Raiotto disgruntledly averted his face. In exchange, the one who answered was Reiko.

“No, we do not. Because this evil brat is the son of the priest’s family I am indebted to, it is true he is a being I have a certain debt of gratitude to. But personally, I do not remember receiving any good treatment from him.”

“Oh, did you do something horrible to her?”

“I didn’t!”

“It’s no good to lie.”

She once again started pulling his cheeks.

“This evil brat was sinisterly scheming every day to expel me from the house. Me, who was blessed with the honourable duty of a sacrifice, he each and every time took me outside despite my surprise, and even went as far as unscrupulously stealing traveling expenses from the house, while making me take the money and saying such cold words as “Don’t you ever come back”. No matter how many times I returned home, without learning his lesson he again led me to far away towns...”

“Lad, it seems you also had it quite hard.”

“Don’t make me remember it again!” Raiotto was on the verge of tears.

They were about the same age. Since both of them were just about ten years old and living close to each other, obviously compassion would well up.

“Besides originally, I was supposed to become a sacrifice. The one who changed that is my old man. Because I’m his dear son, he brought Reiko here from another place. It’s laughable, isn’t it? The reason I’ve been living a good life as a priest, was to one day risk my life for the cause. But at the critical moment a substitute was found and I escaped my fate, what the hell.”

“It’s a shame you didn’t come. If you did, it wouldn’t have become this complicated.”

“Haa? I don’t have a clue what you’re saying, you monster.”

If it was this lad, because he knows how much of an eccentric Reiko was, he might believe me.

“Very well, I’ll count on your motives being pure and tell you everything. To tell you

the truth, I'm not an evil dragon—”

“Stop making annoying excuses!”

With a swish, before Raiotto's eyes the jewelled dagger was stabbed into the ground.

“Don't interrupt Evil Dragon Lord when he's speaking. Be quiet and listen.”

If it was possible I'd also like for you to stay quiet, however, I was too scared to say that. Nonetheless, using the silence to the best of my abilities I fluently conveyed today's happenings to Raiotto...

The result.

“As if I'm gonna believe you. That is, as if humans just with their wrong assumptions would be able to use that super magic. Aha, you want us to let down our guard and then eat all of us? Or did you get scared of going against the Demon King and you want to insist Reiko did all of that on her own?”

“Thought so.”

The story of the absurd interaction in the cave might yield an “It might have happened” opinion, but the scene of repelling the Kuragari wolves certainly became an obstruction. After seeing it in such close proximity, saying “She awakened her powers just on the basis of her wrong assumptions” wouldn't work.

Even I was still half in doubt.

“How is it, Reiko? This guy, he's saying you became able to use magic because of your wrong assumptions.”

“Raiotto, foolish child. You don't understand anything.”

Even though she should've been listening all along about the misunderstanding, somehow the one who had the know-it-all look was Reiko.

“What Evil Dragon Lord is trying to convey is that today, what I've become able to use is merely a piece of His power. That is why, a mere human with his wrong assumptions is able to display only an act of a clumsy child's play – in order to be worthy of being called kin, further devotion is required. I am thankful for the guidance. I will etch it

deeply in this heart of mine.”

“You’re the one who doesn’t understand the most...”

I wanted to cry for the first time in a few hundred years. No matter what words I used till exhaustion, she just distorted it time after time and took it in a positive way. Strictly saying, I’ve had no clue if it was positive or not.

“Since it has come to this, let us hurry Evil Dragon Lord. There is no more use staying in such a remote village. Even though I am lacking, let me assist you in the grand journey to defeat the Demon King and let the world rest in your hands.”

“Can’t we take it a little easy? Today I’m already tired.”

“Such jest, please look out the window. Is it not the full moon tonight?”

“So what?”

“Evil Dragon Lord’s magic power becomes the greatest on full moon nights. That you would be tired on such a special night— I am terribly grateful for the concern for me, the one who has just finished her first battle.”

“I had no idea that I get stronger on the full moon though.”

The setting of things I didn’t know about is steadily increasing. Even though I’ve only felt I was able to walk a bit more easily at a full moon night.

When I was confused, Reiko climbed on my back with an innocent look. She faced the laying on the ground Raiotto and said:

“Raiotto, I want you to convey my gratitude to everyone at the village and home. I was happy to receive this duty. After this, together with Evil Dragon Lord we will conquer the world and make it so everyone can live safely. From now on this is my wish, and the Evil Dragon Lord’s ambition.”

“Hey, wait! Fuck! Untie the rope!”

“Let us go, Evil Dragon Lord. Let the curtain of night become your wings and the ruler’s wind blow — [**Shadow Wings**] ”

When Reiko held her dagger over the moon, darkness of the night condensed densely, as if it could be touched, and in the next instant turned into imposing jet black wings growing from my back.

“Allow my small power to be of assistance in the great Evil Dragon Lord’s flight.”

Along with these few words my body floated softly — I flew for the first time in my life. Immediately after I faced the moon and could rise as far as I wanted.

I thought I was going to wet myself.

Chapter 3

Now to the adventurer's town

— So, where are we flying to?

There was a great deal of risk involved in inquiring that. Since Reiko, who just through her wrong assumptions became able to use magic, was here. It was obvious that, if for example her misunderstandings were to be solved mid-air a terrible tragedy would happen.

If I'd take an unbecoming of evil dragon and lacking in confidence stance, the possibility of a fall would rise sharply. So that was why, without saying anything, I just listened to the attached to my back black wings, which continued to flap along with a fluttering sound.

On the other hand, I felt that if I left it alone like that we'd fly straight to the Demon King's headquarters, just like a forced march. I've had no idea where it was, but I believed she'd just randomly say [**Evil Dragon's Clairvoyance**] and find it. If it was her, there was no doubt about it.

Therefore, to prevent that, I tried to introduce a destination through the conversation.

“Reiko, to be honest, in comparison to my former years my power has declined. As I've retired, my battle sense has also rusted. On the other hand, the Demon King is overflowing with power and has developed his various troops. If we clash with him right now, the chances of victory are slim.”

“Even if it is the Evil Dragon Lord, the Demon King cannot be dealt with using ordinary means, is that right?”

“Yes. However, that's also a great opportunity. The overdone dominance births resistance. Among humans there's also a large number of opposition. I'm thinking of joining hands with them.”

“...I see. Despite them being far from reaching Evil Dragon Lord's height, if we gather a number of them they will certainly become a military strength.”

“Consequently, first let us search for a town where such warriors gather. I’m unfamiliar with the current world of humans. Could you guide me to the appropriate town?”

“Understood. I also do not know much about the society, but if it is the Evil Dragon Lord’s order, no matter the place I will find it — Opening of the third eye [**Evil Dragon’s Clairvoyance**] ”

I guessed it magnificently, even the name. It seemed I had come to grasp this girl’s tendencies quite well. If that was the case, leading her this way was the correct answer. If I didn’t say anything, as per the original prediction we’d have gone straight to the Demon King’s headquarters.

“I saw it. To the north from here is a large-scale adventurer’s town called Peryudōna. There are quite a lot of skilled people, however it’s a fort enclosed by walls and the checkpoint inspection seems to be quite strict. In addition, compared to the surroundings the stable land and goods prices are higher, and the Merchants Guild is rushing to remove illegal peddlers and black market for their interests. On the other hand, the dissatisfaction that the Adventurers Guild feels, namely that despite bringing prosperity to the town it is being neglected, in recent years brought about opening of the publically sponsored bazaar by the adventurers, and the city is currently divided between two factions – merchants and adventurers. Recent problems include worsening of water quality and hygiene as a result of deterioration of the underground waterways, groups of medical care white wizards and alchemists knowledgeable about the purification of water were invited from distant places, however a drastic reconstruction work of the underground waterways has not been achieved yet. Since according to rumours, there is a concern that if the underground waterways environment is serviced, it might become an entry point for the monsters...”

“Yeah, that’s enough. I thought you’re just going to search for the place, but it really was clairvoyance.”

“I humbly apologize for overdoing it.”

“No no, I don’t mind. However, the prices being high are a bit troubling. If I knew it’d be like that, we should have got some money from the village.”

“In that case there’s no reason for concern. I offer you this jewelled dagger. The selling price should be reasonable, since it is an heirloom of Raiotto’s family.”

Ha, my voice faltered.

“An heirloom, is it really fine? No, it might be fine since you came to me with it as an offering, but——”

“It is not an offering, however it does not matter. It is said to possess the power to exorcise evil, and before I was made a sacrifice, despite my reluctance, Raiotto handed it to me saying “Stab that Evil Dragon with it and run”. There is absolutely no problem in exchanging a dagger entrusted with such blasphemous intentions for money.”

“In that case, it’s a pity you didn’t return it. Let’s not sell it. It feels like retribution might befall us.”

Besides, for one reason or another I might be thinking of it dearly as a memento of my pal, who carried it closely with him all his life. Raiotto is still alive though.

“Anyway, let’s try going there. So Reiko, I’ve got a request for you.”

“Anything you may desire.”

“If I go to the town of adventurer’s calling myself an evil dragon, we’ll undoubtedly get attacked, right?”

“—— Then I will turn the city to ashes in five seconds.”

“I knew it. If you do that, there’s no reason for us to go there. No matter what, tell everyone I’m your familiar. You’re going to introduce yourself as a dragon taming sorceress who wants to simply meet allies. Is that clear?”

“I-I am supposed to act as the Evil Dragon Lord’s owner...?”

For the first time since I met her, Reiko’s voice had a sign of turmoil mixed in.

“Yes. Can you do it?”

“I-I am truly sorry, but I have no experience of holding a position over someone. To say nothing of treating Evil Dragon Lord as a familiar, I am afraid it is impossible.”

“There’s no need to worry so much. If you’re bad at conversation, speaking politely is fine. You merely need to restrain your attitude of elevating me more than necessary.”

Here laid my true aim. By mixing with adventurers and learning common sense, while also refraining from treating me as an evil dragon I'd make her feel out of place. I believed that, if she spent a while living peacefully, her misconceptions would disappear and she might see reason. When that happened, I'd just leave her in care of the Adventurer's Guild, since her talent was outstanding.

"...I will make the effort. Please forgive me if there will arise any lacking aspects."

"It's unusual to see you without confidence."

"Yes..."

Anyway, it seemed my scheme was going well; the wings have naturally turned course to the north. If the plan goes smoothly, I might be able to return to my carefree life in the mountains surprisingly soon.

"Come to think of it Evil Dragon Lord, there's a small piece of information I forgot to convey earlier—"

"Hm? I don't really need any complex information."

"Is that so. In that case I might as well say it when we arrive."

We kept flying like that for a while. Thereupon, in the middle of a huge plain a city surrounded by stone walls came into our view.

Although it was already middle of the night it really was well-lit. I guessed that, unlike the poor villages the towns where people gather released such strange light.

Nope, I was wrong.

"That town, it's burning like crazy?! It's not the light of houses but fire, isn't it?!"

"Yes. It is in the midst of receiving a powerful monster raid."

"Rather than the town's water circumstances, you could have told me that instead."

The closer we got, the more agonizing screams could be heard. In the sky above the town countless eerie human-faced birds were dancing while laughing loudly. Inside the ramparts some kind of grotesque white monster was hunting down residents. It

was just like a painting of a scene in hell.

“What do we do, Evil Dragon Lord? I believe one option is to just watch and select the ones skilful enough to survive.”

“You say terrifying things just as easily as breathing, don’t you?”

“Then as expected, we are rescuing them, right?”

“I wonder, have I been conned?”

The black wings fluttered and turned us towards the city’s skies. At first glance it seemed like I was the one controlling our flight, but in reality it was Reiko. I prayed for us to stop, but there was no helping it already. The chances were those of a coachman without reins stopping. I pushed down the uneasiness of nearing death and said:

“Reiko, listen well. In this battle I’ll play the role of a worthless dragon, who can’t do anything without his master’s help. Remember it well and try fighting like a dragon taming sorceress. If you do it well, town’s residents will naturally accept it.”

Although there was no reply, the feeling that she nodded awkwardly was somehow transmitted. If I wouldn’t deceive her somehow, all those lives would be extinguished.

Suuu—, I heard her taking a deep breath on my back.

In the next instant, a slash from the jewelled dagger drew a huge glowing claw scar across the night sky, completely eradicating the flock of eerie human-faced birds.

A dragon tamer’s element? That was what I thought.

Chapter 4

It seems like “Evil Dragon Reivendia” is my name.

First time hearing it

In an instant, she annihilated the eerie flock of birds above the city. But just as I started to feel relief, when I shifted my line of sight a little, from the other direction the white-faced eerie birds were almost infinitely gushing out.

When one looked at Reiko’s real strength, who slaughtered that horde of birds in one strike, they didn’t seem like a significant threat. However, the worrying factor was that Reiko would overuse her magic and deplete her stamina just like before.

“Hey Reiko, powerful moves are fine, but have you thought about pacing yourself a little bit? Once it becomes difficult, you know its fine to go down and get a short break, right?”

“However, these people in the city will eventually become the Evil Dragon Lord’s followers. I cannot let the number of victims grow by leaving the monsters idle. I will save as many as my power allows me to — so that one of these days they will die meaningfully, useful to the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“You, I’ve no idea whether you’re kind or not.”

We flew to the centre of the town enclosed by circular walls. If we glared at the eerie birds and kept them in check, the attacks on citizens would probably lessen. Although, the one who decided that and was making me fly was Reiko.

Or so I thought, but a clad in armour warrior commanding the battleground below screamed.

“A new one! A new monster appeared! It’s a dragon possessing a sinister and tremendous magic power! Ei, do not falter everyone! Let’s somehow counterattack with the greatest strike possible—”

That magic power wasn’t mine, but Reiko’s. This child was emitting aura dangerous

enough for them to call it sinister. I've expected it though.

"Shoot!"

Warriors standing on the walls let loose their attacks simultaneously. Light magic bullets, flame vortexes, wind slashes released from swords, arrows drawing phantasmagorical trajectories, javelins tearing space apart. Just the pure sense of intimidation caused by the released certain kill strikes of brave warriors with their long military service had almost made me lose consciousness.

Well, I've lived for a long time, there aren't many things I regret either — It happened just when I was saying my final prayers.

Rrrooooooaaaaaaa—!—!—!—!—!—!

On my back, Reiko roared.

It wasn't an agonal scream. Or rather, it was no longer a human's voice. If I didn't know Reiko was on my back, I'd have probably misunderstood that an unthinkably strong wicked dragon was roaring nearby.

Moreover, it wasn't merely a terrifying voice. The dreadful roar carrying a physical impact spread in a spherical manner, just like an expanding barrier, which flawlessly nullified all the incoming attacks.

"You pathetic ruffians. You intend to harm the Evil Dragon Lord with just these trivial powers?"

Reiko's voice was echoing loudly across the night sky. And it was hopeless already. This was clearly a villain's entrance.

"Hey Reiko, wait a minute. You, did you forget what we talked about? I'm not an evil dragon, but a simple worthless dragon. And you're not my kin, but a normal dragon taming sorceress. So from now on do your best to correct this."

"...That is, right. I am, sorry. I, understand, and will, do my, best."

It was a speaking pattern of a poor ventriloquism act. Despite her wrong impressions being intense, it seemed she was no good at acting something out with self-awareness.

“I misspoke everyone. I’m a sorceress of righteousness with a very pure heart. Here is a dragon which doesn’t have any merit, but is very meek, harmless and easy to get attached to. Since the town seemed to be burning gravely, I came to save you. I’d be pleased if you’d welcome us.”

Silence fell over the night. Only the crackling sounds of burning buildings were heard, just like a carefree bonfire.

“..What do we do?”

“Well it really stinks, but if we fight do we’ve any chances?”

“Yeah, that previous attack was scattered with one roar.”

“Even if it’s a trap, for now let’s play along.”

“Ye, I don’t really mind if they stab us in the back while playing allies.”

“Alright. For now let’s treat them as allies. Though there’s no way I trust them.”

“Then it’s decided.”

“It seems you’re whispering this and that. Do you believe you’d be able to fool our ears with hushed voices?”

By the way, I couldn’t hear anything.

“Alright! We welcome you! Come down slowly just as you’re. The wall artillery is missing, just land there.”

The one who replied was the commander. The black wings controlled by Reiko lowered the flapping rate and we descended, gliding down. When I landed on the artillery space, there was a reception of adventurers overflowing with bloodlust. I wanted to go home already.

“We all probably have our own motives. However at least here, I’ll think of you two not being our enemies as our good fortune.”

There was just one person lacking bloodlust. Or he might be good at hiding it. It was the commander-like armoured warrior. While approaching us holding a long

broadsword, he put it into a sheath on his back and took off his helmet. Then, vibrant red hair gently fell all the way down to her waist.

It was a woman. For a woman to be acting as the commander of these brave warriors, I wonder how great her strength must be.

“I’m called Ariante. Please fight with us to save this city.”

She even politely took off her glove and wanted to shake Reiko’s hand. As one could expect, she didn’t come near me. In any case, we wouldn’t be able to shake hands with our different sizes.

“Please treat us well.”

In contrast to the knight Ariante who boldly sought a handshake, Reiko held out her hand while shifting her gaze. It’d probably only be regarded as suspicious behaviour, but it just made it look all the more shady.

“I’m Reiko. And here’s the one I serve, the great Evil Dragon Lord... That’s wrong, just a normal dragon.”

“Say, aren’t you doing it on purpose?”

“I would not even think to go against the Evil Dragon Lord’s order.”

“There you are calling me an evil dragon again.”

“Sir Dragon. What could be your name?”

When Ariante inquired, my eyes grew wide open. I didn’t have a name. In exchange for the longevity of our species our population was scarce, so there weren’t even two or three of us in one habitat. That was why, as a matter of course, we didn’t need names to distinguish individuals.

However, from an unexpected direction came surprising information. Namely from the adventurers behind me, who weren’t even trying to conceal their agitation.

“Hey, those black scales and azure eyes... Isn’t that the Evil Dragon Reivendia worshipped by the southern village?”

“I’ve seen his wanted poster at the guild. There’s no doubt.”

“The way from which he flew also matches, right?”

“It’s a lie. That the one known established as the massive monster comparable with the Demon King has awoken...”

Astonishing. There was a terribly exaggerated name given to me. Even though I’ve never called myself the likes of Reivendia. As soon as Reiko heard this conversation, she regained her spirit like a fish thrown into water.

“Hmph, for humans, you guys seem to have pretty keen noses. Since you realized, there’s no helping it. Indeed, he is the Evil Dragon Lord Reivendia. However, think of it as your honour. The Evil Dragon Lord has no intention to harm the bunch of you. The current enemy is only the reckless and foolish Demon King, who is selfishly trampling down on this world, which should be ruled by the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Could you not give them ideas in your high spirits? You could’ve held out more.”

“From the beginning, the Evil Dragon Lord’s illustrious power could not be hidden merely by my performance.”

“Uwa, she shifted the responsibility on me.”

Ariante’s expression hardened.

“Never would I have thought, but it really is true. Be that as it may — you’re really good at concealing your powers. For a moment, I’ve thought you’re just a really big lizard.”

“You intend to mock the Evil Dragon Lord?”

Reiko’s eyes sharpened and she set up her jewelled dagger. However, Ariante was unmoved.

“I understand. Even though you only just became his kin, you’ve already surpassed my power. I can guess that much from the strength of your body.”

Hm? I tilted my neck. As if to represent my question, Reiko asked.

“How do you know that I’ve just been made Lord’s kin?”

“I can tell by looking. In comparison to the volume of your power, you’ve got almost zero practice in handling it. It’s rather all the more terrifying.”

Saying that she wasn’t used to handling it, in other words meant there was still room for growth. From the people gathered here, the one who shivered the most was me.

“But now is not the time to have a long talk. Let’s leave the story of defeating the Demon King for later, first we’ve got to subdue this town’s fire. Fortunately, there are almost no injured people, but if this continues the town will be burnt down.”

“What? Even though there’s such a big fire, there are no victims?”

“What’s that, dragon, are you dissatisfied?”

“No, no, I think it’s a good thing. Getting injured and dying is an awful thing.”

“...You’re a pretty carefree one, aren’t you.”

As if to say I’ve gone mad, Ariante cleared her throat.

“Anyhow, please look at the city. These are the monsters laying waste to it.”

I stretched my neck and looked down at the city. The ones destroying the town’s buildings, hurling fire and pushing the limits of destruction were — skeletons. However, it wasn’t merely human skeletons. Innumerable white bones put together formed grotesque monsters, or siege-like weapons showing unrestrained movements. What was more, there wasn’t just a single one, but many of them running around the city.

“At first only those human-faced birds raided us. We intercepted them well with mid-air attacks, but when the birds’ corpses piled up, the bones separated and started moving just like that. It’s fortunate that they are weak, but not only are their numbers great, no matter how many pieces we break them into, they soon start to reconnect and move again. To neutralize them completely, we’ve to use some means of burning or dissolving the bones, till there’s nothing left of them.”

I see. It was a foul two-pronged strategy, which demons were so fond of using. Reiko fixedly gazed at the sky.

“Just like the Evil Dragon Lord and I attacked before, we’ve got to erase them without leaving even their bones.”

“That’s right. I’d like to leave the skies to you two. If the supply of bones will disappear, we can decrease their numbers on the ground.”

I was reluctant. If we took to the sky again, there was no telling when we’d be able to land. But it appeared that, if we didn’t do anything, I’d be recognized as a monster and get beaten up.

“Reiko, it’s a good opportunity for your training. Try going by yourself. You can fly, right?”

“Please leave it to me, Evil Dragon Lord.”

With a flap, black wings grew from Reiko’s back. I felt like just by asking “You can do it, right?” this child could do anything. Except acting, that is.

“Well then, I’m going to annihilate them.”

“Take proper breaks when you get tired, all right? Sleeping mid-air isn’t allowed either, okay?”

I didn’t know if she was able to hear my warnings. Reiko soared high in the air with a speed fast enough to have only her afterimages seen, after which she started drawing silver claw marks across the night sky.

And then I suddenly remembered my circumstances. I was surrounded by a great number of adventurers, without any place to escape to. With Reiko gone, there was no one to protect me.

“Reivendia, is it fine with just the kin girl?”

Ariante examined me with a sharp, discerning gaze.

“I’d very much like to help out, but if I do, this town will be destroyed with just the remaining waves of my power. I don’t think you want that either.”

As a result of panicking, I spouted the greatest boasts of my lifetime. To tell the truth, even if I did my best, I don’t think I’d be able to destroy even one house. To somehow

change the subject and make the adventurers scatter, I tried to give advice as naturally and a matter of course as possible.

“Well, since I’ll be resting here, you guys should quickly search for the ‘freshly severed head’ and stop the bones. Though it’ll be hard to find under the cover of all those human-faced birds’ bones...”

“‘Freshly severed head’ ? What’s that?”

Since Ariante didn’t seem to understand, I explained.

“What do you mean what, it’s those bone monsters real body — Kurikubikōbe. Look, he takes the shape of a human head and he’s the one controlling the bones here. Since he’s moving them throughout the whole town, he has to be rolling around somewhere high.”

If I remembered correctly, the method of delivering the kurikubikōbe hidden inside the corpse of a human-faced demon and capturing cities with the army of skeletons was quite popular some time ago. Around the time when my body wasn’t as big as it was now, I could remember receiving food from humans, but the town of citizens who fed me was captured using that trick. Since I was really sad at the time, I could still recall how cowardly and vile their technique was.

“Everyone! You heard, didn’t you?! Search for the freshly severed head in an unnatural place mixed with the eerie birds corpses!”

Adventurers jumped to their feet and dispersed. Contrary to everyone’s expectations, after several tens of seconds someone’s war cry was raised, and the skeletons spread throughout the town lost their strength, collapsing along with clattering sounds.

“As expected of a former executive of the Demon King’s army, you’re well acquainted with the demons abilities. There was no such information recorded in the guild’s books.”

Whether she was praising me or speaking with sarcasm, I couldn’t read Ariante’s serious face. Deep down I was sweating profusely, wondering if I’ve made some careless remarks which she could be suspicious of. Then I composed myself and remembered.

Those events happened when I was still small, so it was more than 4000 years ago. No

wonder it didn't remain in some books.

Chapter 5

Where should I leave this child

After defeating the monsters, mages devoted themselves to extinguishing fires with water magic, so the whole process went smoothly. Everyone was trying to save at least a portion of their belongings from the burning houses, while fretting how to make ends meet from now on.

On the other hand, we were made to wait at the artillery spot on the wall. The adventurers' perspective was that, "Until we hear your full story and goals, we can't let you wander around". Personally, I think it was a very reasonable claim. If we loitered around and got attacked we couldn't even complain, so I ordered Reiko to keep still.

However.

"It's fine, I don't mind... Oh, could you borrow me a blanket or something though? You might think it's thoughtless of me saying such a thing when the town is in trouble, but this child has been going at it since morning. I want to let her settle down and sleep a bit."

Reiko, who just finished her air battle, was drowsily shaking her head while rubbing her eyes. Although she might seem composed, the burden on her body must've been substantial. Instead of a nap while dozing off, I wanted to let her have a proper rest.

The watch-keeping soldiers — several dozen of adventurers exchanged glances, and in the end one of them went down to the guardroom. From the air they emitted, each and every one of them was a first-class warrior. Just by showing any sign of hostility, a herbivorous dragon like me would probably be killed in a few seconds. I've absolutely had no intention of going against them though.

Then, the soldier who just went down came back with a blanket.

"Here, a blanket. However, worrying about the kin girl's physical condition is different from the stories I heard, quite compassionate of you indeed."

“Just out of curiosity, what stories spread around?”

“Scorching towns for fun, when starved you make rivers of flesh and blood run just to satiate your hunger.”

“I’ve never done such a thing, really. My staple food is grass or trees. Bamboo shoots are my favourite.”

Everyone got nervous, with their faces saying they wouldn’t get deceived. I secretly expected somebody would believe me and give me some bamboo shoots, but it seemed unlikely.

“Reiko, town’s people have lent us a blanket. Sleep for now and let your body recover.”

“But —— leaving the Evil Dragon Lord unattended and sleeping soundly is...”

“I don’t mind. You have to be tired. Now it’s your task to rest.”

“...As you wish.”

Reiko, who properly wrapped her body in a blanket, jumped on my back with a light leap.

“Well then, pardon me for having a rest before you.”

“You dislike going to sleep first, but you absolutely don’t mind jumping on my back. Not that I mind though.”

Without any reply, I already felt a soft lump lying on my back.

“Reivendia, are you fine like that? If it’s necessary, we’ll prepare even a hundred blankets.”

“I’m not really sleepy.”

My body and spirit couldn’t be more tired. However, I wasn’t that thick skinned to be able to fall asleep in the middle of this facing me hostility. Supposedly, even if we both were to go to sleep, we might suffer an all-out attack and die. Since I felt like I was suffocating, I raised the main issue in a small voice, so as not to wake up Reiko.

“Look, I’ve got an earnest question for you guys, could I leave this child in your care? As a matter of fact, this child isn’t my kin or anything; she’s just an ordinary human. If you guys raise her properly, I think she’ll become a helpful and splendid sorceress.”

“...What’s your aim?” An archer took a deep breath and answered.

“No, I’ve no hidden motives, it’s literally as I said.”

“That story is utterly unbelievable. The magical power that girl emits isn’t human, it’s of a demon’s nature. What’s more, it’s especially nefarious. You, who gave her that power, should understand it the best, shouldn’t you?”

“It might be unbelievable, but in fact it’s true.”

“Stop lying.”

“This is troubling...”

I was at a loss.

The route of acting as a respectable tamer’s dragon has already disappeared; regaining my peaceful life didn’t seem likely. If it continued like this I’d be stuck with her forever, with a straight line for subjugating the Demon King. And then midway I’d probably get killed by a stray arrow.

“I kept you waiting.”

When I was brooding over my situation, from behind the soldiers keeping watch appeared the female knight Ariante, who not long ago was commanding them. It seemed that she was finishing off the remnants until now.

“You guys may stand down. It’ll be easier to talk with fewer people, for both of us.”

“Elder sister, are you sure you’re going to be okay?”

“Yes, I don’t mind. Anyway, if that thing starts to rampage, whether it’s me alone or all of the town’s warriors gathered together, probably everyone would be annihilated. In which case, setting up the grounds for dialogue even a little bit seems like the best plan.”

I wasn't capable to. I didn't know about Reiko though. Still, Ariante seemed like she might be more understanding than those guys openly releasing bloodlust. That alone brought me some relief. When soldiers went down, the one who broke the ice was Ariante.

"Evil Dragon Reivendia, why are you rebelling against the Demon King? The existence like you, even Demon King won't treat you discourteously. Or is it that your pride doesn't allow you to be below someone?"

"As expected, you've also misunderstood... Listen, I'm not any evil dragon. I'm just like a huge lizard that has been eating nothing but grass. To put things bluntly, if we fought I'd die in a second."

"Yet I don't think that a mere big lizard would be knowledgeable about demons."

"It's just accidentally, by chance. I've been living quite long and while secretly running away from various demons I picked up some things, but it's not like my knowledge covers all information on the Demon King's army. There's probably far more demons I don't know about."

"Then, how are you going to explain that kin girl of yours?"

"Regarding that, it's difficult to explain even for me. She's the one who made this so complicated."

The same way as I've explained to Raiotto, I told from the very start the story of how Reiko was offered as a sacrifice.

The result.

"Unbelievable."

What came out was practically the same response as with Raiotto. Well that should be expected, I thought. Even I still wondered if this whole situation wasn't just a bad dream.

“If she’s a regular sorceress this story is impossible. The same way an infant just can’t get up and start walking suddenly, there’s an order to release magic. There would be no hardship if it could be released limitlessly with just wrong assumptions.”

“Is there no possibility that this child is an amazing genius or something?”

“I can’t say there were no such instances in the past, but... those are all just legends. Among the recorded in history high-ranking mages, there seemed to be one capable of wielding enormous magic from the moment he gained self-awareness, but it’s without a doubt an exaggeration.”

“Here she is though.”

“I can’t believe it.”

Ughh, I groaned. Perhaps the reason why you weren’t able to find prodigious children was because you treat them like monsters and drive them away from towns. Even if there were other children like that, they might have had a screw loose, being no different than monsters.

“Even if, for argument’s sake, I were to believe this story, there’s a bigger problem then. The magic power that child wields is already not human’s. If she handles her art crudely, there’s no telling when she breaks the balance and goes berserk. Particularly, there exists a small chance of her being swallowed by her own magic power and transforming into a real evil dragon.”

“Eee... She’ll become a dragon herself?”

“Of course, generally it’s impossible. It’s purely a hypothesis in the case your story is true.”

“For you it might be a hypothetical talk, but for me it’s a shocking reality. What to do, if that child becomes a dragon will her sense of self remain? Will it be possible to reason with her?”

“It’d be better to not expect too much.”

Once I was told that, I felt like I’ve had a terrible bomb on my back. It just might be that she was more troublesome and dreadful than the Demon King, being so close to me, just sleeping soundly and making sweet noises.

“Listen here, I’ve come up with a good idea, why won’t you let her amass a sorceress’ training? Look, as long as she learns how to handle her magic powers, she won’t become a demon, right?”

“It’s not possible. Everyone in this town bears distrust towards you, including me. If this child becomes able to control her powers, her strength would increase even further. There isn’t anyone who would want to provide Evil Dragon’s kin with more power.”

I sighed deeply. Those were some grim prospects. In the worst case scenario, I might have to consider dragging this child with me into the mountains and confining ourselves there. Although it was a shame, I couldn’t send her back to the village...

“Supposing your story is true, if I were to give you a piece of advice it’s not to say lightly the fact that you’re weak. The reason that girl is able to control her powers despite her crude skills, is that there exists a foothold called the Evil Dragon Reivendia for her to rely on. Losing that illusion carries a high risk of her going out of control. On top of that the Guild put a prize on your head. Knowing that you’re weak, those mercenaries looking for gold will unanimously hunt you down.”

“Eh, there’s a reward for my head?”

“Second only to the Demon King.”

“What kind of standard is that... Even though I’ve only been eating plants...”

What an inconceivably false charge. From now on I couldn’t even open my mouth saying I was weak, or I’d get killed for money. As I was spilling tears of sorrow in my heart, Ariante slowly drew her sword.

“I’ve went along with your story. Come, now it’s your turn to answer my questions — Evil Dragon Reivendia. Why are you rebelling against the Demon King?”

I couldn’t answer anything. The reason being bloodlust, which I couldn’t feel even once from Ariante, was released fiercely all at once. My skin covered with scales started shivering.

“You won’t answer? What foolishness. Even though the Demon King also acknowledged your superiority, to suddenly use his kindness because of your pride...”

The tip of the broadsword was pointed at my nose.

“My name is Ariante Sorudo Shiruvie, a devoted sword of the Demon King. Although my life will end here, be prepared to not escape unscathed, old dragon.”

Chapter 6

I think I'll have trust issues

I resigned myself to death when the sword flashed. No doubt that Ariante would be astonished, since she'd be able to bring down the Demon King's enemy in just one blow.

However, Ariante's large sword stopped right before beheading me. The one who blocked the sword was naturally Reiko, who was asleep until a moment ago.

"...My apologies. I've been sleeping soundly while the enemy was right in front of me. I will atone for this disgraceful behaviour with the opponent's neck."

"Well, if you were in a perfect condition that would be very likely."

Ariante took one big step and both of them locked blades. Yet Reiko soon lost her balance and stumbled.

"Your power and speed are both higher than mine. However, you wasted these advantages on those small fries before. At that on opponents who needed not more than 10% of your power, it's as if you don't know what moderation is. If your strength falls to the same level as mine, then it's a contest of skills."

She wasn't just swinging her sword with one's all strength. Her attacks were ever-changing, assailing from various directions, as if she was eroding Reiko's defences. On the other hand when Reiko counterattacked, she parried her dagger's blade upwards and broke her stance.

Ariante struck her large sword into the defencelessly exposed Reiko's flank.

Boom—

Reiko's small figure was effortlessly sent flying, plunging into stone blocks of the castle wall and raising a huge cloud of dust. She wasn't moving even slightly in front of the wall, which cracked from the impact.

“R-Reiko?! Hey, you—— Wait a minute, let’s talk!”

“Prepare yourself.”

Ariante’s sword glowed palely. It was the light of a dense magic power. I was good as dead if that thing touched me.

I really wanted to turn tail and run, but unfortunately, my legs completely refused to move. Ariante leapt and swung her sword aiming directly at the top of my head.

“Oowww———!!”

After a brisk thump sound I howled in pain. I thought I was going to die instantly, but what assaulted me was a resounding in my head raw, dull pain.

“I guess a being of your level won’t be able to feel much pain. However, no matter what kind of being it is, this sword will definitely deal some damage. If you continue to underestimate me and stay defenceless like before, you’ll experience a world of hurt.”

In other words, I won’t be able to die easily. Even torture should have limits.

“H-hey, listen. Could you try changing to a normal sword? I think this one is fairly inhumane.”

“With you as the opponent there’s no point in using an average sword.”

“But it’s actually the opposite... Because of this bothersome sword it’ll just drag on strangely—“

Thinking it might be possible, I looked at Reiko. Despite having her side cut there was no blood flowing and her chest was clearly rising and falling. It seemed there was some damage but she was still alive.

I’m gla—— just when I thought that, I was hit really hard in the face. Due to this weapon’s nature, rather than slashing like a sword it seemed to give an impact like a blunt weapon.

“Hey, time out.”

“I won’t listen!”

“I’ll die, really.”

“Certainly if you go on like this! It’s time to get serious!”

And then, I could say I was briefly in hell.

When at last, my (half) dead body, which wasn’t even able to twitch, was perfected. I certainly had to be at death’s door. It was almost like a state where I’d die just by being poked with a finger.

Ariante seeing that also furrowed her brows.

“...No way, you really are weak?”

“If I was strong I’d have escaped a long time ago.”

She started processing it while holding her chin.

“Okay, I got it. I’ll finish you off with the next blow.”

“You’re also a simple-minded person, aren’t you?”

As soon as I said it, I was sent flying by a swing of that terrifying large sword. I was plunged right next to Reiko, destroying a few stone blocks. However, I was alive. My whole body hurt and I couldn’t move, but I was conscious and breathing.

“...Oh?”

When I looked closer, it felt like Reiko rather than being unconscious was just sleeping peacefully. Ariante put her large sword inside a scabbard on her back and walked over. And then, she deeply lowered her head.

“Sorry for being so rough. I had to make sure whether you really were weak. If you let a human toy with you that far, even though it’s hard to believe, it has to be the truth.”

“Was it necessary to go this far?”

“It was a story defying common sense. Your eyes didn’t look like those of a liar, but unfortunately I couldn’t just accept it without any proof.”

“You already half-believed me, right? Then couldn’t you hold back a little? This will definitely leave me crippled.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. To tell the truth, the only thing this sword deals is pain. It doesn’t leave any injuries on the body. Tomorrow, you’ll probably be able to stand on your own.”

“It hurt like hell though, so no doubt it’ll scar my mind.”

“That I can’t help you with.”

After taking a breath of relief, I suddenly remembered.

“C-come to think of it, the story that you’re a member of the Demon King’s army——”

“That was obviously a lie. If you really were a powerful evil dragon and I challenged you as this town’s adventurer, the compensation for that offense would also befall the city.”

Ariante shook her head.

“But if I earned your resentment as a member of the Demon King’s army, should time and circumstances permit, your rage would be faced towards the Demon King, which would also be useful to humanity.”

“Oh, is that right. I’m sorry for being useless.”

“Well, I had a hunch.”

“Isn’t that too harsh?”

Ariante once again lowered her head and picked up the soundly asleep Reiko.

“For now, since you really are weak, the problem is this girl. Listen, no matter what don’t let her realize that. In front of this girl, behave like a proper Evil Dragon Lord to avoid having her go berserk.”

“I don’t really have the confidence. Maybe we should just seclude ourselves in the mountains. In that case there wouldn’t be any problem, right?”

“That’s not possible; the fact that you declared war on the Demon King is already well-known throughout the town. Unless you can stop people’s tongues, eventually it’ll reach the Demon King’s ears. No matter where you hide, they will inevitably come looking for you. What’s more, it’s going to be a demon possessing enough power to match your reputation.”

“So it’s hopeless. What am I supposed to do?”

When I was sighing, Ariante awkwardly averted her eyes a bit. Not good. That attitude meant she had no idea.

“Well, that... Do your best. It’s fine if you get stronger step by step from now on.”

“Even if you say that, I can’t show her my incompetent training, can I? Ah, right. If you could take care of this child, I’d do my best in the meantime. I don’t think I’m able to become strong though.”

“No way. There’s no one in this town who’d get involved with this child.”

“Yep, that’s what I thought.”

“But —— yeah, it’s doable. As long as it’s not this town.”

Ariante pointed at the far end of the night sky.

“From here about three days on horse is a city with the Royal Teachings Institution. You should conceal your identity and make her learn how to handle magic power as a sorceress apprentice. I’ve a way to hide your body and I’ll also write a letter of recommendation.”

“I’m sorry but it’s impossible. I came to this town thinking the same, but I found out Reiko is just hopeless at acting. It’ll probably get discovered on the first day.”

“...”

She was at a loss. I felt guilty.

“Ah, but I’d still like you to teach me the way to hide my body. At the very least it’ll earn some time from getting caught.”

“...Wait a minute.”

Ariante turned on her heel towards the town.

“If that girl wakes up, tell her that the battle just now was only a dream. It’s an option with the least future problems.”

“Even if it’s this child, will she believe it?”

“She’ll believe anything, as long as you’re the one saying it.”

Just like that, she jumped down from the castle wall. It was a height which ordinary people couldn’t manage, but since it was her she should be fine. And then, when I waited for a while, she returned carrying a barrel fitting under her arm.

“I made you wait.”

“What’s that, alcohol?”

“Why would I serve as your drinking buddy? It’s the elixir of youthful rejuvenation, which can only be made by high ranking alchemists. Usually just a drop is enough, but taking into account your longevity there’s no telling how much is needed. Just in case, I’ve brought a whole barrel. If it works, your frame should shrink a bit. Now, open your mouth.”

I’ve had some reluctance in drinking a liquid of unknown origins, but if I didn’t, waiting for me was only a future of being hunted for gold. Without any choice, I opened my mouth.

When a drop of the liquid placed on the medicine spoon fell on my tongue, with a pop sound my body got enveloped in a purple cloud. In the next moment, my body size was no different from a standing nearby small horse.

“I see. It seems you’ve absolutely no resistance to medicines. You ought to watch out for poison.”

“Eh, I was just glad it worked, but there’s also that way of looking at it. I think I’ll have trust issues.”

“Well, anyway. It works for a day, so be sure to drink a drop daily. Since only a drop

works, that barrel should last you a while. It's really valuable, so don't go losing it."

"Sorry, using something so valuable."

"It's a gift for saving the town, and an apology for earlier. Instead, I feel it's not enough."

"By the way, how were you able to prepare such a precious thing that fast?"

"...Preparedness is the first step to success."

"Ah, I thought it's because you have the role of a commanding officer, but is it possible that, despite looking like this, you're in fact quite old——"

With a swish, a sword appeared right before my eyes.

"There's no loss in keeping my physical faculties youthful for the sake of fighting. That is it. As a warrior, it's a matter of course."

"Yes, I also think so."

I'd be killed if her mood worsened. Since I whole heartedly believed that, I received the medicine prostrating myself.

"Tonight is already late, you can sleep with that girl in the guard's cabin. I'll prepare arrangements for leaving the town."

While still feeling the atmosphere of getting rid of a nuisance, I just nodded.

Incidentally, the next morning when I've fallen fast asleep at the guard's cabin,

"E-E-E-Evil Dragon Lord, w-why on earth do you have this... form? Dream? Was it a dream?"

Soon after making an excuse concerning the yesterday's fight, Reiko started persistently asking for a reason why I've had become so small.

Chapter 7

Troublesome pursuer

As soon as the sun went up, a great number of adventurers went outside the walls and departed on their journeys. It appeared to be an everyday sight in this town, but today their number was especially large. That was because most of the town got damaged in last night's fire. The moment adventurers without any roots here understood that the environment for their long stay was gone, they quickly gave up and left in a hurry.

"How heartless."

"Such is life. Only people living here for a long time are interested in restoring it. Fortunately, thanks to you the last night's damage was somewhat reduced. It won't take that long to restore it. Reivendia, let me thank you once more. And you, kin girl."

While gazing at the formed line of pack horses becoming distant on the grasslands, I lightly touched the hand Ariante held out with the tip of my claw. I planned to shake hands in reconciliation, but from the side Reiko was glaring with dissatisfaction. While stuffing her cheeks with the brought for breakfast bread, she was staring fixedly at Ariante with narrow eyes.

"What's up Reiko? Are you still mulling over that dream?"

After loudly munching and swallowing with a gulp,

"I feel like that knight committed a severe blasphemy towards the Evil Dragon Lord. I have the memory of her pointing a sword at you."

"If it was like that we wouldn't be shaking hands this way. You probably were just tired and saw a bad dream."

"Since Evil Dragon Lord says so, I will treat it as truth, but for some reason I'm not pleased with it."

"Don't fret over this so much Reiko. Here, you can also have my bread, cheer up."

I didn't really like bread either way. When I pushed the lying on the ground tray to Reiko, she started eating it with vigour as if she was starving. It looked like she wouldn't refrain herself.

"Munch, also Evil Dragon Lord, why did you assume this form? Of course, even if the Evil Dragon Lord became small there's no difference to your greatness but... there isn't but..."

"There are still bits of food on your face. Wipe it and drink some water first."

After wiping her face with her arms, she drained a whole jug of water in one go.

"Then, for what kind of reason?"

I was troubled, since I couldn't tell her truthfully that it was easier to hide and run away.

"First of, as I told you yesterday my power has declined. If we fight with the Demon King like that our odds are slim. That's why I intended to join hands with humans, but it seems my ill reputation as an evil dragon won't permit the alliance. That being the case, I thought of reverting to my youthful body and once again developing my strength from scratch."

"In that case, before attacking the Demon King you first intend to hunt suitable enemies, is that right?"

"Yeah, it helps that you understood it quickly. That's right, first we start with appropriate enemies. For example, the living close——"

"Which Demon King's executive are we crushing first? Or do we start with erasing a demon's dungeon from the map?"

Since our definitions of "suitable" seemed to be fundamentally different, I couldn't hide my unrest. It looked like everything besides the Demon King fell into an appropriate category.

"You know that if we suddenly make such a flashy move it'll leak out to the Demon King? The basics lay in steadiness. I think that starting like the ordinary adventurers from the low grade dungeons and slowly regaining my fighting sense is the best policy. Besides, this way you'll also be able to learn many different things, like pacing yourself

in a fight.”

“Oh... I see. In other words the reason that Evil Dragon Lord is choosing this safe approach, is because of my lack of ability, is that right——“

Reiko clenched her teeth with a sorrowful face. It seemed she had various misunderstandings, but for the time being it looked like she agreed. Moreover, Ariante lent a helping hand.

“In human practices there’s also something like heavy-load training. It’s to purposely increase the difficulty of combat by wielding a sword heavier than normal, or a staff with awful magic power consumption. In addition to the wonderful rejuvenation medicine effect, Evil Dragon Reivendia himself sealed his own vast magic power. Originally, his ability was such that even if he’d defeat the Demon King’s executive he wouldn’t accumulate any experience, but in the state where he drastically lowered his strength, even if it’s going to be a weak monster it’ll still become experience in its own way. It can be said it’s a clever idea.”

However, it was a barefaced lie. She was probably aware it was a poor excuse. Nevertheless, Reiko answered with “I see, as one would expect from the Evil Dragon Lord’s keen insight”, without showing a sign of distrust.

“That’s right. To sum it up I’m now intentionally restricting my power for the sake of practice. Even if I’ll be having a hard time with weak monsters, it’s simply all part of the training, you understand? Don’t get disillusioned, okay?”

“Something like getting disillusioned with the Evil Dragon Lord, even if the heavens and earth flip upside down, it would never happen.”

Reiko’s mood dropped a bit and she became sulky. I wondered what would happen if she learned I wasn’t an evil dragon in the first place, though no matter what I would never say it.

“It seems you’ve decided. Well then, come to my dojo. It was hastily rebuilt in one night, but we still have some quite excellent tools gathered.”



“...Been a while since I was last tired.”

After they gathered their equipment, Ariante saw them off from the wall and wiped off her sweat. That was a startling bunch. It wasn't a simple matter of strength. The problem in the uncertain future was the involved grave bomb without a visible fuse. If it was possible, I'd have wanted to raise her for the sake of humanity. However, to be able to control that much power with ordinary means, a few decades of training was necessary. In that time, it was much more likely that the girl would become aware of Reivendia's true form, resulting in her breakdown.

If that was the case.

“A misunderstanding is fine. At least, please become strong enough to not hold her back, being of assistance to humanity.”

I prayed, which was unlike me. While praying, I started thinking in self-mockery, that it'd have been safer to cut them down last night. If I really was thinking about the well-being of humanity, for the sake of eliminating unnecessary risks I should have killed them both. If I got Reivendia's head, I could also indulge myself in the bounty prize.

It appeared that the gambling habit from my young days, which I thought I've cut off, has relapsed here. To look for hope in people I didn't even know.

“Please do your best, Evil Dragon Lord.”

While she was smiling, the dojo's door carried a loud clanging sound. When she fixed her expression sealing her lips, she took off the latch, opening the door. Standing in front was a young lad with short blonde hair.

“What's your business, lad? I haven't seen your face here before.”

“You, you're the owner of the most remarkable dojo in this city, right? Please teach me.”

“I don't know what reasons you've, but I'm not that free to teach a kid like you. Just looking at you, whether it's your magical or physical capabilities, they're just of an average child. You don't have any battle experience either.”

“But, I’ve to stop him. I’ve heard from the gatekeeper, he was here last night, right? The one from our village, that shitty and annoying evil dragon bastard — taking Reiko away.”

“You, could you really be a person from Reivendia’s village?”

Behaving like he was acquainted with Reiko, and an extraordinary anger towards the evil dragon. It couldn’t be.

“Give me your hand.”

“Ha? Never mind that, quickly train—”

“That’s enough, your hand.”

Ariante grasped the lad’s hand. She didn’t tell it to Reivendia and Reiko till the end, but essentially, Ariante wasn’t a swordsman; she was a sorceress who polished her art. This specific magic allowed her to discern truth from shaking someone’s hand.

“That girl’s — the dagger Reiko carried was yours?”

“You met Reiko?! Is she fine?”

“As of now, at least.”

While responding curtly, Ariante felt her frown deepening. This boy was probably the only person whom that girl formerly had a normal interaction with. I had no idea what amount of emotional attachment she still had for him now, but by careless contact, it was possible that he’d awaken her from her wrong assumptions.

“Hey! Please, I have to defeat him. If I’ve no talent, I’ll work two or even three times as hard. If I need money I’ll do all the chores in the dojo. I beg you, teach me!”

“...I’m in a bind.”

If I sent him away, he’d probably in one way or another try to catch up with them. And if he hurried, in a few hours he would have. After all, the current Reivendia was far slower than a walking horse, and they’ve also just left the town.

Ariante cleared her throat.

“It’ll be a long and harsh training. Lad, what’s your name?”

“...Ah! It’s Raiotto. I’ll be in your care, teacher.”

For the time being, I’ll hold this brat down for about half a year.

Chapter 8

To the endlessly stretching grasslands

“Grass is the best.”

So peaceful. I was carrying ample cloth bags along with Reiko on my back, moving forward through the endlessly stretching grasslands. I had absolutely no intention of competing with the overtaking me horse. A horse was an animal specialized as humans' means of fast transportation, so there was no way a herbivorous dragon like me could match it. So I've been stopping here and there every few hours to munch on some grass.

“Evil Dragon Lord, are you sure? As long as you are hungry, I would be more than happy to offer you my soul as a meal.”

“No need. A soul is like a sweet dessert, you can't eat only that. Usually, an ordinary meal is enough.”

“Then instead of grass I will hunt something nutritious.”

“I feel like eating grass now. Not wasting your strength pointlessly is also your task.”

Muu, Reiko indicated her sulkiness. According to her, an appropriate meal for me must be swallowing a whole ox in one bite. In comparison to that image, chewing on grass had to be too plain.

“I understand. In that case, at least let me prepare a drink.”

“Ah, I'll leave it to you.”

Reiko hopped down from my back, pulled out a metal plate from the bag and put it on the ground. At first I thought she was going to pour water from a flask Ariante gave us.

But Reiko put her arm over the plate while drawing over it the jewelled dagger's blade.

“Let me now quench Evil Dragon Lord's thirst with my blood.”

“Why are you so eager to make it a dark meal like that? Just water, please.”

Reiko, who shut her eyes with frustration, poured water from the flask. But while hanging her head down before the plate, she was muttering “My blood isn’t to Evil Dragon Lord’s taste...” with vexation.

Putting things bluntly, it was scary. I didn’t think I’d be able to put up with such anxiety each and every meal.

“Listen well, Reiko. You’re looking down too much on the act of eating grass.”

“...What do you mean, Evil Dragon Lord?”

“Plants are living by absorbing energy straight from the earth. Eating them is similar to absorbing that energy directly.”

Reiko was nodding eagerly indicating she was listening closely.

“Therefore, one can say grass is a supreme delicacy. Blessed by the earth, grass is also the reason I’ve lived for so long.”

“Is — that so. I apologize. Please forgive the ignorance of me, the prisoner of human’s eating habits.”

“Okay. Well, since you understood, from now on my meals are ordinary water and grass, alright?”

“Yes, of course. To think grass was that amazing...”

While still answering, Reiko started plucking grass at her feet and stuffing it into her mouth.

“Hey, what are you doing now?”

“I intend to imitate Evil Dragon Lord and from now on live eating grass.”

“Our feeding habits are fundamentally different so it’s impossible. More importantly it’s dirty, hurry up and spit it out. You’ll break your stomach.”

“No, I can do it. After all I’m the Evil Dragon Lord’s kin.”

Face of the obstinately objecting Reiko was distorted by the astringent taste of grass.

“These are clothes Ariante was kind enough to give you, so don’t go staining them with weeds. It hasn’t been long since you’ve become my kin, so if you don’t have human meals you’ll just wreck your body.”

There was no response, which was unlike her. Her body hardened like a statue, not moving an inch while gazing somewhere far away.

In the next instant, with a “blergh” she spurted green juice from her mouth, magnificently soiling her brand new clothes.

“Although the appearance might be a little showy, it’s a combat attire. Let us think of dirt as medals.”

“I’ve thought it for a while, but you’re quite optimistic, aren’t you?”

Taking a look once more, her clothes were considerably different from the thin silk sacrificial gown she wore yesterday.

Draping over her wide, light red knee-long pants was a translucent skirt. The former was made of Boulder Digging Goat’s skin excelling at physical resistance, while the latter was woven from Samsara Silkworm’s thread, which was resistant to magic.

As for the upper body she wore a short cotton robe. Although the fabric was ordinary, the used valuable blue dye was collected from the ancient forest’s God Tree, which was said to grant divine protection to every being clad in it.

According to Ariante, just those three pieces of clothing were worth quite a decent mansion. And now, it was thoroughly dirtied with weeds.

“Maybe you should find some water to clean it?”

“Yes, I intend to do that. However, first let us get through all the dirty business.”

Reiko sat in a seiza on my back and started sniffing like a dog.

“Ah... As expected, we’re starting today?”

“No matter how much magic power Evil Dragon Lord seals, you are still the Evil Dragon Lord. The monsters in these tranquil plains are not your opponents.”

I dropped my shoulders and looked down upon my body. On my limbs was something akin to samurai’s armour, while a type of extending blades was attached to my claws. There were also various other parts, but if it became too heavy I wouldn’t be able to move, so in the end we went with just a bare minimum.

Honestly speaking, I also wanted super equipment like Reiko’s. However, if the equipment was too great it might have led to suspicion, so the equipment’s quality was suppressed to commercial level.

“Well then Evil Dragon Lord, let us begin hunting. First, I will search out the enemy. I have already sniffed it out, so it won’t take long.”

“Just please get me a weak one.”

“Understood.”

Reiko, who took off from my back, quickly finished searching just as she promised. But, the figure with which she was returning was somewhat unexpected.

Three heads with six tusks. A giant elephant monster, which wasn’t weak looking at all, despite being still alive, was carried by Reiko with one hand.

“Come now, Evil Dragon Lord. It’s today’s training dummy. Please torment it to your heart’s content. I’m sure it will only bring this beast satisfaction.”

Even though it was caught alive, its eyes already looked dead.

Chapter 9

A pitiful elephant — and other matters

It was pretty obvious, but there was absolutely no way I'd win against that giant elephant monster. The reason for me acting as if I were motionless wasn't a show of complacency, but simply my legs have frozen from fear.

However, the same thing could be said about the opponent.

"I beg ya, let me off. I promise I won't ever again go after humans. I'll return to my native forest."

The elephant monster completely forfeited his fighting spirit and curled up before me. Even though he was trying to look small, his body was still far bigger than my youthful form. But he was doing his best to look like a small puppy.

"Erm, you—"

"Eek. Please Big Boss, at least let me off from the usual eternal hell course. Not letting me die while burning me in hellfire of darkness, furthermore tearing me apart piece by piece, just to finish off with drawing my soul out and making me serve as a slave for eternity, this I'd definitely hate. Kin lady, please help me out here."

Reiko answered with cold eyes.

"Stop unsightly pleading for your life before the Evil Dragon Lord. Your fate is already in the Evil Dragon Lord's hands. Consider the very right to hold life dear as no longer yours."

"Wait a minute, Reiko. Just what are you saying?"

"As a show of small benevolence, I've taught this beast his path to the underworld."

There are limits to confusing someone's path. To begin with, I've no intention of sending him to the underworld. Why do I've to argue back and forth about vainly taking a life? In the first place I told you to bring a weak one, so what's up with that elephant, you no

good Reiko.

Measuring his strength with my power of insight, he was at the level that needed a dozen first-class adventurers to take him down. His intelligence was also high enough to speak, while in addition no one knew what his racial ability could be.

“You.”

“Please, please at least my life!”

“For now, as you just mentioned, return to your forest. However, no more doing bad deeds.”

“I-is that okay?”

I nodded in a dignified manner. After all, even if I only trained with him, I’d just wind up dead.

After I calmly followed with my gaze the causing earth tremors quickly running away elephant, Reiko came over and knelt down.

“I’m terribly sorry, Evil Dragon Lord. After all, one of such level was way too weak, wasn’t it?”

“That’s right.”

I already couldn’t say anything else. Anyway, I decided it was still too soon to accumulate actual combat practice.

“Reiko, you can ride on my back. It seems there are no monsters nearby that could be my sparring partners. Let’s take our time searching slowly for an appropriate training place.”

Doing as she was told, Reiko immediately jumped on my back and sat down. Just a young girl wasn’t heavy, but still, there was some weight. There was a few days’ worth of luggage, along with claw weapons and armour.

If I ran with it attached to me — I should be able to develop some physical strength.

I took a deep breath, and started running across the vast land with my four legs. I was

desperately trying to breathe out calmly from my covered in scales nose, so that Reiko would in no way be able to realize that I was running with all my power.



“Aaaaaaaaaa— — —!!!”

“Too slow! Run faster! You think that your legs will fall off?! Don’t worry, even if they will its fine, as long it’s less than five seconds! I’ll immediately attach them again, so be at ease and run till they fall off!”

In the still scarred by fire town of adventurers Peryudōna, one rickshaw and a cart was running around wildly. Pulling it was just one person with one passenger, along with a large mass of debris.

“You must be lucky! Since no matter how much you pick up, there will still be some left!”

“Uoooooooooooo— — —!”

“Answer with words, you fool!”

“Ughh!”

After being hit with a scabbard, a gold haired boy pulling the rickshaw raised a scream.

It wasn’t child abuse.

It was Raiotto and Ariante, working to restore town while training at the same time.

“Shit! What the hell, teacher! Even though you said you’d teach me, to make me do something like pulling a cart!”

“Nonsense! If you want to become a warrior, first you need to build physical strength! Especially you, since you don’t have even a trace of magic power, you’ve no choice but to fight with that body of yours! First off, build up your endurance by running till you die! No, first try dying once!”

“So you’re saying, but it was this way all day long since morning! I’ll really die! Let me rest a bit or I’ll die!”

Town residents were laughing while mercilessly stuffing debris onto the cart. Not even one of them was showing any signs of mercy. And then, sitting at the backseat Ariante asked adding insult to the injury.

“Hey brat, do you know why restorative medicines or white magic exist?”

Raiotto answered while out of breath.

“— To heal injuries and illnesses, right?”

“Wrong.”

At that time Raiotto felt a shiver down his spine.

“Morning, afternoon, evening. Even if you keep tempering your body diligently every day and every night, without any sleep or rest, it’s a convenient tool to barely keep you from dying. Be glad, there are still a great number of skilled people in this town.”

Chapter 10

Let's reminiscence at night

As a matter of course, with my speed we didn't reach any town and it became a camping night in the middle of the grasslands. Dry wood was burning, creating sparks with crackling sounds.

"Well then, let's have dinner. Reiko, just pick anything you want from our luggage."

For me, it was a treasure trove of food as far as the eye could see. In comparison to the mountain vegetation, there were a lot of young ones lacking substance, but instead they were fresh and juicy. Reiko on the other hand, choose and was eating biscuits and dried meat. Both had water extracted from them and should be considerably hard, but she didn't look to mind it at all. It seemed even her jaw strength was better than mine.

After she quickly finished her meal, she turned her gaze towards the night sky.

"Please look up Evil Dragon Lord."

"Hm? What's up?"

"The star of evil omen is emerging. Evil, namely the governing darkness Evil Dragon Lord's will itself. It's proof that, even heaven is trying to avoid obstructing the Evil Dragon Lord's road to supremacy."

I listened nodding my head.

"This time I won't even touch upon what you said, but do you like stargazing? Speaking of which, when we were leaving the village you also mentioned something about the full moon."

Stargazing was a young maiden like hobby so it was fine, but I'd prefer if she stopped mixing it with those unreasonable interpretations.

"No, it's not really that I like it. I was simply often living in places where the stars could be seen, so when the night comes I can't help but look at them. I know that keeping

my human habits is something that mustn't be done as your kin, however——”

“Nah, I don't mind. At any rate, there isn't anything else to do at these plains. You can look as much as you want.”

Here Reiko's face lit up, seemingly noticing something.

“—— I understand. That is right; full moon is the Evil Dragon Lord's source of first-rate magic power, an offering from the night. Then I, as your kin, will feast upon moonlike shards, the star's light.”

I nodded coolly. Somehow I've felt that this time around I've seen a part of her own intentions, without the usual sense of danger. On the contrary, it was a bit pleasant.

“Since we're probably going to be together for quite a while, I've got an idea. How about telling each other about ourselves while stargazing? There was a lot going on and now that I think about it, we couldn't even introduce ourselves properly, right?”

“What are you speaking of, Evil Dragon Lord. The likes of my short existence, you must have comprehended everything when you've eaten my soul.”

Oh, is that right. Apparently, when you eat a person's soul you can grasp their past. Let's watch out from now on. Or rather, I'd like to write down on paper the setting that's inside her brain. Then I could match it accordingly.

“Ah... It's not like that. It's a matter of feelings. Just simply knowing it, or hearing it directly from the person through their words. The weight is different.”

“Weight...? I don't quite understand.”

“It means that, because I'll hear it from you directly it'll actually deepen my understanding.”

I thought it was a painful excuse, but Reiko stared respectfully for a brief period, after which she nodded while slanting her head.

“Very well, I'm feeling extremely ashamed to trouble you with a story of someone like myself, but I'll accept your kindness and narrate this lowly person's life.”

“Ah, wait a minute.”

I stopped her before she started speaking.

“You were a slave before, weren’t you?”

“Yes. And as my good fortune, I was bought as a sacrifice.”

‘Good fortune, eh?’ I thought in my head without saying it out loud.

“If talking about those times is painful for you and you don’t want to, you don’t have to push it, okay? You can just speak about the time after you were bought as a sacrifice.”

After coming to the village, she shouldn’t have been treated that badly. Since they were going to sacrifice her to the evil dragon, they couldn’t have let her become ill and neither could they’ve let her lose too much weight. Also, Raiotto was there. It seemed he was watching over her in one way or another, and he was sure to object if anyone were to mistreat her.

“I am thankful for your consideration, but it’s not necessary. I don’t particularly have any memories of being mistreated as a slave.”

“Really?”

Normally, right about now I should feel relieved, but in Reiko’s case I wasn’t sure. Even if she was suffering, she seemed like she might accept it as something ordinary.

“Yes. Although I’ve never met them, from what I heard, it seems my parents were quite powerful, for humans that is. Maybe because of that bloodline, I was treated as high-class goods, so I didn’t undergo any experiences which would lower my value.”

‘That’s why I could see the stars’, she mentioned.

“In the prison chamber, only I had a window. I can clearly remember the moonlight, and how beautiful it was. Thinking about it now, that charming and refined radiance was, just like a mirror, reflecting Evil Dragon Lord’s intent. Ah... I’m thankful. Since that time, Evil Dragon Lord was already watching over me.”

That was quite a huge misunderstanding. The me of that time was probably spending his days only eating grass and sleeping.

“So, have your parents passed away?”

“I don’t know. Even if they were strong, strength doesn’t necessarily have to go with humanity, so selling their own child as means of raising money is also a possibility.”

Either way, she just might be better off without such parents. Assuming they were powerful, if they wanted they could’ve kept her safe.

“After I was bought I was able to live a better life. When I think about it now, religious service is a foolish custom, but being taught reading and writing by reading holy scriptures as education was interesting. If I had to complain about something, it’d be that annoying brat, Rai——”

“Erm yea, I think I know about who you want to speak about, so don’t complain too much please. Somehow, I can’t think of him as a stranger.”

But as a fellow victim of Reiko. I wonder what he’s doing right now. Villagers may still be severely angry at him, because of that matter with the stone. I think I should’ve defended him a little more.

“Be that as it may, even though it was only 10 years, I believe I’ve been allowed to walk a life of good fortune. Since at the end, I was blessed with the honour of becoming the Evil Dragon Lord’s kin.”

“Stop with these remarks like ‘only 10 years’ or ‘at the end’, it’s as if you were looking back on your life while dying. You’re still living, aren’t you? Did you somehow forget?”

“Yes, I’m living on as a dragon’s kin, not a human.”

“I think it’s the same though...”

In essence it was exactly the same. Since being kin or what not was just her wrong assumption.

“Well, so it’s my turn now, isn’t it? Right, when should I start...”

I noticed when I said it. Carefully thinking it over, since I had to behave like an evil dragon, it wasn’t like I could speak frankly about my life. If I was to summarise it with “I was pretty much only eating grass and sleeping for 5000 years” and speak about my pitiful life in one sentence, I feared that Reiko might lose the point for her magic power

reliance and go out of control, turning into a new evil dragon. Incidentally, if that were to happen, naturally I'd die.

“Eee—— Thinking about it now, if I was to narrate my lifetime, there wouldn't be enough time even if this night could last for eternity.”

Ultimately I went with the smokescreen strategy. Since I also wasn't good at lying, there was nothing else than that.

However Reiko, who I thought would be disappointed in me stalling, surprisingly showed a gentle smile. She softly drew her hand to her chest and said.

“That's okay, Evil Dragon Lord. I already receive your words directly to this heart of mine. All of those great feats spanning over that long lifetime carved scrupulously. As proof of that I can recall them clearly, as if I've seen them myself. That time of huge upheaval of heaven and earth, the Evil Dragon Lord's figure standing atop countless corpses, dyed crimson red with spurting blood, roaring——”

I was just listening, with a deadpan face, to the crackling sounds of bonfire.

I could safely declare. I had no such past.

Chapter 11

Interlude: Raiotto's training

~today I'm also (half-forced) lively~

“Until you clean the strewn throughout the town debris, you're to pull this cart with all your strength. I won't let you rest till there isn't a single piece of debris, even on the walls.”

After this order from Master Ariante, Raiotto's respite time completely disappeared. Moreover, the one responsible, after passing down that absurd command has swiftly went to the dojo while saying “I also have to train other adventurers”. Quite the liberal treatment.

And now, throwing the words of encouragement from the back of the rickshaw was—
—

“Raio~tto, it's almost time for your medicine ♡ Actually, it's an exceptional product! If one drinks just a liiittle bit of this, they don't have to eat or sleep for 3 days!”

It was an alchemist. She was dressed in a purple cloak, with dubious bracelets and necklaces jingling loudly. Becoming of Ariante's acquaintances, there were many such fellows switching and keeping watch over him.

Incidentally, yesterday it was a white sorceress launching at whim mysterious rays of light from her seat. Every time a ray of light hit him, fatigue would vanish unbelievably and he'd be full of vigour, but when that effect disappeared, the tiredness hit him twice as hard. Furthermore, every time when he was suffering from the twofold weariness, she wouldn't cast another one. When he looked back, he could've seen her smirking, so it must have been her idea of harassment.

As soon as he stopped the cart to pick up the debris, the alchemist nimbly caught Raiotto in a nelson hold and brought near his mouth a flask with green liquid. Although the surrounding temperature should've been normal, a viscous liquid just like lava was seething inside.

“It’s okay! I’m not yet tired at all! I don’t need this medicine!”

“You can’t push yourself too hard~. Here~, there’s no need to be afraid of medicine~.”

A sinister green something was stuffed into his mouth all at once.

“U... Ugu! Guaa!”

The taste couldn’t be put into words. It was neither bitter, sweet, sour nor spicy. If one had to somehow express it, it’d be a “ruthless and cruel taste”. Moreover, due to its stickiness one wasn’t even able to vomit. In the time Raiotto freed himself and was crawling on all fours with a blue face, the alchemist was recording something down on a parchment. It seemed he was being used as a good human experiments subject.

In addition, without a moment of rest, a hand was placed on his shoulder.

“You came, boy. Good timing. I was just about to begin demolition of the partially destroyed homes. There will be quite a lot of debris, carry it all outside the town’s walls.”

It was a male martial artist with both of his arms wrapped in bandages. On his upper body there was nothing except those bandages. Raiotto judged him as an exhibitionist who only wanted to flash his muscles.

“Look, at least let me do some demolition work too... I’ve had enough of running...”

“No way. It’d be dangerous for a child like you. Come on, it’s close to this street.”

When he pulled his cart for a short distance, a scorched, on the verge of ruins house appeared. As soon as the martial artist smirked, he threw himself earnestly at the ruins while kicking and punching repeatedly. The ruins turned into debris right before one’s eyes. While running quite a dazzling sweat, he said.

“Aaah! Feeling of pure destruction transmitted to these fists and legs! Precisely this is the essence of martial arts!”

It was an insult to martial arts. Although Raiotto hasn’t gotten any accomplishments in arts, he was sure of that.

“Well now, Raiotto~. Stop spacing out and start picking up the debris. Or maybe you

got tired? Do you want your elder sister to give you another medicine~?”

“Uwah! I’m great, full of spirit! I’ll pick it up, I will!”

Actually, his body moved awfully quickly. Even though he was still picking up debris, it felt like his body moved twice as fast. The frightening thing was, the alchemist was still recording down his condition in great detail. Without a doubt it had to be the effect of that medicine. Just the thought of what side effects would come from this moment forward could make one shudder.

The martial artist (pervert), who destroyed the house in the blink of an eye, came speaking surrounded with the stench of sweat.

“You’re lucky, boy, since you get to take the unlimited training course prepared by Miss Ariante. The ones who complete this course, no matter how much talent they lack, will always become first-rate warriors. I’m already looking forward to see your future self. When you get top notch skills, please have a bout with me.”

“...Setting aside sparring, are you for real? I’ll really become strong with this careless training?”

“In theory, if one keeps putting burden on his body and then recovering, one’s body will continue strengthening. Of course, if one does such harsh training, there’s a risk of dying along the way, but that’s exactly what she’s here for.”

At once the alchemist gave thumbs up. ‘Won’t I die because of their medicine or magic?’. He decided to leave his doubts for later.

“Well, sometimes it’s too harsh for the body and the heart stops, but——”

In response to the following words, which sounded like a death sentence, any kind of facial expression disappeared from Raiotto’s face.

Chapter 12

Reiko Kidnapped

“Please wake up, Evil Dragon Lord.”

Reiko unexpectedly whispered into my ear when I was sleeping soundly like a log next to the weakly glowing campfire. While I was busy rubbing my cheeks on the grass in my drowsiness, I asked:

“What’s up Reiko? It’s still dark, should be a while till morning.”

“I’m sorry. It is probably a trivial matter, yet I still wanted to confirm the Evil Dragon Lord’s wishes, just in case.”

“It’s the middle of the night, something worrying you?”

“No, it’s not really a worry of mine——”

Reiko turned her head and looked around us. When I followed her movement and cast my gaze at our surroundings, I noticed wavering in the darkness orbs of flame encircling us. Startled, after waking my drowsy self by blinking a couple of times, I immediately understood the true identity of the flame orbs. Slowly but steadily, drawing near us was a group of carrying torches humans on horses.

“It appears to be a gang of bandits. What should we do with them, Evil Dragon Lord? Disposing of them is a simple matter, however if you are set on forming an alliance with humans for the sake of Demon King’s subjugation, if we bring about an incident here by causing an excessive bloodbath, it might just breed future problems.”

“R-right, even you’ve that much of a common sense.”

“Naturally, that is why if I may be so bold, I would like to propose a plan of not leaving behind any corpses by completely erasing their very existence.”

“Please don’t.”

I strongly dissuaded Reiko. Otherwise she'd just do something that couldn't be undone.

"Hey there, you woke up. Lass, you're surprisingly sharp. To be adventuring at this age, one can't lower his guard."

Floating a vulgar smile while urging the horse forward and contracting the encirclement, was a bearded middle-aged man with a hood pulled over his head. Most likely their customary nomadic clothes worked as a camouflage, helping them avoid alerting people. Since if they pretended to be a travelling nomadic tribe, they could move from country to country without raising any suspicions and it also allowed them to search out places where the novice adventurers were out camping. Or perhaps they really leaned towards nomadic lifestyle as their core business, and switched only to being robbers when they found easy targets, like us.

"—— Bandits, right? I'll give you a fair warning; you guys should retreat obediently. I presume you don't want to lose your lives in vain."

I didn't say it as a bluff, I really meant it. If by any chance there'd be someone who would aim his bow at me, Reiko would probably instantly take action and finish him off. And in the meantime, I'd be left dying with an arrow stuck in me.

At least I'd like to cancel the medicine's effect. If I'd be able to turn back to the form of one known as the Evil Dragon Reivendia, I could make them back down with my intimidating aura alone. However, my size now was that of my youth. After dinner, I've drunk a proper dosage of one drop, so the efficacy should still last some time.

"Oh! That's rare. Here I thought how the girl has some incredible first-class equipment, but that dragon can speak human language. Both of them should yield a good price."

"That's right, aren't you guys lucky? We also don't want you to "lose your lives in vain". Since at any rate, your value would lower as corpses."

"What happened, young lass? You're too afraid to move? Don't you worry, though we may look like this, we're a bunch of gentlemen."

As a matter of course, it wasn't that she couldn't move. It was simply that she didn't feel any necessity to move. In reality, Reiko's expression didn't waver one bit. She was quite naturally emitting an aura of complacency, as someone who was able to kill everyone here if she just wanted to. I was now really worried about the lives of these

bandits.

“Boss, once we seize them, let’s soon transport them, along with the ones at our hideout to the market. Although the others will at best go cheap, sold as vulgar low-grade slaves——”

“Wait.”

It was a word carrying an arrogant undertone with it, that was why it cut off the small fry and shut his mouth. However, when the bandits exchanged glances and followed the voice, they found the one who said “wait” was the young girl they considered as their prey – Reiko.

“Haa? Lass, if you’re gonna beg for your life, you should do it with more respect.”

“You humans holding slaves in contempt. From the ones who become slaves sought is a sense of service without any compensation along with excellence in all arts. It’s not a work anyone can do. Take it back.”

She narrated that quite abruptly. It was the same when she was a sacrifice, but it seemed her fixation on her own duty was really excessive. The attitude of looking down on the slaves’ duties has probably pulled on her heartstrings as a former slave herself.

“Take back? Haha, I should take it back, right? What do we do, boss? She says some cute things, that girl.”

“Yeah, you’re right. You should take it back. After all, we’re merely selling off the slaves; we’ve no clue about these things. It seems like this lady is quite educated on the matter, let’s have her pass her knowledge to our slaves.”

Those were clearly remarks full of sarcasm, but Reiko thought it over while nodding her head, after which she turned to me.

“What should we do, Evil Dragon Lord? Despite these being the words of our enemies, I believe they are worth considering.”

“What are you saying?”

“It appears there are a large number of people at their hideout who are aspiring to

become slaves. Formerly being one myself, I could ascertain their aptitudes and point the ones unsuitable to some other occupation.”

“If you’ll be the standard criteria of comparison, I don’t think there would be anyone fit to be a slave.”

But it certainly would be nice to help the captured humans. I didn’t consider my sense of justice to be particularly strong; however, if despite knowing of the prisoners’ existence I’d turn a blind eye to it, it’d leave a bad aftertaste.

Well, in reality it wasn’t like I could do anything.

The one who had the strength to somehow resolve this situation was Reiko, so since she was saying she wanted to help them (let’s forget about the nuance), the least I could do was to back up her wrong assumptions.

“Very well. We can do it as you want. But you’ve to promise me one thing.”

“What could it be?”

After my words, when Reiko turned her head towards me, the bandit’s boss apparently got impatient and cut in.

“Hey! How long do you intend to keep whispering? You guys, quickly tie them up! Watch out, they might resist a bit.”

The men carrying curved blades nimbly jumped off from their horses and came at us all at once. For a moment, I got surprised by the vigour of their all-out offensive and opened my eyes wide, but somehow barely managed to pass a few words to Reiko.

“Killing and causing serious injuries is off-limits.”

“Understood.”

The following morning.

Among the brightly illuminated by the sun grasslands. Ahead could be seen a figure of Reiko, who kidnapped herself, brazenly advancing forward to the bandit’s hideout

while a bunch of bandits with their heads hanging low were accompanying us.

Chapter 13

Individuality is wonderful (when one knows their bounds)

The bandit's hideout was an underground cave with a wide entrance in the grasslands. Despite being a cave, it had a decent living room along with properly set up candles illuminating it. It looked too good for being hurriedly made by bandits, so most likely this must have been some historical ruins which they appropriated for their own use.

In the deepest parts of the cave. There was a sealed off with iron bars and a guard holding a machete room, where their goods were held — that is, the cell inside which they held the caught humans.

“L-lady Reiko, just ahead is the cell. Please do as you like.” The terrified bandit's boss was leading the way.

“Okay, from here forward it'll only be me and the Evil Dragon Lord. You guys obediently wait here.”

“Yes, of course. That's why, please. Please just hand us over to the nearest guard. I beg you, anything but purging us with blood, please——”

“If even one of you runs away, I won't let you off.”

“N-naturally! Hey, you all got it, didn't you?! Don't even try to run! If you do, the Evil Dragon Lord will curse your very soul and leave you wishing for death! In comparison to that, living in jail is much better!”

After the bandits simultaneously nodded in agreement, they returned to the spacious room and each and every one of them sat down seiza-style, waiting. Not to speak of running, nobody even flinched a little.

“Those guys, they're not even worth killing. Is that right, Evil Dragon Lord?”

“That's right.”

In the comfort of the underground cave I half-heartedly gave a response, while recalling the peacefulness of the mountain cavern I once lived in.

Advancing with Reiko along the passage we were led to, we came right before the cell.

Looking inside, the prisoners differed from young-looking novice adventurers, to merchants with their whole families. Everyone had a haggard appearance and was looking over here with fear in their eyes.

I didn't really know how to interpret the expression Reiko showed at that time.

It felt like a gourmet that satiated his hunger, was looking at an inferior food cart while laughing and ridiculing "Don't tell me you're calling THIS food". As if saying "One can't call those things genuine slaves". For the time being, from that expression one could tell that there was no one among them possessing the necessary slave qualities Reiko was looking for.

Well, duh. If even one more person like that existed in this world, I'd have cried.

"I had some expectations, yet after all they're like this? It seems a person possessing these top-notch qualities won't be found that easily. All of them can be at best third-rate slaves. No, they're not even qualified for that."

Everyone from inside the cell was looking anxiously at the lamenting Reiko. They've probably misunderstood that a slave trader came to evaluate the goods. After all, finding a fault to lower the price of the goods was the basics of haggling. In Reiko's case, she wasn't looking for a fault, but was genuinely disappointed.

Reiko effortlessly, with a push, spread the iron bars apart. 'Wouldn't it have been better to get a key just now?' I thought silently.

"I pronounce you disqualified. You're not worthy to be slaves, to say nothing of being Evil Dragon Lord's kin. You can go somewhere else."

A commotion went through the cell. They probably had no idea what she was saying. Even I usually couldn't understand more than half of what she was saying.

"Umm... Are you a merchant?" A woman holding a baby in her arms timidly asked Reiko.

“No. I’m the Evil Dragon Lord’s kin. Now go.”

Was that supposed to suffice as an explanation?

Without any other choice, I walked in front of Reiko and clarified.

“Erm, well. Reiko here is a bit of an oddball, but she’s a skilled adventurer. She has subjugated the bandits here and came to rescue you.”

“Is that true?!”

The prisoners stood up all at once and tried to draw near me, but Reiko pulled out her dagger to obstruct them and emitted a terrifying amount of spirit.

“Don’t you dare make a racket before the Evil Dragon Lord’s countenance, filthy swines. You better clearly understand who he is. He is an existence living since time immemorial, the ancient Evil Dragon. Proprietor of the strength excelling even the Demon King’s — his fame also...”

“Hey, time out. Don’t complicate it. I’m just a good-for-nothing dragon used as a pack horse. So please, just stick to the setting we agreed on from the start. You really should stop spreading my bad name with every chance you get.”

I was standing on my two hind legs and shaking both of Reiko’s shoulders, trying to soothe her.

“...I see, those are some grand considerations indeed. I understand.”

However, instead of stopping, paradoxically she continued.

“But if you speak with them too casually, I believe everyone will get moved by the Evil Dragon Lord’s open-minded heart and will come wishing to become this journey’s follower. Due to their incompetency they’ll become nothing more than a burden. I beg you to consider that aspect.”

“Except you, I don’t think any other oddball like that exists.”

I answered frankly. Looking objectively at the current me, I was nothing more than a slightly unusual animal that was able to speak. There was no way for anyone to get inspired by me.

I was intending on voicing out that extremely obvious reasoning, but for some reason Reiko was staring wide-eyed in puzzlement.

“Only me...”

“Ah, not in a particularly bad sense. I think that being peculiar — erm, rather, having a strong sense of individuality is a good thing. But you just need to look at your surroundings with a bit more composure.”

But it seemed like my excuse wasn't really reaching Reiko's ears. Flashing an eerie grin, “fufufu”, she started stifling her laugh, which sounded like someone's incoherent muttering, while trying to not let it escape her mouth.

She was glad, somehow.

Seizing the opportunity while Reiko was busy, I quietly addressed the hostages.

“What do you want to do? Its fine to run away now, but you've got to be fairly tired, right? Going out and coming across a monster now would be terrible, so I was thinking of calling the nearby town's soldiers and getting them to protect you.”

One of the hostages, a young male adventurer who seemed to have guessed something, answered whispering so that Reiko wouldn't hear.

“Yes, please do. There are also here attacked civilians along with their pack horses. Even if we leave the cave, there's no telling if everyone will make it to the town. By the way...”

The adventurer lowered his voice even more.

“Mister Dragon, you're not running? From what I can tell, it seems like you've been caught by that terrifying girl...”

“...Really, I'd like to do just that.”

Since the adventurer's words hit the bull's-eye, I nearly started crying. However, when I thought how Reiko was going to purge the adventurer if I cried awkwardly, I just barely managed to endure it.

Chapter 14

Unforeseen circumstances

When we got the captured people some food from the storage room, faint smiles returned to their dust covered faces. They most likely weren't fed anything good.

"Well then, I guess we should get going to call some soldiers from the nearby town..."

As I was about to place Reiko on my back and leave the cave, I suddenly realised something.

"By the way Reiko, where's the nearest town?"

"With an average horse it's about a day from here, but with the Evil Dragon Lord's flight it shouldn't take longer than a blink of an eye."

"Sorry. To tell you the truth, last night I must've slept in an awkward position. Today I can't really use my wings."

"Then, despite my incompetence allow me to aid you."

What should I do? I don't want to fly ever again. It's scary as hell, and above all the very thought of Reiko being in control of where we're going is dreadful.

"— You wouldn't be able to know it, Reiko. Ominous winds are blowing on today's sky."

"Evil Dragon Lord...?"

"The me able to subjugate the winds is fine. However, you don't yet comprehend the skies. If you were to flutter now about the sky carelessly, I'd lose a precious kin."

As I was saying it, I remembered the clear weather when we entered the cave. But, as if she forfeited the very notion of "distrust", Reiko deeply nodded her head in agreement.

“I see. So those vast heavens are still a precipitous territory for a novice like me. Such consideration is more than I deserve. If that’s the case, let us move on land.”

That was troublesome in its own right. Since there were many exhausted people here, we couldn’t make them wait by drawing it out. Having said that, it wasn’t like I could send Reiko to town on her own. If I wasn’t there to keep an eye on this child and let her do as she pleased, there was no telling what destruction she was capable of.

In the worst case scenario, that town might just vanish from the map.

After I’ve ordered Reiko to stand by, I started aimlessly wandering inside the cave while puzzling over what I should do. In the hall, what incidentally entered my vision was the bandits’ head, who was still sitting motionlessly on the ground.

“I-is it really okay for someone like me...? For me to take the role of Lady Reiko’s attendant?!”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. There won’t be any problem if you just earnestly explain it to the town’s soldiers and get a carriage here for the hostages. I’ll tell Reiko to not lay a single finger on you, as long as you carry out your task properly.”

Not to mention laying hands, just a reminder was enough to completely keep his mouth shut.

“Then, what does Evil Dragon Lord intend to do?”

“I’ve to keep an eye on the remaining bandits, don’t I?”

“Not at all! We already swore to never again commit any evil deeds! If you are so inclined, it’s fine to bind us all with chains, so please, I beg you, anything but being Lady Reiko’s attendant!”

Reiko seized the neck of the practically crying pleading bandit.

“Stop your wailing, foolish human. You just have to turn yourself in and call the soldiers. Or do you intend to waste the Evil Dragon Lord’s kindness in giving you, a criminal, an opportunity to atone for your sins? If you’ve got any complaints, I’ll just cut all of you down right here and now.”

“Hii! No, no, it’s not like I don’t want to or find the very idea frightening, it’s just that I think we can’t make the Evil Dragon Lord do such a vulgar job like keeping watch—
—”

“Vulgar? So you dare spout blasphemy towards the Evil Dragon Lord, who volunteered to keep watch.”

“No! That’s not it! So please, don’t glow your blue eyes at me!”

I apologized in my mind to the bandits’ head.

I feel really guilty, but I want you to think of it as part of your punishment for the numerous sins you committed. Surely it’s going to be a hellish day till you reach the town, but a man with common sense like you will be able to explain it well.

The only remaining worry was that the subordinates might try to rebel, but it was fine to exclude that possibility. Even when I checked through my power of insight, there was no one with any fighting spirit left. Everyone’s current state could be described as half-insane. Even I was more than enough to guard them.

“Well then, off you go. Be careful, okay?”

“Understood. I will return tomorrow.”

The bandits’ head began a full out horse gallop, while Reiko calmly followed closely with her superhuman like running speed. Even from the distance, the spectacle of a fast horse being urged forward by a running human was quite bizarre.

After seeing them off, I was in high spirits for the first time in a while. That was because, disregarding the bandits, the captured people thought of me as a “timid dragon caught by Reiko”. Thanks to the medicine Ariante gave me, my appearance was completely one of a miniature dragon and I also lost the ominousness, the both factors that were causing me to get mistaken for an evil dragon.

So if it was now, asking about useful information — for example, location of the low-level monsters habitat — ought to be a piece of cake. Also, I could whine unceremoniously to my heart’s content.

Humans were already moving provisions. Given that I thought that if we’d eat together a lively conversation was bound to spring up, I went to the inner parts of the cave in

search for food. In moist depths of the caves like this one, there was often moss or mushrooms growing. Since I've stuffed myself full of green grass lately, it'd be nice to enjoy some delicacies.

Deeper. And even deeper.

The candles placed by bandits have already disappeared, but since I've already caught the scent of moss it wasn't much of a problem.

That was a mistake.

Since the bandits haven't gone that route, it must've been due to the lurking danger.

By the time I've heard a click sound coming from below me, it was already too late. The ground under my feet has vanished.

—— A pitfall.

Without any time to scream, the cave's surface opened its pitch black mouth and swallowed me into the depths of the earth.

Chapter 15

Even further below the underground ruins

I've awoken in the gloomy depths of the earth. When I fell into the pitfall I've prepared myself for death, but surprisingly, once I tried to move my body it didn't hurt at all. Seemed like the reason I've fainted was a psychological shock.

Looking at the hole I came from it wasn't a vertical drop, but rather a long slide. In addition to the steep slope, the slide's stones were polished smooth, so unless I had suction cups chances of me climbing up didn't seem high.

"...I'm screwed."

Stretching ahead in the underground space was an obscure tunnel. On the surface of the walls grew glowing moss, which served as a natural light source. Based on the incessantly trickling water from the ceiling, it might be a passage utilizing the grasslands rain flowing into the water vein.

Is there no clue how to get out — taking one step forward with such thoughts, —snap— I stepped into something.

Bones.

"...Uugh!"

While stifling a stupid cry, I shrank away and violently crashed into a wall. After I started taking deep breaths to soothe my thumping heart, I noticed those were most likely animal bones. They've had the shape of a four-footed animal, like a horse or a sheep.

"Did it get lost in the cave and fell down here...? Poor thing."

It probably wasn't long ago since the bandits made this cave into their headquarters. If it was abandoned previously, such tragedy might have played out.

"It's okay... It's fine. If I wait one day Reiko will return and immediately find me. At that

time I'll just fool her, saying that I've been taking a nap at this cosy-looking place..."

It was quite pathetic, but I was already giving up the option of proceeding deeper into the cave. As far as my nose could tell, there was no beasts' or monsters' stench ahead. Having said that, blindly moving forward without any guarantee would just be inane. And scary, above all.

However, when I've sat around for a while, I noticed that lying right next to the hole I slid down through was a single book. Coming closer to take a look, it turned out it wasn't damaged at all, despite being neglected in a damp cave. It seemed to be made out of a special paper. Written on its cover in the ancient human language with glowing ink, so as it could be read in dark, was the following title.

[Exploration Notes: God of Hunt Sacrificial Grotto]

Since it was made for humans to read, I had to be delicate with flipping its pages. Still, its contents gave me a huge hope.

After all, this book contained notes of adventurers written down for exchanging information, probably before the so called guild was even created.

[—This grotto was built by the race of hunters once living in this area, as a temple for worshipping their God. Capturing their prey alive, decorating its body with treasures and sending it underground as an offering to the God of Hunt was a custom of theirs. However, its treasurers were lost by the hands of past robbers, what remained was nothing but partly weathered animal bones. As a result of the complete closure of ancient ruins, the inhabiting it monsters or dangerous life forms were not confirmed.]

There was even a courteously drawn map, pointing out the route robbers dug out, going as far as the cave's exit. Looking at the last page listing out the vicinity's precautions, there also wasn't much to worry about.

[In case of heavy rain there's risk of submersion.]

[Slippery moss, watch your steps.]

[It's a dungeon with slim risk. Consequently, it's often used as a playground by the adventurers' children. If one finds something moving, refrain from immediate attacks.]

Charming precautions from which one could surmise those times living conditions. After it completely dispelled my tension, I nodded in acknowledgement.

“Since it’s such a peaceful dungeon I should be able to escape, even by myself. Trying it out a bit as a test of courage isn’t a bad idea, especially since I want to avoid making weird excuses to Reiko as much as possible.”

This book supporting my nose not sensing any monsters was effective. Since it was a safe place, to the extent that children used it as a playground, excluding any danger except for the likes of slipping and falling down seemed like a good idea. Today was also a clear weather, so there was no need to worry about submergence.

Because of that, against my better judgement, I skimmed over the last sentence without thinking much about it.

[Thing to keep in mind for the adventurers’ using beasts. There’s no harm if they enter with a person; however, if the beasts walk inside the maze alone, they will, without exception, turn to bones.]

The me of that time, because of the sense of relief has completely forgotten about it. The fact that, speaking of human standards, I also entered the beasts category.

Chapter 16

God of Hunt

If one was to think about it, it wasn't like I could just wait there for Reiko the whole time. After all, the rejuvenating medicine able to shrink my body was with my other luggage, left inside the bandits' hideout. If I were to spend the night here, my body would've suddenly returned to its previous size, and not able to fit inside the cave I'd have caused a cave in.

"I'm really glad it's a safe cave. Err let's see, I've to turn right here."

I've always been reasonably confident in my memory. Still, just in case I'd have to retrace my steps, I was scraping off moss marking the ground. Bringing the book along would be the most certain way, but not moving it from the entrance had to be the tacit etiquette. If one day some other humans were to fall in, just how much relief would that guidebook being there bring them.

"So I turn this way here — and once I pass straight through the last room I'll reach the robbers passage on the surface."

Once I followed the path without any mistakes, I suddenly felt the muddy ground turn solid. It was just before the robbers' passage. The only wide space on the map able to be called a room was built entirely with the same sized stone blocks, from floor to ceiling.

A so called stone chamber. I heard that the ancient royalty's tombs were designed like this.

I felt inexpressible eeriness. Throughout the stone chamber were murals depicting men carrying bows and spears while rousing the beasts of the grasslands.

"Let's leave quickly."

This wasn't a good place for me to be in. Instinctively feeling that, I hastened my steps to cross the room. If I'd clear one part of the destroyed by the robbers' stone blocks, it'd immediately become an ascent towards the surface.

At that time, two incidents happened simultaneously. Firstly, the moss attached to my feet got crushed on the flat stone chamber floor. As a consequence, I slipped and fell down magnificently.

And the other one was that, as I've been falling, an arrow with a tremendous force passed right above my head, grazing it.

"...Ha?"

A black arrow was pierced deep into the stone chamber's wall. If that were to hit me, I'd have no doubt followed the fate of the rolling around the entrance animal's bones.

"A-a trap? That was way too close. Or rather, lucky me. Just one more step and I'd be dead."

However, I had a bad feeling. In that guidebook, there certainly was written "used as a playground by children". Traps with shooting arrows, was it really a place for children to play?

"...These adventurers' children are amazing. They were already training this way from the young age."

After forcibly interpreting it this way, smiling, I deliberately looked in the direction the arrow came from. It had to be a trap.

Because if that wasn't a trap, it'd have to be something much more terrifying. Because if that wasn't a trap, it'd have to mean that someone nearby shot that arrow, right?

"Prey, hunt."

Anxiety turned out to be true. There was something.

It was a strange existence formed into a human's shape from the densely gathered black fog. That thing, while holding a bow and arrow composed similarly from the black fog, faced me promptly and drew his bow.

"Nooooooooooooo———!! It came out———!!"

I started running away in a crazed manner. After I moved, an arrow pierced the floor with a whish sound right where I've just stood. Returning to the maze I began my

flight, repeatedly turning right and left. Once I ran into a dead-end my shoulders moved up and down while trying to stifle my breath.

— *Now that I think about it, I'm a beast, aren't I?*

I messed up. Only at this point did I remember the guidebook's warning. That had to be the enshrined here God of Hunt. He has mistaken me for a sacrificed animal and was trying to hunt me down, like prey.

What should I do? Dying in such a gloomy place... At least let me die somewhere better.

Even when I desperately exerted my ears I couldn't hear that monster's footsteps. However, just by imagining that eerie black fog figure appearing before me, I felt like my spirit was cut with a sharp blade.

Think. Even if I fought with that thing, there was no way I'd win. After all, it was a God. It was an existence which preyed even on the trained for combat adventurers' familiars. That was why I'd just get quickly sacrificed and be done for——

Sacrifice? Reiko's face briefly flashed in my mind.

(A God of Hunt, huh...)

For the argument's sake, I thought what Reiko would've done in these circumstances. Well, most likely when it came this far she'd have as always used tough measures and kicked even that God's ass, but what would happen if she was delivered here as a sacrifice, just like she was offered to me.

Would she have died? No way. I couldn't imagine a picture of her being meekly sacrificed. Even if she wouldn't have awoken her magic powers.

"I'll die anyway. Might as well give it a try."

After sighing and preparing myself for death, I ran out of the blind alley along with splashing sounds of water. Then, I raised a scream which reverberated throughout the cave.

"Oo—i, exalted God of Hunting! I'm nothing more than a stupid dragon offered to you as a sacrifice! Come and enjoy me as much as you like!"

I took a pose of absolute submission, lying belly-up on the ground with all my limbs stretched out. As soon as I did, an arrow shot from somewhere got stuck right next to my face.

Still, I didn't move. Well, truth be told, even if I wanted to I was already unable to move, since my legs got paralyzed from fear.

Inside the cave echoed only the sound of bowstring being pulled.

"I won't neither run nor hide. Being able to be pierced by the magnificent God of Hunting's arrow brings one nothing but satisfaction. Now, please pierce my heart, if only your mercy may allow so."

I simulated the lines Reiko would have said in a situation like this. Even I found it unpleasant how easily they came out of my mouth. Several seconds, which seemed like eternity, have passed like that. Before I realized, sound of the bowstring being pulled disappeared and was replaced with nearing steps on the wet ground.

"You, not run?"

I felt like fainting when the black fog monster suddenly peered in my face.

"I-I won't run. Since my very life has already been offered to you."

"You, weird."

As expected, you also think so – I empathized with the grotesque God in my head.

"Wait."

The black fog God briskly went into the rear passage, and after a while came back. In his hands was amply soaked in water moss.

"Cool your head, a bit. You, tired."

After being moved by the kindness for the first time in a while, I at last raised my voice and cried on the spot.

Chapter 17

A kindred spirit can be found anywhere

“...And then, I was completely worn out. I feel like at this rate I’ll really get an ulcer...”

“Don’t cry. Cheer up.”

Me and the God of Hunt (abbreviated: Hunt) were sitting next to each other in the stone chamber. When I tried talking to him, it turned out he was a great chap, who sat down hugging his knees to his chest and lent me his ear.

Anyway, he might’ve looked eerie but he was a God, not an evil monster. When he understood that I wasn’t an adequate hunting prey — that is, I was too much of a shabby opponent — he has completely lowered his weapon. It also seemed that, the act of him killing the adventurers’ familiars was actually him disposing of animals let loose by robbers, who were causing a disturbance in the ruins.

“That before, above, amazing. That, Reiko?”

“Yep, you’ve got great intuition. She left for town just a while ago.”

“That, strong. Very strong. Not human. Dangerous.”

“Nah, she’s still a human. She just went a bit too far with her wrong assumptions.”

“Amazing.”

Despite his brief remark, I could feel Hunt was deeply impressed. It seemed like Reiko’s awakening was hard to believe, even for a God. What was she, that child. After I complained for a while and felt refreshed, I’ve wiped away tears with my forelimb and asked.

“By the way, are you living here?”

“Yeah.”

“It has to be hard. Adventurers wreak havoc, robbers make this place their headquarters, it has to be noisy.”

“Not, really. No more, treasure. No one, comes.”

Having no visible face Hunt obviously had no expression, but he still somehow looked lonely. And yet, he tried to ruthlessly kill the first visitor he had in quite a while, so his hunting pride must’ve been considerably high.

“Since no one’s coming maybe you should move somewhere else, where there’s more people?”

“I, this place’s god. I cannot go, anywhere else.”

“That’s just suffering. It’d be nice if there was something I could do to help...”

“Really?”

Hunt looked as if his non-existing eyes were shining.

“Of course. You kept me company for a long while. As long as it’s something I’m able to do, just tell me.”

“After a, long time, I want to, go outside.”

I quizzically tilted my head to the side.

“Are you not allowed to?”

“Usually, I cannot. But, when teaching hunting, special. Can go, grasslands.”

“Ah I see. Since you’re a God of Hunt, teaching is also a job of yours. Were you teaching humans long ago?”

“Yes. Taught, a lot.”

I nodded in agreement and said.

“Then it’s decided. Please teach me hunting on the grasslands above. Honestly, lately I was thinking I need to temper my body a bit anyway. With a God’s guidance it might

be a little easier. Having said that, I've never hunted before, so please go easy on me."

"...It fine?"

"That's obvious. I believe helping each other out when in trouble is the way to go."

The huddled up Hunt stood up in an inhuman movement. After staring intently at the grotto's ceiling, he said.

"...Thank you. Up, we go."

Once he muttered that, before I noticed the surrounding scene has been painted anew. Grasslands were illuminated by the moonlight. It looked like we were sent to the surface by his hands without even crossing the robbers' passage.

And then, looking at the night sky, I remembered.

"Oops, not good. Can I quickly go and get my medicine? The one I told you about, youthful rejuvenation elixir. If I don't use that, I'll return to my original form and just get hunted for bounty. It's already this late, so the effect might run out any time now."

"This?"

Surprisingly, it turned out that Hunt thought ahead and held out a small barrel in his hands.

"Yes this, thanks. You really helped me out here."

When I took a step forward to take it, for some reason Hunt took one step backwards. Taking another one, he stepped further away.

"Why are you drawing back? If I don't take it I'll be in trouble."

"Hunting is done with utmost effort. Issuing a challenge and drinking weakening medicine is unforgivable."

"You, didn't your personality change too much?"

"No compromise permitted."

Eeh, as soon as I thought I was blessed with a kindred-spirit, it turned out he was that kind of person (god). When I said “after all I’m not feeling good today” and tried to run, all the while feeling with my whole body an unpleasant premonition, Hunt, like a rider, got on top of my back.

“Now, let’s go. Was a while now, my blood boils. Don’t worry. From now on I’ll make you, into a splendid hound.”

“For God’s sake, can’t you return to your former gentle self? I don’t want to turn into a hound, above all I think I’ll piss myself.”

“Get running!”

Hunt’s black arm changed shape, stretched and turned into a whip. Then, not tolerating any objections, he lashed my back relentlessly and made me single-mindedly dash through the grasslands.

I continued to run while letting out shrieks of terror and grief. Even when my body returned to my former size, the Spartan training continued till morning.

“Fool! Don’t run so loudly! Become one with nature!”

“Running quietly at full speed just isn’t possible! Besides, I’ve nothing to do with nature! I’m a dragon!”

“The food you are eating, is what?!”

“Grass and trees!”

“That’s nature! In other words, you are nature!”

“Hey, isn’t that too much of a leap in logic?!”

A lash for talking back. Since it was like that, I shouldn’t have asked for guidance and should’ve just abandoned him in the depths of the earth. As I’ve been receiving the God’s personal torture-like guidance, with loud thuds my steps echoed in the grasslands through the whole night.

“The Evil Dragon Lord is angry...!”

From what I heard later, the terrified bandits at the hideout were saying so in response to the earth tremors.

Chapter 18

A useless present

Around early dawn, when the grasslands horizon was turning white, I felt death coming. I wondered whether the fluttering its wings butterfly wasn't perchance the underworld's guide. Buried deep in the soft grass and feeling my 5000 year long life at last coming to an end, I slowly closed my eyes.

"Wake up!"

"Ngyaa!"

Nevertheless, I was hindered from the tranquil death's embrace by a whiplash. The field of flowers I saw behind my eyelids faded away instantly, and when I came to, I once again saw the grasslands daybreak. The floating on the sky moon completely lost its colour.

"You took whole night, yet didn't catch even a single rabbit. First time coming upon such a dull hunting dog."

"But it can't be helped. I'm not a hound, besides hunting a rabbit for no reason is just too sad."

Well, not being able to catch up to a small animal while running for real was also pretty sad.

"Never mind. I taught you basics. Rest depends on you. Unless you want to die, continue."

"I think training each night like this will kill me for different reasons though."

Moreover, carrying it out behind Reiko's back would be next to impossible. When I sighed thinking about the hardships ahead of me, Hunt got off my back and gently patted me on the head.

"It is okay. Surely, it will somehow, work out. Do your best."

“You really do have a dual personality, don’t you?”

“I am, completely refreshed, about time, to return.”

“I feel it’s a nice way of putting it, after using me as a toy.”

Hunt put the small barrel of medicine he confiscated on the ground, faced me and held out his hand, as if seeking a handshake. Even though I already had no more stamina left to stretch out my limb, Hunt was uprightly waiting with his hand held out.

I somehow roused my body and touched it with the tip of my claw.

“A present.”

Once he said that, a portion of the black mist which formed his body gently coiled around my forepaw. Before long the mist quickly soaked in and was nowhere to be seen.

“Eh? What did you do?”

“Weapon.”

“A Weapon? Ahh, now that you mention it, you held something like a black mist bow and arrow—”

“Put strength, into claws.”

“Like this?”

Hghh, I strained myself. And then, just like Hunt have said, the black mist made its appearance on my claws, as if covering them from the top.

——However, length of the materialized mist claws were even less than a fly’s size.

When I tried digging out the ground to check the sharpness, it turned out to be a dull sensation not much different from my original claws. Completely useless. Since effectively, my claws were extended by only a portion of a small insect.

“Aaa...”

Hunt also became speechless.

He didn't have any expression, but I understood what he wanted to say. In the hands of a skilled user it had to be strong. That weapon becoming this much of a disappointment was surely a first for him.

"...Erm... Do your best..."

Slanting his gaze diagonally downwards (though he had no eyes), Hunt erased his presence as if he was running away. What was up with that. Somehow I felt sorry.

Then, the fatigue flooded me completely and I collapsed on my belly. Along with the rumbling tremors, small birds nearby took off in unison.

I began to nod off. Falling asleep, while basking in the morning sun——

"Evil Dragon Lord!"

After hearing Reiko's voice coming from far away, I did a full kick-up jump. When I scanned my surroundings in panic, I saw Reiko on the distant horizon sprinting here with all her strength. Fast. As if wind took the form of a person, so light that one couldn't feel any weight.

During the time it took me to blink three times, Reiko arrived before me along with the blowing wind.

"I have returned. The town's guards should be arriving soon."

"Oh, good job."

"Not at all. This kind of errand, it was an easier matter than breathing. By the way, Evil Dragon Lord... Judging from your appearance, you seem to be tired."

My body tensed up. Not good. If the fact that I've been dead tired from the Spartan training was to be exposed, Reiko would surely become disillusioned and go out of control.

"No, that's not true, actually——"

"—— As expected, the old wound from that time still aches?"

“Wound from what time, exactly?”

First time I heard about it.

“When you decimated a thousand enemies during that great war of Gods and Demons——”

That was quite an explanation for a simple muscle pain after training. When I spoke ambiguously “Well, that was”, I finally saw the guards galloping on their horses.

“Good wo~rk. Over here——”

Instead of raising my arm, which thanks to the fatigue has become practically immovable, I waved my tail to guide them. However, the cavalry abruptly pulled the reins and stopped their horses. And then someone muttered.

“Evil Dragon Reivendia...”

Ah, I was hopeless. Because of fatigue, I’ve forgotten to drink the medicine.

“Can’t be helped it got exposed——” At the very least, I somehow managed to prevent Reiko from delivering her speech in high spirits.

Chapter 19

Town protected by the Water Saintess

It was a ridiculous scene. It could be said that guards transporting the taken under protection people on wagons was a matter of course.

However, the sight of bandits without any restraints binding them getting on the horses of their own volition and dragging themselves to town could only be described as queer. Moreover, after coming near, far from running away, they continuously beseeched the guards, saying “Please let’s go faster” and “Put us quickly in jail”.

In contrast to them, who were already emitting the air of model prisoners, were the riding on a jail wagon Reiko and I.

“Of all things, pushing the Evil Dragon Lord into a cage...”

Towards Reiko displaying her irritation,

“It’s fine. Since this carriage is wider it’s more comfortable, besides riding with other hostages would just be awkward.”

My identity of an “infamous Evil Dragon” was quickly conveyed by guards to the hostages. Even the adventurer who yesterday had an attitude full of sympathy, today couldn’t stop his eyes from wandering about, while stating that “Me being grateful didn’t change” during his release.

That day I learned just how much movement could human eyes achieve.

Surely, if we were to board the same wagon, on the surface everyone would have treated me with kindness. But that kindness would have instead dealt serious damage to my heart.

In that case I preferred to ride on the borrowed jail wagon, so I asked the guards for the unreasonable.

Actually, the most natural choice might have been to part ways with the guards at the

hideout and return to traveling with Reiko. However my muscles ached awfully because of Hunt's gruelling training, so I didn't feel like moving for the next two days.

"By the way, Evil Dragon Lord. There's a matter I'd wish to bring to your knowledge."

"Hm? Did something happen?"

"It is about the town this wagon is heading to, namely it seems to lack combatants — such as adventurers and soldiers — in comparison to its size. They already had trouble with sending out this small number of guards. To make matters worse, there are no defensive structures, such as ramparts, to protect it. It is to the extent of only a waterway enclosing the town."

"That's really careless of them. If monsters were to attack, it'd probably be captured without any resistance."

"I also think so. Supposing we'd leave a town this incompetent alone, it'd just get occupied by demons and become an encampment of the Demon King's army. Therefore..."

Reiko, without a change in her expression, continued with a serious face.

"—after reaching the town, I am thinking about making a declaration of Evil Dragon Lord's rule. If we were to use the Evil Dragon Lord's authority, no demon would dare to interfere, surely ensuring the town's prosperity through all eternity. It would by no means be an act of aggression, but protection due to a kind heart, so there is no risk of harming our relationship with mankind."

"Erm you see, Reiko. I'm sure you're saying that with pure intentions for the town's sake, but I'm positive it'd develop into an all-out war between us and that town."

"Victory and justice is on our side."

"It's not about winning or losing, but about fighting itself."

If we were to aggravate the situation, I'd just wind up dead. Supposing my body lived, my heart would surely die from the heavy feelings of guilt.

"May I not? While returning from town, I have even polished this draft of rule declaration."

Reiko pulled out from her pocket a roll of paper and spread it on the wagon's floor. Since the first line of the opening passage was **[Informing the foolish humans]** , I stopped my reading there and then.

To begin with, wasn't she running all the way back from town? Don't tell me she did it while running?

"Anyway, no means no. I won't do any ruling."

"...I see. I sincerely apologize for my officious behaviour. As expected, there's no place for being concerned about a single small town in the midst of Demon King's subjugation. A cold-heartedness to forsake things is also required."

"No, no way do I mean anything like abandoning that town. Seeing that it was established until now, I think it has to have some means of protection. For example, supposing it really was that much of a wimpy town, shouldn't the now being dragged to jail bandits have aimed at it?"

"Regarding that."

Reiko's nose twitched, as if she was sniffing something.

"As expected of the Evil Dragon Lord's keen insight, there certainly appears to be something protecting it. The town's people called it [The Water Saintess]."

"Saintess?"

"Yes. It is said that, the soul of a departed on that land Saintess to this day dwells in waters circulating the waterway, repelling wicked beings. I certainly felt some feeble resistance when I tried to enter. However, since it wasn't too strong I just pushed my way through."

I nodded silently, but in my mind I trembled — *This child has been recognized as evil.* Moreover, on top of being recognized as evil, she just simply passed through.

"Soon this wagon should be crossing the waterway's bridge. I believe that Evil Dragon Lord also, despite it being just a little, will feel its power — however, saying bluntly, it is a being too inept to protect even one city."

Even though there were no windows in the wagon, she seemed to have an accurate

grasp of our progress. Before long, just as Reiko have said, the smooth swaying of the wagon traveling through the grasslands changed to a violent ride when we stepped onto the stone bridge.

Then, a voice started speaking directly in my mind.

—— Help me.

—— Please stop that child.

That clearly was the Saintess' voice seeking help.

Chapter 20

Lady Saintess on the run

At the town's centre was a spring temple deifying the Saintess. Although saying a temple, it wasn't much of an extravagant structure.

Around the spring copiously welling up with water were built four pillars, as if encircling it and supporting a half-spherical roof. That was it. One might as well see it as a slightly luxurious rain shelter with a water source.

However, it seemed like people's faith was genuine, since everyone without exception was coming to offer their prayers. An outwardly zealous old man could be seen kneeling for a very long time with his hands joined.

"Now, there's no main form of the one called Saintess here. I can feel a strange presence wandering aimlessly throughout the town, so she probably has to be running around the waterways."

"Since everyone's praying, stop saying such things. Also get out of that temple. It's rude."

Meanwhile, Reiko could be seen brazenly breaking into the temple and peering inside the spring. She pouted her cheeks in displeasure, not knowing there was a reason for the Saintess' escape.

It goes back to the Saintess requesting help.

—— Please, Pet Dragon. That little girl appears to have opened up her heart to you. If you were to try to persuade her, she'd surely think over the town's subversion.

It seemed like the Saintess has mistaken me for Reiko's pet. Though taking into account our power relationship, I couldn't say it was necessarily a mistake.

Not especially aiming to correct her misunderstanding, I planned to answer in my mind that, “for now I persuaded her not to invade it”. Yep, it was exactly at that moment.

“You bloody fool. Understand just who exactly this Lord is. He is the great Evil Dragon Lord Reivendia — of all things, to brand him the same as a trivial pet. You bastard have just now, committed a sin deserving worse than hell.”

Somehow, she heard it. Reiko just normally listened in to the Saintess’ voice, that should have been spoken directly in my mind.

And, since then, Saintess has been on the run. No matter how I shouted, it didn’t yield any response.

That was a given. She started a conversation since she thought I was a harmless pet, yet now that it turned out I was a real end-boss (falsely charged), there was no way she’d sit back and talk.

Reiko, who came out of the temple ignoring the surrounding her hostile gazes, said,

“Damned Saintess. On top of insulting the Evil Dragon Lord, you don’t even intend to show your face. How insolent.”

“No, look. If you get angry like that anyone would be scared. Try smiling, smile. It’s not like we came here to fight.”

“—— That’s right. Not to fight, but to deal divine punishment.”

“A divine punishment while smiling, that’s a psycho for you.”

In the vicinity, guards were on standby, holding their spears. They might’ve been keeping watch, but their faces only held looks of resignation. They probably must’ve acknowledged that, were the Evil Dragon and his kin to rampage, they didn’t stand a chance. In reality, setting me aside, it should’ve been no trouble for Reiko to take care of those guards in one move.

One soldier ventured,

“S-Since it seems like you already paid your respects to Lady Saintess, if it would please you, I can guide you to your desired lodging...”

“Not to pay respects, but to declare wa——”

“Let’s do that! It’s been a while, you also probably want to sleep in a proper bed! Reiko, let’s hurry!”

My loud voice just barely managed to drown out Reiko’s improper remarks. It seemed like the guards became more wary after my sudden loud shout, but it still wasn’t enough for them to attack us. With their guard raised they took us to the inn.

On the way, I admired the town’s landscape.

Stores and houses were located only in the central part of the city surrounding the Temple, from where radially extended the waterways, around which were pretty much only fields and pastures. Normally, large-scale plantations were administered by powerful, at least to some extent, entities like royalty or church, to prevent crop plundering and to manage the land.

However, here it was different. Just by extending the waterways, in which the Saintess’ divine protection dwelled, plunderers and vermin wouldn’t be able to come near.

Rarely one could find such a convenient plantation. As a result even an amateur could see, that it was becoming a splendid grain producing region.

“The Saintess’ presence is getting more and more distant. She can’t intend to run away from this town, can she?”

However, the next harvest has already become worrisome. Thanks to the carriage swaying, no one noticed my legs trembling from guilt.

“Listen well, Reiko. Hatred yields nothing.”

“Evil Dragon Lord...?”

“I comprehended it at the end of my life full of strife... Well... I mean that... Discussing things through is good.”

“I see. As expected of the Evil Dragon Lord. Negotiations backed up with an overwhelming power sometimes yield better results than war.”

“Though I’d prefer to go with no overwhelming power backing it up policy.”

Moreover, the discussion with Reiko was a negotiation where the table has already been flipped over. In addition, one after the other, weights were being piled up on the table's back, so that it couldn't return to normal.

Heaving a sigh, I continued,

"...Ah, Reiko. I'm going for a walk. You listen well to the guards, keep still and wait for me at the inn. Don't you think about doing anything reckless."

"Yes, certainly."

I've had the carriage stop and I got off the wagon. My four limbs still ached acutely, but I couldn't allow myself to take it easy.

I moved to the nearby waterway on my four limbs, as if grovelling, and said,

"He—ey, Lady Saintess. It was a misunderstanding. I'm simply a powerless, good-for-nothing dragon, while Reiko won't do the city any harm. After resting for a few days we'll leave, so please, for the townspeople sake, don't run away."

There was no answer. It seemed like I lost her trust completely. Besides, honestly saying I also didn't have the confidence that Reiko wouldn't cause trouble.

And, just when I was at a loss at the side of the street, I heard voices behind me.

"Wow amazing! Dragon, a dragon!"

"Awesome—! A real one?!"

"So cool—!"

When I looked back, a few children bustling jumped out of a roadside house and, all of a sudden, swarmed around me.

"Is it a dragon raised by a merchant?"

"Maybe it's lost?"

"Could it be hungry?"

And yet again I was mistaken for a pet. Seeing in my head the scene of Reiko losing it and raging, I hurried to explain myself.

“Erm, I’m not a pet you see——”

“It spoke!”

Carelessly speaking out just caused more confusion. From the kids’ point of view, a dragon able to comprehend the language had to be a suitable toy. Given the situation, I was treated as a circus animal, with no chance to forcibly escape the small encirclement. Although I was weak, if I bumped into a small child I might’ve made it fall over.

—— That was why...

“Here you go, Doradora—. Our vegetable scraps—. Delicious, right?”

“Aah—, not fair—. Eat my potatoes too—.”

“Uh huh, either is tasty.”

Being fed like this was an inevitable outcome.

Chapter 21

I got lost

When the sun started to set and children scattered to their homes, I noticed my grave mistake. I didn't know where the inn was.

Now the guards, who were attentively keeping their eyes on me when I rode the carriage, were also gone. It was likely that Reiko made everyone stay behind, saying something like "Despite the Evil Dragon Lord saying he'd like to take a stroll alone, you intend to obstruct him?".

For crying out loud, I wanted you to have a bit more pride as guards. Then you could've guided me.

To begin with, this was an agricultural town lacking entertainment venues. When it started to darken, the walking around humans would pretty much disappear and finally I was going to be at my wit's end. I've had no psychological resistance against yelling out that I was lost and seeking help, but if I, an Evil Dragon, revealed that much of a pitiful appearance, the fact that I was weak might get exposed by Reiko.

"No helping it. Let's sleep outside."

It was good enough to say I just got too much into walking and have forgotten about returning to the inn. When the sun has risen, I was going to call Reiko out by having a random guard deliver her a message. Then, making something up, I would have her guide me to the most suitable inn.

Besides, as far as I was concerned, sleeping outside was an everyday thing for me. Instead of sleeping in a tiny house, feeling cramped—— tiny?

"Not good. If I wait till morning, the medicine's effect is going to wear off. Once I take a nap defenceless, considering the bounty on my head, a reckless adventurer might just go for it."

I take back what I said. It was after all better to sleep in a safe inn.

Staying up till dawn wasn't an option. Last night, I've received Hunt's gruelling training throughout the whole night, so I didn't get any sleep. At my age, not sleeping two nights in a row was too hard. After a few more hours I wouldn't be able to fight off the drowsiness and would fall asleep on the street. At this rate I might lose my neck, not being able to wake up ever again.

And were that to happen, a real evil dragon would be born inside the inn.

Now the world's fate was hanging on my proper sleep.

“Having said that, I can't find it...”

Despite it not being a tourist town there were many inns stretching out, maybe to welcome the intending to buy crops merchants. It was impossible to pinpoint from them the one Reiko was staying at.

—— In that case, there was only one thing I could rely on.

The place I came to by dragging my aching feet was the Saintess' shrine, which was empty in the night. Even though it was veiled in darkness, just with the stars light the welling up water was glistening adequately.

‘Please Lady Saintess; I implore you to guide me to the inn. Once I peacefully sleep one night, I promise to leave this town.’

I tried praying sincerely. Other than the ever present stillness, I couldn't see any significant response from the spring.

And yet when I continued to wait for a while, I suddenly noticed something.

Not inside the spring, but behind it. There was only half of a person's figure sticking out from the shrine pillar's shadow while peeking over here. The figure's size was small. It had to be a young child.

“Who is it?”

In response to being questioned, the figure jolted with surprise and showed her face from behind the pillar. It was a young girl with beautiful eyes and swaying long hair

like the crystal clear water.

“E, erm, Doradora, right? Look, it’s me. We just played, didn’t we? Remember? I fed you fish, you remember right?”

I’ve had absolutely no recollection of a girl with such characteristic hair colour, besides I haven’t eaten a fish in several hundred years. After all, I was basically a herbivore.

“L-Look, well, because Doradora seemed to be troubled I secretly followed you... I’m sorry, please don’t get angry! Ah, it’s fine, right—— he’s gentle with children. If it’s this form, it’s okay, right? No, it’s nothing. Anyway Doradora, please tell me if there’s anything troubling you, because I’m a gentle, pure and kind child——”

Since the explanation was too desperate, I understood everything. And I decided to definitely not reveal anything I perceived.

“That’s right. I don’t know the location of the inn my companion is staying at. If it’s fine, could you guide me?”

“Sure! My intuition is rea~lly good, so I’ll probably find it immediately! You can rest easy, Doradora!”

Well you’re a Saintess, you probably can see through the whole town. But I kept such thoughts to myself.

“Much appreciated. Then, let’s go.”

“Yes! So after you properly arrive at the inn, leave first thing tomorrow morn—— No, it’s nothing!”

The disguised as a little girl Lady Saintess briskly showed me the way. We went through the town’s shortcuts as if under a spell, and despite my snail-like speed, we arrived at the inn in mere minutes.

“We’re here! Your companion is staying in the room at the end of this inn’s hallway—— I think. It’s my intuition.”

“Un, thanks. It’s likely right, so it’s fine up to here. As promised, we’re going to leave this town tomorrow morning, so you don’t have to worry.”

When I bowed to Lady Saintess before the inn's entrance, tears copiously welled up in the corners of her eyes.

"Hooray—! I won—! I protected it—! Everyone in the town—!"

Once more I lowered my head to her, who was basking in the afterglow of victory, and entered the inn. The guard seemed to have passed the message and the innkeeper quietly led me to the room.

What greeted me when I opened the door, was the sitting in seiza and waiting Reiko.

"Welcome back, Evil Dragon Lord. How was the preliminary inspection of the town?"

"Not an inspection but a walk. I don't think it's good to have an expectant expression, as if we're about to do something."

'More importantly', I changed the topic.

"Have you been properly keeping to yourself? You didn't cause any trouble for the guards or the innkeeper?"

"It's fine. According to the Evil Dragon Lord's command, I kept still with all my energy."

"Did it really take up that much effort?"

My anxieties were usually proving to be right, in a bad way.

"I'm terribly sorry. Because of my incompetence, getting the hang of it took me a bit of time. However, just as Lord wished, [stillness] — that is, I finally succeeded in casting away the idle thoughts and reached the untrodden limits of my consciousness."

"Did I really say something grand like that? Untrodden limits?"

"Yes. The future."

It seemed like Reiko was doing something big by herself. I deliberately didn't want to ask too deep and intended to let it go, but the following remark was no doubt the very bomb itself.

"Although belatedly, I also managed to comprehend it. The Evil Dragon Lord has

already seen through it, right? That the true form of the Saintess is a water demon—a member of the Demon King's army.”

Chapter 22

Lady Saintess, for eternity

Was it a regular delusion? Or a sixth-sense like hunch? Thinking it through reasonably, it should be the former, but taking into account Reiko's strange ability I couldn't rule out the latter option.

— However.

"Reiko, to tell you the truth, I've met Lady Saintess just now."

Based on her behaviour, her nature in no way seemed like that of an evil being. If she could act well enough to hide her true identity of a demon, then she should've been able to put more of a show as a child.

"I see. In that case, it was just a groundless apprehension on my part. Since the Saintess has already been obliterated there is no problem."

"I didn't obliterate anyone though?"

"Then you let her free because she still has her use— is that right?"

"That's not it. Listen, Reiko. You have to start properly considering things in a peaceful manner. If you always have this bloodthirsty way of thinking, sooner or later you'll really turn into a villain."

I raised my limb and lightly patted her on the shoulder. She tilted her head for a while, before nodding slowly.

"I understand, Evil Dragon Lord. Competent evil dragon's kin can't be caught up in calculating profit and loss like a small scoundrel, but rather has to look at the grand scheme of things."

"Yeah. I don't really understand but it should be close enough. And so, I'd like to hear your story step by step; on what basis are you saying that Lady Saintess is a demon?"

There might have been some misunderstanding, the same way she started treating me as an evil dragon. In which case, if I didn't rectify it, she'd cause some inconceivable disaster.

"A basis? It is the kin's intuition."

I made a sour face. There was no room for a misunderstanding. Since the basis was too weak, I couldn't even contradict her.

"Um... Let's calm down Reiko, shall we? Isn't it too early to decide she's a demon based on just that?"

"If a confession is necessary, I can capture her and make her spit it out."

"Please don't."

I didn't have to hear it to know. She no doubt intended on conducting a vicious interrogation. If that wasn't true, why would she have moved her hand towards a dagger on her hip? If Reiko were to seriously interrogate her, she'd have confessed even if she wasn't a demon. Actually, even though I wasn't an evil dragon, I was getting screwed over by her insisting that I were one.

I wondered whether Lady Saintess was eavesdropping on this conversation. If so, she might be trying to run away from town all over again.

"Anyhow, I'm telling you, you're overthinking it in the wrong direction."

"I would be glad if that was the case."

"If you're that worried, I'm going to speak once again with Lady Saintess tomorrow. Despite looking like this, I've some confidence in my power of insight, so once we speak facing each other I should be able to discern whether she's good or not."

"Since Evil Dragon Lord says so I can be at ease."

Telling the truth, I didn't think there was any need to confirm that. After finally being able to catch a breath, I drank a drop of medicine from the small barrel and lied down in the corner of the room.

"In case you couldn't fall asleep on the floor, please use this bed."

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I wouldn’t fit in a human bed either way. You can use it.”

“However, in that case I would have to sleep in a higher position than the Evil Dragon Lord. A kin mustn’t sleep somewhere higher than the head.”

“You often sleep on my back though.”

I wondered how she’d explain that, but Reiko just nonchalantly ignored it and laid down right next to me. How insipid was sleeping on the floor stuffed together in a corner, even though a spacious room had been prepared especially for us.

“At least spread a blanket on the floor. You mustn’t catch a cold and harm your health.”

“Then, Evil Dragon Lord also...”

“Yeah, yeah.”

While thinking how spreading some dry grass would have been more to my liking, I obediently wrapped myself up in the blanket Reiko covered me with.

The next morning.

“Dear guests—. The breakfast has been served—. May I bring it inside—?”

I’ve woken up to the sound of knocking. Looking outside through the window’s curtains, the sky still had a deep blue colour, so unless I were a dearly valuing time peddler it was too early for breakfast.

“Why is it so early...?”

I woke up my aged body by rubbing my eyes hard with my foreleg. It seemed the muscle pain still hasn’t subsided yet, but it couldn’t be helped considering my age.

“...I won’t forgive disturbing the Evil Dragon Lord’s sleep.”

And from my back Reiko’s still-waking-up voice could be heard. Given the circumstances I didn’t ask why was she there and just crawled sluggishly on the floor, saying,

“For the time being, it’s fine to leave it in front of the door. I’ll eat it when I get hungry.”

“But that is...! At this inn, eating a freshly made breakfast is the most vital!”

The overbearing knocking continued along with loud sounds. Awfully pushy. Did the inns really go this far in their guest service?

“Should I silence her?”

“It’s fine, just open the door.”

Since Reiko was emitting a disturbing presence, for now I decided to open the door. Thereupon, as soon as the door opened, what leapt to my eye was—.

“He—llo. It’s this inn’s specialty, a fresh pot-baked fish—. What’s more, only today, we’ve prepared a helpful for our travellers’ journeys preserved food, such as the dried fish—. Oh my, what great weather we have today, so beautiful, that it makes one want to leave town first thing in the morning, right? Now then, please fill up your bellies quickly and let’s depart vigorously!”

Wearing an apron dress and pushing in a cart with a huge plate, as if supplying a banquet— was a woman with long blue hair. When I listened closely, it was the same voice as the last night’s child.

Similarly to last night, I realized everything but deliberately decided to pretend I didn’t notice anything.

“Thanks. But I don’t really like fish. Reiko, how much can you eat?”

“I can finish this much by myself.”

It was quite a huge fish, around the size of an adult’s arm, but it seemed to be a piece of cake for Reiko. I already surmised it from the meals in the last few days, but Reiko ate quite a lot.

“T-then... That’s right! Please wait a moment! Dorado... Sorry, I’ll right away prepare a meal to the liking of our guest!”

“You better hur—” I barely managed to restrain Reiko, who was trying to use threats. However, after a few dozens of second, Lady Saintess dropped an even bigger bomb.

She came back carrying a woven bamboo basket, full of muddy and tattered vegetables, saying,

“These are the vegetable scraps picked up from a nearby field! You like this, right?!”

At that time, I couldn't bring myself to look Reiko in the eyes.

Chapter 23

Educational guidance

That moment felt like an eternity. I excessively struggled to get over this predicament and the world turned into slow motion, appearing like a revolving lantern.

First thing I spotted was the figure of Reiko brandishing a dagger and throwing herself upon the Saintess. It was an unavoidable future the moment Lady Saintess made the mistake.

In response to that, I tried to shout “You mustn’t kill her!” Nevertheless, amidst the slowly flowing time my body’s movements couldn’t keep up. That was a no-brainer. Despite my senses becoming sharp, it wasn’t like my body became able to move faster.

However, Lady Saintess also displayed an unexpectedly fine play. She probably had a cowardly disposition by nature. From the start she appeared to be wary of us, so her escape was fast. Screaming, she hurled the basket and the scattered vegetable scraps blocked Reiko’s vision.

Naturally, Reiko wasn’t perturbed by some vegetables. When the dagger flashed, just the created wind pressure alone shredded all of them into little pieces. Yet, there was no Lady Saintess’ figure beyond the cut up vegetable scraps.

She vanished?

No, that wasn’t right. When I focused my eyes, I saw the long blue hair fluttering around the corner at the end of the hallway.

She just simply ran away. At any rate, she had fast legs.

“Y-You can’t kill her!”

At last my voice caught up. Because I was hurrying and faltered in the middle, my scream turned into an order in a normal tone. Reiko, who even now was intent on chasing her, said “Why is that?” with a serious face, while still tightly grasping her dagger.

While breathing out a sigh of relief because I made it in time, I said,

“Don’t ‘why’ me. You can’t just thoughtlessly hurt people. Once something happened, there would be no turning back.”

“However, she served the Evil Dragon Lord a meal akin to trash——”

“And that’s fine. Being really strong means not getting mad at trivial things. Besides, I like vegetables.”

I ate the lying on the floor cut into little pieces vegetables. They were pretty spoiled, so it wasn’t like I really wanted to eat them, but unless I did that, Reiko’s wrath wouldn’t subside.

“E-Evil Dragon Lord. To eat like that... I will gather them at once, please wait a while.”

“Aah, never mind that. More importantly, Reiko, I’d like for you to have the character of a strong person.”

“The character of a strong... person?”

“That’s right. You are my— Evil Dragon Reivendia’s kin. These claws aren’t something to be swung lightly at every minor trouble. That’s why, until you possess sufficient self-awareness, I forbid you from using strength without my permission. Ah, but protecting yourself is an exception. You can also fight when there’s no other option, but even then, killing is not allowed.”

That’s right. I should have ordered this from the start. With this, Reiko should avoid needless battles. It’s a brilliant idea, despite being mine.

I nodded in self-satisfaction and raised my gaze from the floor, while saying “Did you understand?”

Thereupon I saw a figure of Reiko, depressed beyond my imagination. She sat on the floor in seiza with her head drooped low, the light in her eyes completely extinguished. The lack of vigour, as if her soul could leave her body at any time.

“R-Reiko? What’s wrong? You don’t have to be so depressed. It’s okay to just be careful from now on.”

Accompanied by the almost visible cloud of gloom over her, Reiko responded with her head lowered,

“Is that so... I wasn’t adequate enough as the Evil Dragon Lord’s kin, was I...?”

“No, that’s not true. I didn’t mean that.”

“Your kind concern is not necessary.”

I thought it was a brilliant idea, but unexpectedly the sense of guilt is terrible. This child, she appears simple but is quite troublesome.

“Reiko, I really am glad that you became my kin.”

Reiko kept quiet with her head hanging low.

“You’re still young, I think its fine to grow from now on.”

Reiko still was dejected.

“That’s why, unless you cheer up, I also won’t be able to...”

Thereupon, Reiko suddenly straightened her back with a cracking noise.

“That won’t do. I see, the kin’s energy also has some effect on the head, namely the Evil Dragon Lord. It won’t do for my inexperienced self to drag the Evil Dragon Lord down any more. At the very least, I have to possess a firm spirit.”

“Yeah... That wasn’t what I really meant. What should I say...”

If possible I really wanted to follow-up somehow, but now I had to chase after Lady Saintess and solve the misunderstanding. After all, she was almost killed, so it wouldn’t be weird if she was finally attempting to escape from town.

“Reiko, I’ve something to take care of, you just keep still and—”

No, if I left her to sit quietly when she’s feeling down, she might just brood even more.

“You also can go for a walk through the town. It seems there are a lot of children in this area, so there might be someone you could play with. Understanding human customs

and habits is also a valuable learning experience.”

“I understand. As you wish, I’ll carry out my walk resolutely.”

“I didn’t mean it with that sort of obligatory feeling...”

The tension has subsided completely. When I took a step forward in pursuit of Lady Saintess, I faced Reiko once more, along with some last words of encouragement.

“Even if you’d lose your power as kin, I’d never come to hate you. Before thinking of you as kin, I consider you an important comrade.”

Reiko stared blankly. Since she was called a comrade by me, the head, it might take her a while to understand it. Then I inquired suddenly.

“By the way, Reiko, what would you’ve thought if my strength disappeared?”

“That’s obvious.”

She responded immediately. *It’d be nice if she’d get along with me, despite me being a powerless, worthless dragon—* As I was thinking that, what reached my ears was...

“There’s no way Evil Dragon Lord could lose his power.”

Yep, I’ve thought it was going to be like that. I started trudging through the hallway with my back hunched more than usual.

After meeting with Lady Saintess, I’m probably going to have to comfort Reiko all over again, but who’s going to comfort me? After all, I’m trying so hard. I want to cry.

It happened along with these thoughts, when I neared the corner Lady Saintess disappeared behind. A splash sound came from my foot, along with a cold sensation. When I looked at the floor, there was a fairly big puddle of water in the wooden hallway.

Maybe someone has spilled it? But the amount was as if someone would have dumped a whole water bowl. If that was it, wouldn’t there be a lot of noise, which I’d have noticed?

All of a sudden, the water puddle reflected Lady Saintess’ face.

Startled I turned back, but nobody was there. Which meant that Lady Saintess was literally in “the water puddle”—

“Y-Y-You fell for it! Eiyaa—!”

Plop. This time the sound was much louder than when I stepped into it. My whole body was dragged deep under the water.

Chapter 24

As kin

The Evil Dragon Lord's presence abruptly disappeared behind the hallway's corner.

I had a pensive look on my face.

Certainly, the Evil Dragon Lord was able to create subspaces, in which he could stride freely. However, if the mighty existence known as the Evil Dragon Lord were to even temporarily disappear from this world, it'd be an undesirable incident for this world's natural harmony. Were the central pillar of the house to disappear, it'd creak and start to crumble. In the same manner, the world also couldn't sustain its tranquillity without the Evil Dragon Lord.

The Evil Dragon Lord was extremely thoughtful. He had a thorough knowledge of causing bad influence on the world, and ever since he made me his kin, he hadn't distorted space even once.

— In which case...

Reiko dashed through the hallway, arriving at the corner. What she found was a puddle of water, as if there was a roof leak.

Moreover, it wasn't just water. She could feel the dissolving magic power. Once she touched it with her finger, she immediately understood what kind of thing it was.

"It's a dimensional barrier trap, imprisoning the target inside. Which means— that insolent fellow before was after all the Saintess in disguise. No wonder that she had a strange presence for a human. To go so far in disrespecting the Evil Dragon Lord, I absolutely cannot forgive it."

The Evil Dragon Lord wouldn't have readily fallen for the enemy's trap. Which meant, he went to the Saintess of his own volition. To put her to death, or maybe to win her over. I wasn't able to see through his far sighted and prudent mind, but as his kin, ordered to restrain myself, I couldn't meddle needlessly.

Nevertheless, suppressing the urge to destroy this trap right away was a terrible hardship for Reiko. She could've easily broken through the barrier Saintess made just by swinging her dagger. However, since the Evil Dragon Lord wasn't taking those measures, were she to make a move, she'd have ignored his will.

"I cannot. If I were to cut in here, it'd be the same as me not having trust in the Evil Dragon Lord. That mustn't be. As kin, I shouldn't stand out where it's not my place."

That was why, she absolutely wouldn't do anything. She stopped herself at just fully releasing her killing intent towards the Saintess from above the water puddle. All of the hallway's windows shattered into fine pieces.

There should be no problem with this much. The Saintess was now in front of a genuine Evil Dragon Lord's eyes. The released by me bloodthirst would be like a drop lost in the ocean.

With this I managed to let out some of my pent-up anger. Now I just have to carry out my walk as the Evil Dragon Lord ordered.

"Uwaa! What the hell is this? All of the windows are broken!"

I slipped past the panicking innkeeper and went outside. I was barefoot and wearing silk clothes as a substitute for pyjamas, but the Evil Dragon Lord also usually didn't really wear much. In that case, he shouldn't mind me lightly dressed.

When I was walking, several loudly squealing children came running down the road. Looking closely, they were holding vegetable scraps and tree roots in their hands.

"Where did Doradora^[1] disappear to—?"

"He said he wanted to stay at some inn, didn't he?"

"I was hoping to meet him again today..."

"He probably hasn't left yet. Let's search for him, search!"

I see. Judging from their conversation, they seemed to be searching for an unusual animal called Doradora. Come to think of it, when I was scolded the Evil Dragon Lord told me to play with human children as a way of learning their customs and habits.

They came at the right time, Reiko thought and readily approached the group of children. She pulled out her dagger and held it up towards the sky, saying,

“You there, human children. I want you to let me join as a member of your group. We have to hunt the one called Doradora, right? Just leave it to me. I’ve confidence in my skills.”

The children raised a ruckus. Reiko tilted her head.

Strange, I asked them in a natural manner, so why are they so wary of me? I’ve no idea what use the vegetable scraps have, but the tree roots have to be the substitute in place of swords for playing. They should want to corner and beat the one called Doradora with it.

“Y-You see, that’s wrong. We don’t want to hurt Doradora.”

Once the leader like young boy said so, the purpose of vegetable scraps unveiled itself to Reiko.

“I see. You don’t want to hurt him— which means you want to capture him alive, and these vegetables are the bait to lure Doradora out. Should we dig a pitfall trap?”

“I’m saying you’re wrong! Doradora is a dragon that yesterday came to this town. He likes vegetables, and he’s really smart and cute too. We don’t want to bully him at all.”

So that’s how it is, I nodded. It seems there are various dragons. There are those mighty and grand like the Evil Dragon Lord, while there are also these lizard-like existences, which have just let their fur grow.

“I understand. I’ll search for that Doradora with you.”

Children were exchanging uneasy glances, but there was no need for worry. Once I used the bestowed upon me by the Evil Dragon Lord power and opened my third eye— No, I shouldn’t. I was prohibited from using my powers thoughtlessly. Using it for mere children play was out of the question.

Which meant I should only rely on my five common senses. I closed my eyes and strained my ears, picking up sounds throughout the town. Excluding the footsteps of humans, horses and cattle, searching for other characteristic sounds of footsteps—

“This is...”

Catching the sound of footsteps she heard before, Reiko furrowed her eyebrows. Because these were footsteps, which shouldn't have been there.

“We'll have to leave playing for later. I've something to take care of first.”

She pulled out her dagger, resolutely kicking off the ground. She was quite slower than when using all her strength, even so the scenery was changing rapidly. She jumped over the few laid out in place of walls waterways and headed towards the town's outskirts. During that time, it seemed an alarm bell urging people to evacuate resounded inside the town, but it didn't concern Reiko.

When I crossed the stone bridge leaving the town's area, I immediately saw my target. A mass of riding on horses and holding bows soldiers was lined up in a battle formation. Everyone's gaze was cast towards that fellow.

“That's why, please, put down your weapons. I didn't come to attack the town. I don't want to fight, even a little bit. I just came to apologize to Miss Saintess as atonement for my... Eep! Kin girl! I-I-It's not how it looks like. I didn't come here to do anything evil. Please, please just listen to me!”^[2]

One who swore to never again assault human villages and to return to his native forest—the three-headed elephant met the other day was there.

^[1] Changed Dora to Doradora.

^[2] The elephant is using ツス at the end of his sentences, which is a yanki like manner of speech.

Chapter 25

A far more terrifying person

“Don’t get deceived! It’s clear he came to assault the town! Shoot!”

Simultaneously with the commanding from the rear mounted archer’s shout, a cloud of arrows was released towards the elephant demon. Unlike the adventurers’ town we visited previously, it seemed few skilled people were here. After all, the might of discharged arrows exhibited only an average level of training.

Nonetheless, they appeared to recognize their lack of ability. Despite confronting the three-headed elephant, it could be seen they were constantly conscious of their means of retreat. The loosely scattered files of troops weren’t pressing down the enemy with attacks, while also allowing themselves a path of retreat.

Most likely, once the situation turned for worse after causing some injuries with the projectiles, they intended to take refuge in the town under the Saintess’ protection.

“I’m telling ya— I don’t want to fight!”

However, that that hit-and-run tactic was only effective, if one could cause damage to the enemy. The three-headed elephant rotated his three noses like a windmill, using them as a shield and knocking down all the arrows mid-air.

Then he put on airs waving his nose,

“Hahaha, you saw that? Though I look like this, I’m the kind who can do whatever he wants with style. If you understood the difference in our strength, calm down and listen to—”

“What did you come here for? If you came to assault this town and incorrigibly break the oath you swore to the Evil Dragon Lord, I won’t have mercy.”

At that point, Reiko was already holding a dagger over the elephant’s heads. It was a stance that, if he were to display any disturbing behaviour, she’d cut off all of his heads in an instant.

“I am sorry. I got carried away.”

“As long as you understand. So, what did you come here for?”

“More importantly, kin girl. The arrows are coming again.”

“Right.”

When Reiko lightly waved her hand, all the arrows were blown away in a different direction. Then at last, the soldiers seemed to notice Reiko standing above the elephant, all of them wearing the same stunned expression.

“As expected from kin girl.”

“No need for poor compliments. I am now prohibited from exercising the Evil Dragon Lord’s power. As kin, I’m in a close to powerless state. There’s nothing to boast about.”

“Ah, that so? I’m like, super embarrassed that I got carried away before. Please forget about it.”

When the three-headed elephant was showing his embarrassment, the soldiers collectively started screaming.

“Y-You there! It’s dangerous, get away from that demon quickly!”

“She probably can’t. She most likely was taken hostage. You bastard, how despicable—”

“Wait there! We’re going to save you!”

“Everyone, calm down. This child, she looks like a normal girl, but she’s the subordinate of that Evil Dragon Reivendia.”

Oh, then we can take it easy. This atmosphere of relief spread among the soldiers, and after a short while, all members stiffened like statues.

“Then isn’t this even worse?! The evil dragon has finally called his demon subordinates to destroy the town!”

“Ku—, so our road ends here... You damned evil dragon...”

“I’m gonna do it. I’ll face them here and awaken my real power!”

“Give it up, you’ll just die in vain like trash. We’ve no choice but to run under the Saintess’ protection.”

Reiko dejectedly listened to the soldiers talking, and said,

“That’s not good. Not good at all. The Evil Dragon Lord is being misunderstood, even though he has no intention of bringing harm to this city.”

“Because Evil Dragon Boss is a kind person.”

“He’s not only kind. He encompasses both the kindness and strictness, overflowing with inexhaustible virtue, a grand person forever mesmerizing all beings. Be sure to engrave it in your heart.”

“Yes.”

“If you understood, give me your neck. Once I execute you here, I’ll prove that you’re unrelated to the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“It looks like you didn’t inherit the Evil Dragon Boss’ kindness.”

“That’s not true. I’ve the kindness to finish you off quickly and painlessly, so don’t struggle. If you do, I might miss your vitals.”

When the three-headed elephant started to struggle and tried to escape, Reiko gripped him by the scruff of his neck with one hand. With the other hand she raised her dagger and aimed it at the top of his head, but—— she changed her mind and stored it in her sheath.

“E-Eh? You’ll let me go?”

“There’s some truth to what you’re saying. Certainly, compared to the Evil Dragon Lord, I might be narrow-minded. Today, I was also scolded for this reason.”

“Aah, that’s why you said you were forbidden from using your powers. Frankly speaking, it didn’t feel to me like you were prohibited though.”

What is he saying, Reiko thought. I’m not using the dragon kin’s [Claws], [Wings] and

all the other powers, so am I not restraining myself properly? After receiving the Evil Dragon Lord's divine protection, my body got a tiny bit stronger, but it's within a margin of error.

“Well, as long as you listen it's all good. Actually, till just a few days ago I wanted to capture this city.”

“I was right after all.”

“I'd prefer if you stopped putting a cold thing against my neck while I'm in the middle of talking. I think that, if it was the Evil Dragon Boss with his vast magnanimity, he'd listen to the end.”

“In that case, I'm going to listen a little more.”

Incidentally, the soldiers were clamorously disputing during their conversation, but since Reiko wasn't really interested, she left them alone.

“It's because, even though I look like this I was a member of the Demon King's army. I'm a minion of an underling though. Ah, that's not right, past tense. Now it's not the Demon King, instead I swear my allegiance to the Evil Dragon Boss. I never met him, but someone like the Demon King has to be gloomy with no popularity, obviously a guy who can't hold a candle to the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Good.”

“And so, I was trying to sabotage the Saintess' barrier protecting the town, but it was hard. The Saintess here is like, super strong, and she drives away the half-baked demons. Me too, drawing near the waterways was the best I could do.”

“To struggle with that small fry, pathetic. We passed through easily.”

Reiko felt some resistance, but the Evil Dragon Lord seemed to not even have felt an obstacle.

“Because you two are exceptional. So— What I came here for, was, like, to apologize for what I did, and to like give a heads-up or something.”

“A heads-up?”

Yeah, the elephant nodded.

“To tell you the truth I also learnt it recently, but the Saintess here is a demon. She’s like an incarnation of a bottomless swamp. And for some reason, it gushes out of the spring and coexists with humans.”

“Please, don’t look down on us. We already saw through it.”

“Ah, you knew? Then it makes it easier. Though late, the Demon King’s army guys also caught wind of it, and apparently devised a strategy. It is to——”

“Rouga^[1], it seems you’re getting along with humans quite well.”

With a thud, the sound of wings came from above. Reiko looked up to the sky. Blocking the morning sun with its back, there was an enormous body dancing in the air.

A covered with silver scales, possessing sharp horns and fangs—— dragon. He looked down on the soldiers, as if ridiculing them, and turned his gaze to the three-headed elephant. However, the elephant was not perturbed.

“Deplorable. How deplorable. For you to, as one of us, proud demons, surrender to humans and spit out information.”

“...Senior? That’s right. From now on, I decided to get along with humans, so I plan to spill the strategy.”

“You think this I, will forgive you?”

“I don’t think you’ll forgive me, but I learned of a far more terrifying person than senior.”

“Nonsense!”

The furious silver dragon came flying in. The three-headed elephant was unable to move, while the soldiers raised a scream and started running about trying to escape.

While Reiko was observing the dragon, she murmured in a whisper.

“This is, Doradora...?”

He didn't appear either obedient or smart, but for the time being, she decided to capture him alive for the children's sake, so she sheathed her dagger and formed a fist.

In the morning town, echoed a brisk and refreshing sound of hitting.

[1] His name in kanji, 六牙象, means the six-tusked elephant.

Chapter 26

The true aim

“I’m glad I found you. The children will surely be happy.”

Looking down upon the lying on the ground unconscious silver dragon, Reiko dusted off her hands. “Senior, look what you’ve done...” The three-headed elephant was lamenting next to the dragon.

“Now then, let’s strike while the iron is hot. I’ve to make you into a children’s toy right away.”

Just like that, she started pulling the heavy dragon by his tail, dragging him to the town. Then, one of the dazedly staring soldiers came running over in a hurry. A knight in his prime smiled stiffly, saying,

“Y-Young lady? What do you intend to do with that dragon?”

“The town’s children were looking for him. Looks like they want to play and feed him.”

“Erm yeah. That has to be some mistake, I think.”

“That’s not true. There aren’t that many dragons. This one has to be Doradora, I’m sure of it.”

“No, no, it’d be dangerous for them to play with a dragon. Besides, there aren’t that many children either.”

“There were 5 or 6 of them.”

“Oh, Lady Saintess...”

The soldier covered his eyes and turned towards the heavens. When Reiko let out a sigh, thinking he finally agreed, there was someone else running after her. It was the three-headed elephant.

“Kin girl, wait a minute.”

“You still here? Since I found Doradora, I’m busy over here. If you got no intention to attack the town, you can make yourself scarce. Go back to your forest.”

“That’s not it. I’m sure senior can’t be that Doradora. It’s not even mistaking a person, but a dragon.^[1] Unless one’s extremely strong, if a demon tries to enter the town the Saintess’ barrier will prevent it. Senior isn’t an exception. If someone tries to enter forcefully, his body will be torn into pieces.”

Reiko stopped her feet for only an instant, but she got a new idea and resumed walking forward.

“In that case, even if it’s just a torn head, I just have to deliver it. It’s enough for a game, where you need to feed it.”

“That has to be really horrible for the upbringing. If you made the children play such a crazy game, their parents would break down crying.”

“T-That’s right! Please, don’t make them do something like that...!”

While the knight in his prime turned his ardent gaze towards the three-headed elephant, both of them nodded many times over. For some reason, it seemed like a strange sense of connection was about to be born between a demon and a human.

“Besides, what I want to say, is that senior isn’t able to enter this town, so there’s no way he met the children before. That’s why, isn’t the Doradora children talked about someone else?”

Reiko leaked an “Ah” and let go of her grip. It was a blind spot. Certainly, if he was Doradora, yet at the same time couldn’t enter the town, the fact he was fed yesterday would be a contradiction.

However—

“Is the Saintess’ barrier really that strong?”

Reiko narrowed her eyes and asked. According to Reiko’s experience, the resistance was akin to tearing through a thin paper. If it was that much, were the other demons to hold out a little, they should be able to get through.

“Nah, there might be absolutely no effect for you and the Evil Dragon Boss, but it’s a menace to us. If you don’t believe me, you can try throwing senior towards the waterway at the town’s boundary. He’ll bounce off of it for sure.”

“Okay, I’ll try it.”

The soldier only put his hands together, offering a prayer to the Saintess. Arriving at the town’s boundary, Reiko lightly tossed the silver dragon in the waterway’s direction.

If the three-headed elephant’s words were correct, he shouldn’t be able to cross above the waterway, and instead should be flicked outside the town.

— However, as if it was the most natural thing to happen, the silver dragon’s body entered the waterway raising a large splash of water and started going under.

“Ah, senior! No good! He’s going to drown!”

Three-headed elephant, who was the first one to say the unexpected result, ran up to the waterway, stretched his noses and began the rescue operation. During that time, it looked like the elephant also wasn’t going to get repelled by the waterway.

“I knew it, that Saintess’ strength doesn’t amount to much. This one has to be Doradora. Yesterday, I’m sure he had entered the town stealthily and got fed by them.”

“No, leaving aside the case of the barrier, senior isn’t a person with such gentle hobbies.”

“Everyone has a side they want to hide.”

“Oh... Senior, by some chance, did you really like to hang out with kids...?”

Looking just like a drowned body, the silver dragon was pulled out of the waterway.

“Anyway, it’s weird. When we attacked this barrier in the past, neither me nor senior were able to get through. It’s true.”

It doesn’t appear like he’s lying. Since this elephant has sworn his allegiance to the Evil Dragon Lord, surely he wouldn’t play some stupid games.

“Kukuku... It seems like our strategy was a success...”

The silver dragon regained his consciousness unnoticed, resounding with a fearless laughter. However, it seemed he couldn't move his body, all the while spouting out water from his mouth, being in a near-death state.

“Strategy?”

The one who answered Reiko's query was the three-headed elephant.

“Ah, yeah. It totally slipped my mind. The first stage of the Demon King army's plan was to have senior act as a decoy and weaken the barrier's strength. Even if senior didn't break it, as long as he attacked it with all of his strength, he'd be able to focus some of the Saintess' magic power on the barrier.”

“That's right. Both the Saintess and you guys have completely fallen for it. To have panicked because of my, the great dragon of violent winds fierce attack and lost sight of the true threat, how foolish you have to...”

“Senior, are you okay? There wasn't anything close to a fierce attack. Maybe you were dreaming?”

Reiko silenced the silver dragon by stepping on his snout.

“Most likely, the reason the barrier was suspended is the Evil Dragon Lord. A short while ago, the Evil Dragon Lord has gone to meet the Saintess. Surely, she has withdrawn all of her power from town and should be using it in self-defence—although it's a complete waste of effort.”

“Saintess, you poor thing.”

“And so, elephant. What does the Demon King's army intend to do after weakening the Saintess' barrier? Hurry up and speak.”

“I'll speak, I will. I don't plan to hide anything from you.”

Once elephant blew all the water from his noses, he started explaining.

“The high-ranking demon commanding the whole region around here is a fairly peculiar fellow. He doesn't have his own body— he's a spirit demon, so to speak, who

resonates with the wicked humans' or demons' hearts, seizing their bodies.”

Originally, Saintess was also a demon, he added.

“The point is, when senior was acting as a decoy, that guy was supposed to haunt the Saintess and make her heart return to the time, when she was a bottomless swamp demon. Because once he accomplished that, this whole town would turn into a swamp and sink under. But, well, it's fine, isn't it? As long as the Evil Dragon Boss is nearby, that rascal will just get wiped out if he even tries to approach the Saintess.”

That's it? Thought Reiko with relief.

“You're absolutely right. Seeing that the Evil Dragon Lord is besides her, there's completely no reason she'd get manipulated by that guy. If there is, she'd just earn the Evil Dragon Lord's wrath and get erased.”

“Naah, there's no way. Evil Dragon Boss is a benevolent person, he wouldn't do something like that.”

“Saintess' stupidity might even surpass the Evil Dragon Lord's magnanimous nature. She's a staunch fool.”

“That true? Then I wonder how it—”

It was at that time. In one breath, the town's ground was tinged with the black colour of impure mire, and a row of buildings began to slowly sink under.

Chapter 27

What exactly is Lady Saintess?

I was dragged into the puddle of water inside the inn's hallway. *It's just a puddle of water, why is it so deep—* I was able to think leisurely only for a moment, afterwards I was in a frantic struggle, desperately seeking air.

However, I wasn't able to float to the surface.

There was nothing surprising about that. Since Lady Saintess clung to my forelimbs with both of her arms, trying to pull me to the bottom. I was suffocating, my face distorted with the pain of impending death, but Lady Saintess' face looked even worse. No, I should say her face showed her resolve. Once anyone saw it, they'd know. It was an expression of a warrior wanting to defeat his opponent at any cost.

Please stop. Just calm down and listen. There's no value in giving your all when aiming for someone like me.

"H-H-How's that—! It hurts, right—! It's because I've gathered here a—all of the demon repelling water from town! I-If you want to surrender, now's the chance—!"

I really want to, but nothing except foam is coming out of my mouth. Or rather, the demon repelling water doesn't matter. Just normal water is plenty enough for me to die.

I'm done for, it happened right when I gave up hope.

Reiko's dense and dreadful bloodthirst went through the space filled up with water.

Normally, identifying the person who released his killing intent was an impossible feat for me. Then, if I were to answer why I could assert it was Reiko's bloodthirst, it'd be because I faintly saw a translucent phantom of Reiko thrusting her dagger at Saintess' neck. Her otherworldly figure, which was aiming at someone's life with a terrifying expression, looked just like a vengeful spirit.

After being hit directly with the bloodthirst, Lady Saintess fainted abruptly. As soon as that happened, filling the space water drew back, and what remained was a water level

low enough to only cover my claws, exposing the white floor made of stone. Walls were nowhere to be found. The white space stretched endlessly, no matter how far I looked.

“At the end of the day, I always get saved...”

I was doing nothing but reprimanding her how to use her strength, but now I really was saved. Lady Saintess was still lying on the floor with a pale face, all the while making restless noises. It looked like she was having a nightmare.

Walking up to her timidly, I shook her shoulders using my claws.

“Erm, are you okay? I think there was some misunderstanding, so if you could just calm down and listen...”

“U... Uunn... Ah”

Unexpectedly, Lady Saintess quickly opened her eyes. And then, the moment she met my gaze, her eyes rolled over and she once again lost consciousness.

I didn't really like to badmouth other people, but putting it mildly, she was a tool. Nevertheless, to escape from this space, I had no other way than to talk with her directly, so I decided to persevere patiently. If I were too close she'd just faint again, so I drew a proper distance and lied flat on the ground.

Maybe because I woke up early, or because of my old age, when I sat still I started getting sleepy. *No, I shouldn't*; while thinking this, my eyelids started closing before I knew it—.....

“Please wake up, cute Dragon.”

I woke up to someone caressing my head. *Are these the yesterday's children*— when I opened my eyes, what I saw was actually Lady Saintess standing before me and patting my head.

“Eh? Ara?”

Lady Saintess smiled in response to my bewilderment, and for some reason started explaining very quickly.

“You nearly drowned in the town’s waterway. I saved you. That’s why, you being dragged under the water has to be some mistake.”

She judged that her plan of drowning me failed, so she switched to the excuse mode. I was expressionless; it was too much of an abrupt change in attitude for me, but if I were to argue poorly here, she might again attack me desperately with the intention to bring both of us down.

“Then I’ve to thank you for your help. By the way, where are we? A companion is waiting for me, so I’d like to quickly return to the inn.”

“Well, this is... Erm... House of a great person. That’s why it’s so big.”

“I see~, a great person’s house, is it?”

It had an extremely innovative layout. Ordinary people didn’t live in a house like this, where to the horizon was nothing but a brilliant white floor layered with water. Maybe God or something. Well, in this town Lady Saintess was an existence similar to a God though.

“Well then, I’m sorry but could you show me the exit?”

“Ah, yes, of course. Then, please turn around for a little bit.”

Why did I have to turn around? I had my doubts, but I did as she instructed. During that time, I could hear rummaging sounds coming from behind me and knew she was doing something.

“Okay, you can turn around. The way back is right here!”

I wondered where she got that from. In a place where there was nothing just a while ago, a superficial door has been prepared. Despite clearly being paper-thin and should lead to nowhere, when Lady Saintess opened it, the scenery of the town’s heart was projected.

“This house’s doors are a bit different— when you pass through them, you’ll get ejected out of the town’s spring, sort of like a fountain. But please don’t worry, okay?”

“I don’t have the confidence to not worry, but I’ll do my best and try not to.”

Just how should I explain it to the praying in front of the spring people? I wonder if they'll accept it if I say I wanted to try playing in water. Although doing that in a sacred spring, I feel I'd be charged with a crime of disrespecting their God.

I stood in front of the door. After preparing myself to escape at any time, I turned around to Lady Saintess while persistently maintaining a low profile.

“By the way, I heard a stupid rumour, but it isn't true that this town's Lady Saintess is a demon, right?”

The moment I looked at her, I knew I screwed up. Lady Saintess opened her eyes wide, trembling visibly.

“A-As expected— that's right. You also knew it, that's why you came here.”

“Erm, excuse me? Umm, I've no ulterior motive at all, I was just a bit worried.”

With a swish, something swirled near my legs. It was the sound of water spread on the floor, which started writhing like a snake and coiled around my leg.

“Eh?”

“But I won't yield! It doesn't matter even if I'm a demon! I'll protect this town”

A big water serpent warped greatly and flung me away from the door. Up high in the air, so high that Lady Saintess looked like a speck of dust.

Most likely, it was simply a throwing technique to keep me from escaping, but if I were to land like this despite not knowing how to break-fall, I'd kick the bucket.

“I'm screwed.”

If I were to die here, Reiko would go berserk. It'd be nothing but a tragedy, be it for her or for humanity.

Contrary to my agitation, the altitude of my fall reached its peak and the floor started to rapidly come closer.

And then finally, gathered on the floor water made a large splash.

However, I kept my consciousness. On the contrary, it didn't even hurt. While striking a slovenly pose on the ground with my limbs spread wide open, I managed to turn my line of sight to face Lady Saintess.

The reason for that spread right under me. The useless weapon given to me by Hunt—black mist had spread under my body like a cushion.

Chapter 28

A sorrowful splash of water

— It was soft and fluffy.

Black mist, which now looked like a squashed ball, had magnificently absorbed shock from the fall and was making peaceful ripples in the water spread on the floor. If I had to say, that softness wrapping my body was similar to a sponge.

“I-I’m sa-ved...”

Once I expressed my relief in broken language due to excessive fear, the black mist returned to my claws with a hissing sound.

I looked up to the heavens, making sure to express my gratitude to Hunt. *Thank you very much. I’m sorry for thinking it was a useless weapon.*

“Perhaps— it became usable when I was at death’s door? If that’s the case, I’ve some hope.”

I wanted to cling to anything now, no matter how slim of a hope that was. I put strength into my claws, just like Hunt said. What sprung up were the same claws as before, about the length of a fly.

As a test I tried scratching the floor, but my claws were only slipping like on ice, not leaving even a scratch.

“Damned Evil Dragon! Prepare yourself!”

When I was wailing in despair over here, Lady Saintess made her next move. In spite of her visible lack of experience, she rushed over while being accompanied by an extra-large wave.

She was planning to drown me again. Last time, I had a lifeboat called Reiko’s bloodthirst, but I was pretty sure there wouldn’t be a next time. Because most likely, Reiko wasn’t aware of what was transpiring here.

Since if she were, Lady Saintess would have already been killed ten times over.

“Or rather, it’s not a time to think about this! Somehow, I need to find a way to escape—”

If I could float at least— the moment I thought that, something twined around my body. I thought it was the controlled by Lady Saintess snake again, but I was wrong. The stretching from my claws black mist made a lap around my torso.

“...Is that, a swimming ring?”

I somehow guessed its use. The moment I took a deep breath, a tremendous amount of water fell onto me from above. Rocked by the mighty waves I lost any semblance of distinction between heaven and earth; still, my body was naturally moving towards one direction. It looked like the swim ring was working.

However, there was someone trying to prevent that. Lady Saintess once again clung to my legs, trying to drown me.

“Stop floating! I’m telling you, you can’t float!”

But unexpectedly, her strength was really meagre. Buoyancy of a swimming ring was stronger than her pull, so my head surfaced in a twinkle. On the contrary, Lady Saintess’ bright red face could be seen underwater, persisting with all of her might. Even so, the swimming ring didn’t appear to budge an inch.

Since I managed to get a little bit of leeway, I tried speaking gently while suppressing my rapidly beating heart.

“Say, Lady Saintess. It seems there’s a misunderstanding, so can’t we calmly talk it over?”

“No way I’m gonna believe it!”

Although underwater, her voice reached me just fine.

“But we can’t continue this tug of war like this, right? I’ve absolutely no intention to fight you, so could you pull back the water?”

“...Really? Ah, but despite being an evil dragon he’s gentle to children, so maybe he’s

not so bad...?”

“Erm, I’m not an evil dragon, but well, it doesn’t really matter now. First, let’s peacefully—”

All of a sudden, Lady Saintess let go of my foot.

“Okay, I understand. However, before we talk, I’m going to absorb your magic power. That’s fine, right? After all, you’ve no intention to fight, right? You don’t mind me cutting your magic power off, do you?”

Somehow, her understanding of the situation suddenly got better. It wasn’t like I didn’t feel a tinge of uneasiness, but I still nodded, saying that it’s fine. It was because, I didn’t possess any magic power to absorb in the first place. Just like one couldn’t pull out water from desert sand, even if you absorbed nothing, there would be no change. After all, I was nothing but a barren land.^[1]

Slowly but steadily, the water level has started receding. In exchange, the water around me seemed to concentrate, intensifying its blue colour.

“Urya!”

Lady Saintess held both of her hands below my eye level. Probably, she was trying to absorb my magic power. I had no subjective symptoms though. Just as I expected, most likely because she couldn’t absorb anything, her face turned bright red like a minute ago.

“Why, why can’t I absorb it? It can’t be that’s the Evil Dragon’s power...? Even though I planned to thoroughly plunder it...”

“What isn’t there can’t be absorbed.”

Using this as a chance I wanted to tell her my real identity, but Lady Saintess’ fighting spirit had already reignited.

“Eei! If I steal here all of the Evil Dragon’s power, I’ll be invincible! After that I’ll be able to hold my head high! Don’t lose! Let’s just absorb it with all my power—!”

“Hey, Lady Saintess, I’m telling you it’s not like that. Or rather watch out, your true intentions are leaking.”

“Quiet, eiya—!”

When Lady Saintess put in more energy than ever, an accident happened.

Probably, Lady Saintess has sucked up the sole magic power enveloping my body—magic power of the secret rejuvenation medicine Ariante gave me.

As a result, effect of the medicine abruptly snapped.

My body, which suddenly became huge, forcefully landed on the ground raising a large splash of water. And being directly under me, Lady Saintess has had her consciousness reaped by a combo of a physical as well as mental shock.

This was the full picture of this tragic drama, which occurred in an instant.

[1] Apparently, 不毛地帯 (Fumō Chitai) is a title of a novel. Its literal translation is “Wasted Land”.

Chapter 29

The fall of Lady Saintess

“Uuu... I don’t care anymore, do whatever you want...”

For a while, Lady Saintess’ eyes were rolling around, but the minute she woke up, she burst into a flood of tears and raised a white flag. It seemed that the moment she saw me, who had returned to his original size, she had lost all of her fighting spirit. Even though I wasn’t strong at all.

“Listen, Lady Saintess.”

“I understand... As you wish, I’ll enter the Demon King’s army or whatever, so please, just don’t lay your hands on the townspeople.”

“Stop arbitrarily creating an evil story and listen to what someone’s saying. You listening? I am not a member of the Demon King’s army.”

When Lady Saintess heard that, she energetically did a kick-up jump.

“You’re not a member of the Demon King’s army— t-then, that rumour really was true? One that, Evil Dragon Reivendia has been dissatisfied with the seat of a top executive and began a rebellion, turning on the Demon King and attempting to take over the world...”

“It’s not even remotely true.”

There wasn’t anything correct in her sentence. First of all, my name wasn’t Evil Dragon Reivendia. I also never was a top executive of the Demon King’s army, not to mention rebelling against him. Practically everything was thanks to the harmful rumours brought about by Reiko.

“Actually, I’m pretty similar to a huge lizard. I’m far from what you’re taking me for. I’ve no intention to do anything to this town, so you can calm down.”

“Ah...? Then, what about that terrifying girl...?”

“Regarding that, I also have trouble dealing with her.”

I collapsed on the floor and started worrying. *I wonder what Reiko is doing right now. It'd be nice if she hasn't brought a lot of trouble to the townspeople. I told her to play freely, but since I've had her out of my sights for so long, I have gotten really worried.*

“...? Well, so basically, that child is the real Evil Dragon Reivendia?”

“Your way of thinking is quite weird, but after doing a whole circle you're actually not that far off.”

“In that case, you're something like a sacrifice given to the evil dragon?”

“Ah, yeah. You're pretty much right.”

Lady Saintess straightforwardly prodded the heart of the matter. Surprisingly, she might be pretty smart. If she were to say that in front of Reiko though, it'd end with an instant execution.

“By the way, that thing you said before, you were invited to the Demon King's army?”

Lady Saintess, wiping her tears, answered,

“Yes, that's right. I was told that, if I were to become a member of the Demon King's army and shoulder the burden of being an accomplice in exterminating the humankind, this town would be spared... Still, if the whole world were to become a den of demons and only this place would be safe, wouldn't that be even more horrifying? It'd be hard to live peacefully, wouldn't it?”

“It'd become an immensely bizarre town.”

At the very least, I absolutely wouldn't want to live there. Anyway, with this I could rest easy. The remark Reiko said, that Lady Saintess was a member of the Demon King's army; after inferring with her sixth sense the surrounding it circumstances, she must have jumped to the wrong conclusion.

Even I thought that bringing the sixth sense as the basis of an argument broke the rule of common sense, but I decided to stop applying reason to her.

“That's why I refused their invitation. However, I heard that a few days ago the

neighbouring adventurers' town has suffered a large fire, caused by the demon invasion. Apparently the Demon King's army has put there a lot of effort and filled everyone's hearts with dread..."

"If we're talking about that place, everything's okay. Quite a lot of buildings were burned, but it seemed like there were almost no human casualties. The reconstruction probably shouldn't take long."

"Oh, is that true?"

"Yep, it is. As luck would have it we were there, and Reiko lent a hand. Even though she's like that, she has her kind side."

Lady Saintess gleefully stood up, clenching her fist.

"Then, that Evil Dragon Lord disguised as a young girl Reiko is planning to defeat the Demon King, right?!"

"Reiko is Reiko, she's different from an evil dragon, so don't lump them together."

However, it looked like the words of an animal, who was nothing more than a sacrifice, were of no concern to Lady Saintess.

"Since it's decided, I'm leaving the subjugation in her hands! Just you wait, wicked three-heads—! You'll learn the fear of a genuine Evil Dragon, serves you right—!"

"I think I happen to know who you're talking about, but if it's that elephant, he should've already returned home."

He couldn't have been a run-of-the-mill demon, so saying a three-headed elephant 9 out of 10 times had to be about that pitiful fellow.

"Oh? Has Lady Reiko subdued him already?"

Lady Saintess, who abruptly turned around, was now naturally calling her Lady. A dangerous sign. It might spur Reiko's delusions even further. Above all, if she were to disregard me and treat Reiko like an Evil Dragon, her neck would be sent flying.

"Ahh, as one could expect from a fellow demon. I've nothing but respect for her!"

Now she had finally been categorized as a demon. I cried a little when thinking about Reiko's future.

"Ah, by the way, lizard."

"Make sure to never call me that in front of Reiko, okay?"

"I'm really sorry for putting you in danger because of a simple misunderstanding. Forgive me."

One could say it was sudden, but Lady Saintess obediently lowered her head. Since I only thought of her as a bit of an unfortunate idiot, I was slightly taken aback by her admirable action.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, I'm just a bit surprised. I always thought the demons were only atrocious, but it seems like you've been friendly with humans from the beginning."

"That's not true. Even I started off as a really fiendish demon. Thanks to the townspeople I was able to change for the better."

"It's hard to believe."

It was like I couldn't imagine her as a fiend. Even when she was trying to drown me, what stood out was her desperation rather than atrociousness.

Anyhow, I was glad that now we could afford to have a friendly chat. It seemed I'd be able to leave town peacefully.

"Well then, shall we return to town? I'll open a passage to the spring."

When Lady Saintess had clapped her hands, an extra-large door matching my body size appeared in the space. Once the double door had opened soundlessly, what stretched before my eyes was a view of the spring shrine.

At that time, something flew in here from amidst that scenery. It was an emerald green grasshopper. I thought it was a normal insect, but I realized otherwise when he passed through the door. Because a queer rotten smell followed him.

“That’s a putrid corpse locust^[1], isn’t it? A low grade demon, which flocks to crops spreading around a rotten smell.”

It was a popular demon, so even I had knowledge of it. As long as it wasn’t a swarm, they were basically no different from the usual pest.

“Oh, but wasn’t there a barrier preventing demons from entering this town? Hey, Lady Saintess, what happened to—”

There was no answer. Lady Saintess had petrified. When I looked closely, the putrid corpse locust was sitting on her head.

“...Is she bad with bugs? Oi, if you’re troubled I can drive it away.”

I plodded slowly, moving to rescue Lady Saintess. However, when I looked upon her once she turned around, I was so terrified that my knees gave way.

“ [—Sink—the town—] ”

Her face was dyed purple, and her eyes shined bright red.

The moment she had raised her hand, the whole surface of the ground outside transformed into a swamp.

[1] It’s 死臭蝗 in Japanese, read as shishuukou. Literal translation would be locust with a smell of a putrid corpse.

Chapter 30

Lady Saintess returning to the past

“Hey, what’s wrong with you suddenly? Your eyes look scary. Plus, there’s that whole ‘sinking the town’ deal.”

“I am a water demon— I thrive on humans’ bottomless despair—”

“It’s no good. Maybe she respects Reiko too much.”

I haven’t seen such sudden change since Reiko’s awakening. Whether it was her remarks or lack of judgement, they both were similar. I hunched my body and drew near her face.

“Wake up, Lady Saintess. I doubt anything good is waiting for you down this road. You’re idolized by everyone in this town, so don’t purposely go and make them all draw back.”

“Sink... Mud... Let all and everything be swallowed.”

“Haah, she really went all-out this time. I wonder what’s wrong with her.”

Yet, even while saying so, I still had some composure left. Even though she fell into darkness, in comparison to Reiko, its severity was much lower. Frankly? It lacked vigour. The time when Ariante was playing the Demon King’s subordinate was more terrifying.

“For now, I guess I’ll take her to Reiko and have her persuade Lady Saintess. Once she’s warned by the object of her worship, she should open her eyes.”

“Kukuku... Writhe within my mire, foolish humans...”

I grabbed Lady Saintess with my teeth by the collar and passed through the door with her dangling from my mouth. The second my feet stepped on the door’s boundary, I got sucked in rapidly and flew out of the spring like a fountain. I barely avoided letting go of Lady Saintess.

“Ouch.”

I arrived with a splash. Good thing the ground had turned into soft mud.

“Watch... This is the mire of the Abyss... It will drag you all the way down to hell...”

I checked my feet. It was a normal mud. It wasn't anything nearly as bad as Lady Saintess had said. I wasn't sinking much, even with the weight of my large build. If one didn't move at all, he'd go down just a little bit, but anyone could break free by taking a single step. Its stickiness also wasn't too bad. It was clear, however, that anyone could see the small damage dealt to structures, which couldn't move on their own. Although the sinking would stop at a certain depth, the slowly listing private houses probably couldn't avoid being submerged up to the first floor. The repair costs seemed to be increasing.

I put Lady Saintess on the ground. Instead of standing on her feet, she just had simply toppled sideways and became half submerged in mud.

“Hey, listen. You can't do something like this simply because you were in the mood. Haven't the crops just been planted? If you make the ground muddy like this, their roots will rot.”

“Everything will sink into the dark depths of the earth...”

“Haah, even after all this it's still useless. There's no helping it.”

I inhaled in a hurry and shouted randomly while surveying my surroundings.

“He—ey, Reiko. If you're somewhere close, come here for a second.”

At that moment, enormous jet-black wings spread in the sky at the outskirts of town. It was a flight far exceeding the speed of sound. The owner of those wings approached instantaneously, while pulling along a ring of clouds created by the shockwave.

“I have made all haste to join you, Evil Dragon Lord.”

Reiko kneeled, folding her wings. *Let's not summon her thoughtlessly from now on*, I firmly vowed in my heart.

I thought to ask her to reform Lady Saintess, but I first inquired about what was

bugging me.

“Ah, well. First of all, Reiko, did anything strange happen when I wasn’t around?”

“Excluding this mud, there wasn’t much. I made the earnest effort to play with children.”

“Ah, I see. I’m glad. What game did you try to play with them?”

“I was searching for a docile dragon, called Doradora, since it looked like the children wanted to feed him.”

I broke out in a cold sweat.

“A, aah—... Yeah. And what happened? Does it look like you’ll find him?”

“I have already secured a dragon fitting the description.”

I wonder what dragon exactly had the misfortune to be caught. Anyway, I can’t do much more than say I’m sorry.

“I wanted to cut off his head and use it for the feeding game— however, at that time the town turned into the current state of affairs. I decided it’s not the time to play and discontinued it temporarily.”

“Wow, that’s some game alright. Was that supposed to be a heathen ritual?”

Despite trying to maintain my calm mental state, my legs were trembling like those of a fawn. That was because, if I was to make one wrong step, my future would be that very spectacle of playing with my head like a toy. I was really glad she stopped. After an experience like that, someone’s going to have to tend to the captured dragon’s mind.

“Incidentally, Evil Dragon Lord. The one laying there, is that the Saintess?”

“Ah, that’s right. Because of her, there’s a thing I need to ask you for.”

“Understood.”

“Sheathe your dagger.”

She didn't understand at all. She was clearly planning to finish her off.

"I don't really know how to say it, but that child really respects— err, rather, she'd like to become friends with you."

Reiko made an extremely disgusted face. She even indignantly pouted a little.

"Inconceivable. She has ridiculed the Evil Dragon Lord many times over. I won't forgive her."

"Don't say it like that. As an evil dragon's kin, size of the vessel is also important."

"...Is that how it is?"

Somehow, she gave me a nod. Now we can have her persuade Lady Saintess. If Reiko said something along the lines of "A true demon can't cause only fear", she should open her eyes.

"However, Evil Dragon Lord, at the moment it seems she's being controlled. According to what I heard, an executive of the Demon King's army— a demon capable of manipulating people's hearts has planned to possess the Saintess. I can feel a heterogeneous magic power dwelling inside Saintess' spirit."

"Ah?"

She was being controlled? I was bewildered by this out-of-the-blue information. Wait, certainly that sudden change was abnormal. I had been numbed by Reiko's precedent. The grasshopper demon that flew in that time— he might have carried that executive to her.

"Evil Dragon Lord also should have felt that. Why did you let the Demon King's executive go and possess the Saintess? Are you, after all, planning to deal with them all at once?"

No good. It surely had to be incomprehensible from Reiko's point of view. The fact that, of all people, the Evil Dragon Reivendia would have overlooked a scheme of the Demon King's executive and let the town submerge in mud was an inconceivable blunder.

"— Good grief, you don't even understand that? You got yourself quite a dull kin, Reivendia."

When I turned my gaze to the unexpected voice, there was a figure standing on the house's roof with her arms folded. She was clad in heavy armour and helmet, but one couldn't feel weight from her light movements.

"Who are you?"

"Ah— Ariante? Why are you here?"

"You're asking me why? Enough with the games, Evil Dragon Lord."

Ariante jumped off on the ground. I didn't know what kind of technique it was, but she wasn't sinking at all, despite wearing armour on the swamp."

"This town's guard had begged me through the guild, saying "An infamous evil dragon has come, please send help". Of course, I know that you've no intention to hurt humans. Still, I doubted conveying that through a messenger would get rid of their anxiety. That's why I came personally, to talk with them directly."

Rejoice Reivendia, Ariante continued.

"You can expect to have the price on your head temporarily suspended. Since putting a bounty on someone proactively cooperating with humans is just way too rude."

"Hmph. From the beginning, the Evil Dragon Lord wasn't someone to be hunted by the likes of you humans."

My heart was dancing with joy. It seemed like I'd be able to eat fine grass today.

"Ah right— Ariante. If it's fine with you, could you give Reiko an explanation? My intentions in regards to this case, that is."

She came to help with perfect timing. Honestly, I really didn't feel like I could make an excuse this time. In these circumstances, I even might've had to go with Reiko's conjecture, that I wanted to round all of them up.

"Eee..."

However, Ariante brought me to despair by uttering a meaningless sound.

'Don't eee me! Didn't you think of something and come to help?'

'I bought you some time to think, didn't I? You can think now. If you don't hurry and cover up your incompetence, a new evil dragon will emerge.'

'No way, no way, no way! After all, I'm old and slow-witted.'

That exchange unfolded in an instant, using only our gazes. Reiko's mood was visibly dropping. She probably couldn't stomach that, me and Ariante were behaving as if we came to a mutual understanding.

"Evil Dragon Lord, teach me your intentions too, if you please——"

Ariante gave me thumbs up with a solemn face.

So she's saying good luck? Curse you. Since it's come to this, I've no choice but to go with something like "There's no point unless you guess it yourself". She may possibly go on a rampage with a convenient interpretation like she always does, but needs must when the devil drives.

It happened exactly when I opened my mouth.

"Hey, everyone! Rejoice! It's a blessing of Lady Saintess! For the first time in well over 100 years, a mud festival!"

Bustling, the townspeople rushed out of the buildings—— everyone was wearing wide geta^[1] designed for walking on swamp—— and they cheered repeatedly.

A resident passed by me when I was standing dumbfounded. Holding two wine barrels under his arms with a flushed face like a boiled octopus, he likely flew out from a tavern somewhere. Then, he looked at Lady Saintess while laughing from the bottom of his belly.

"Oi, that lass lying over there has already started drinking? It's going to take a while, so don't rush it too much. After all, for the mud of blessing to well up, it hasn't happened since grandfather's times. Everyone's going to use heaps of saved up money for the festival, and people's excitement won't settle down for one or two nights."

Like that, he ran through the town while sending the mud flying with each of his drunken steps. He wasn't perturbed even when seeing me in my original form, probably because he was either greatly drunk or too festive to pay attention, or most likely it was a combination of both.

Suddenly, from somewhere came the resounding sounds of drums and other instruments. When I looked closely, it turned out that most of the town's warehouses had raised floors and weren't affected by the swamp.

"Erm, Reiko. This is, well..."

While I was troubled and couldn't think of what to say next, a crying voice came from near my feet. It was Lady Saintess in demon-mode, who covered her face and shed tears.

"Why... Even though I'm doing my best, making a swamp... Don't cultivate it... Stop picking it up as you please... It's a special mud to sink people... Stop saying how it's the best thing for soil... I beg you, someone sink please..."

I pretty much understood now how this town came to be, and the reason Lady Saintess turned out like that.

[1] Geta are pretty much japanese wooden sandals.

Chapter 31

Unseen glorious victory

The town's preparation for a sudden onset of swamp were flawless.

The sinking was taken into account when constructing town's essential facilities, which in turn helped keep the damages to minimum. They had also stocked up on the necessary materials for the temporary mending of common buildings, while the materials for permanent repairs were ordered smoothly through the guild. All the expenses were covered by the town administration's "Lady Saintess' Mud Festival Fund".

As per the original prediction, this year's harvest would decrease due to the damage to many crops caused by the mud, but there was no need to worry. As a result of Lady Saintess not making the mud gush forth in approximately 100 years, the accumulated fund had long ago reached sky-high levels. There was an excessive sum reserved for damage compensation, while the festival budget itself was also virtually inexhaustible.

On top of that, the mud was fertile, which made the next few years of harvest more than promising.

"— Or so they say."

Ariante finished her explanation.

"I guess there can be nothing more humiliating as a demon than someone taking such airtight countermeasures against you."

I was admiring the festivities, after I took advantage of a commotion caused by the festival to safely retrieve my medicine from the inn and once again turn into my mini size. At the square in front of the spring, a play was being held, praising Lady Saintess' blessing upon this town. With big gestures, a narrator was emotionally explaining the state of affairs.

'Our ancestors, the founders of this town, were forced to flee for their very lives from their homeland by demons. Compelled to escape through dangerous, demon infested

plains, they banded together in cooperation to defend against the dangers in those wild spaces where demons ran rampant. Searching, searching for a land they could finally settle and find again the peace they sought. Just when they began to despair, losing hope their dreams would be lost, they found, right there in the middle of the plains, a miraculous swamp – a swamp gifted with wide expanses of fertile mud welling up bountifully from the earth.'

"You set up your trap in the middle of the plains? Being able to see it clearly, no wonder no one fell for it."

Lady Saintess was still in her demon state, lying face down and sobbing bitterly. The townspeople took her for a maudlin drunk, so no one paid any attention to her.

Actors were reading out poor lines on an improvised stage, created by laying down planks on the swamp.

'Oh my! What excellent looking soil this looks like! Even though it is a muddy swamp filled with mud, it is well drained and has many good nutrients that probably make it good for growing things in it.'

'And if we were to filter it to take the dirt out of the mud we could even easily get drinking water from it, that's how lovely this mud is!'

'What's more, the demons aren't approaching near here at all, are they!'

Probably the reason low-grade demons didn't draw near was it being another's turf.

Come to think of it, the settlers had to have some extraordinary guts to do something bold like that. In less than 3 days after arriving, they had grasped the mud's special characteristics, and devised a perfect way of using it effectively.

Humans' drive to live is amazing, I was simply full of admiration in my heart.

Lady Saintess, who remembered her painful past, was still crying.

"...Sniff... Humans ganged up on me and, and grew food in mee... Even though I did, I did my best by blending mud every day, but then nobody hardly ever fell in... Even when someone sometimes fell in, they just pulled out their legs like it was normal... And and and, they just picked up mud as they pleased? And then went and sprinkled it on the ground around here..."

“There, there. You’ve just made the ratio of the blend a bit too suitable for agriculture. Don’t feel so down about it.”

Well, taking into account the fact that the caught people were able to escape easily, she clearly failed as the bottomless swamp.

The play was beginning to enter the first harvest stage.

‘How can this be! Although the harvest is right around the corner, you’re telling me the demons are coming?!’

‘Oh no... Just when we thought to have at last found our new home, it’s going to be snatched away by demons again... ‘

It looked like a demon strong enough to not fear stepping on someone’s turf had appeared. When I was watching the play feeling nervous as to what was going to happen next, from behind the stage a man wearing a demon mask made an entrance.

‘Wahaha— I came to assault this town—’

And the one who responded by reading her lines in a monotonous voice was a girl entering similarly from the back, wearing an azure wig.

‘I won’t let you! I will protect this town and its people!’

A thunderous applause had welcomed her entrance. The narrator then delivered his lines with a zealous voice.

‘At that time, the one who revealed her honourable figure to protect the town had been the Lady Saintess herself. Yes, she was the guardian spirit of the gushing swamp in the plains. And to her, who had splendidly driven away the demon, settlers have decided to offer their faith. ‘

“...Because... Because... That’s because, it’d be really frustrating if he snatched my territory... They took so much of my mud, they had to know I wanted to prey on them...”

“I guess they ruined it in all sorts of ways.”

However, I hardly ever got to see a play, so no matter how bad it was, I thought it to be

pretty fun. They continued with the background explanation.

‘Around the time when the town started growing bigger, the swamp suddenly turned into a pure spring.’

“...They were using my mud, so I tried pulling instead of pushing...”

‘Taking it as a blessing, everybody drew waterways in an effort to cultivate the fields even further. ‘

Lady Saintess was rolling around in anguish. It seemed she was having a vicarious experience from the last few hundred years.

Like that, the drawn-out play continued,

“And now in this town, we live here. Come now everyone, let us offer our gratitude to Lady Saintess.”

They closed it with those words of prayer.

“Look, they’re making an offering to you.”

I peeked at Lady Saintess’, while she was sitting grasping her knees and facing the mountain of materials placed around here.

Oh? I thought. Even though her face is tainted purple from the demon erosion, a normal skin colour is returning to around half of it.

“I-I see... Maybe everyone depending on me isn’t that bad... Somehow, I’m welling up with a mysterious strength, maybe watching them a little more before eating them is also fine...”

She was grinning. Somehow, I’m relieved. We might have crossed the mountain.

“Evil Dragon Lord, I just returned.”

Thereupon, Reiko came back. She went outside the town to send back that dragon of the Demon King’s army along with the three-headed elephant to their distant forest.

“Using Evil Dragon Lord’s teaching methods I taught them to never again assault

human habitats. I did not wound them.”

I had no clue about those teaching methods. Still, if I were to pry too deep I most likely wouldn't be able to sleep tonight, so I let it slide. It'd be nice if there were no wounds to the dragon's mind.

“At any rate, the prosperity is amazing. The reason Evil Dragon Lord intentionally let that incompetent Saintess over there be controlled, was all for the sake of holding this festival, is that right?”

“Ah, yeah. After all, it's more fun when it's lively.”

“As expected, a keen insight. You even took into account the Saintess' foolishness.”

“...Yes. Hm?”

During that stressful exchange, I abruptly felt a weight on my back, and when I looked behind me it turned out Lady Saintess had reclined on me. Her complexion had finally recovered to her normal state.

“Oh, you've finally returned. I'm glad, with this the issue is settled.”

However, my heart still carried a shadow of doubt. It seemed like she was forcing back the brainwashing little by little, so why exactly did her recovery progress all in one go, and then only at the end?

When I was thinking that, a voice echoed inside my head.

[I can't use this water demon any longer. Nigh time to start over again. Dragon over there, I'm going to make use of your body. Come now, gaze into the darkness of your heart.]

Without even a chance to have considered my blunder, my consciousness had been dyed black. The past wrongdoings started gushing out from the bottom of my memory, trying to taint my heart. Thinking about how he possessed Lady Saintess, I had let down my guard.

[Expose your true nature. Lying bare your heart brings into existence genuine power. I am a being who can grant your true desires. Go on now, reveal your unsightly nature.]

The devil's whispers have filled my heart.

— *I have...*

— *Hogged a tree with delicious leaves all to myself.*

“Ha”

The instant I had expressed my innermost thoughts, I regained my consciousness.

“As expected of the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Huh, what did I do now, Reiko? Why are you praising me?”

Please don't be so humble, Reiko smiled happily.

“Just now, the aforementioned spirit demon has tried to transfer onto Evil Dragon Lord, but he was swallowed by the Evil Dragon Lord's great torrent of darkness— it seems he has been annihilated.”

My heart was troubled.

Chapter 32

Chat at the festival's corner

“Seems for the most part it turned out as I expected.”

Nibbling on her pork rib, Ariante approached me looking impressed. I thought she was just eating free food in the corner of the plaza all along, but it appeared she had paid attention to what was transpiring here.

“Eh? You expected that?”

I put Lady Saintess to bed face up, and tilted my head.

“Speaking of dragons, they’re generally powerful existences. If that water demon was no good, I could easily guess that demon changing his target and going after you. The result— well, is the one right now.”

After Ariante cleared her throat to dodge the issue, Reiko took over.

“A truly foolish thing. The likes of a trivial demon trying to tread into the great darkness of Evil Dragon Lord’s heart, it is indistinguishable from a powerless human diving into a vast expanse of sea in the dead of night— No, more than that, it is nothing but reckless.”

“Be that as it may, even I couldn’t imagine him being annihilated completely. I intended to seal him, after he was weakened.”

“Don’t look down on the Evil Dragon Lord, human. There’s no way such a demon would get away when coming in contact with the Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Uh huh, it definitely was my lack of understanding. I should apologize genuinely.”

Having exactly opposite intentions, their conversation was established after doing a full circle. I played dumb, thinking how unusual things tend to happen sometimes.

“By the way, kin girl. Since you’re through with your task, why not fill your stomach?”

They're having a barbecue over there, with as much food as you want. The ones known as human magicians are big eaters with generally inefficient fuel consumption. You aren't a sorceress, but "kin"...Nevertheless, as a similar user of magical power you probably have that point in common."

"Hmph. My magic power was bestowed upon me by the Evil Dragon Lord. Even if I were to starve myself, I wouldn't lose it."

Ariante brought the half-eaten meat near Reiko's nose. Growl, her empty stomach rumbled reflexively. However, to the bitter end Reiko kept her poker face. It seemed she intends to pretend she didn't hear it.

"How about eating something if you're hungry? Which reminds me, you haven't even eaten breakfast, have you?"

"If that is the Evil Dragon Lord's command."

"Yes. Also you don't have to hold back, from now on make sure to tell me when you get hungry."

"Understood."

"Well then, have a good one. Make sure to properly follow the turn in line."

She had to be very hungry. Reiko dashed towards the barbecue sending the mud flying.

"Sorry. Now I even made you help me out with that child's meals."

"No need for thanks. I only taught her the basics of being a warrior, which is to eat when you can. Although, overeating is just as bad. It'll impede one during battle."

"You sure you didn't need to tell her that?"

"That child is on a different level. She can eat as much as she wants."

"I see."

It was an explanation I could agree with. When I happened to look at her, Ariante was trying to control herself while laughing in amusement. Clearly enjoying herself, she covered her mouth with a fist.

“However, it’s a strange thing. Who would have thought, that the one called Evil Dragon Reivendia would devote himself to being a babysitter.”

“You can stop making fun of me now. In the first place, I’m neither an evil dragon nor Reivendia.”

“Still, you magnificently exterminated that demon just now, didn’t you?”

“I don’t know about that, you sure I exterminated him?”

“There’s little place for doubt. I’m not fit for this method of sensing, but that girl did declare you had annihilated him. The Evil Dragon’s kin wouldn’t have overlooked the enemy’s existence.”

“Hooh, so there’s something even you aren’t good at.”

Hmm, Ariante held her chin in thought.

“Not good at... I guess. It might be the opposite. Well, I prefer not to speak about that in detail.”

“Why is that?”

“In the unlikely event that child goes berserk, I’ll have to help stop her. I want to avoid the situation of having my hand divulged.”

“I guess that’s true. I feel like I might let it slip out if I ever heard it.”

Above all, even if I heard it, it wasn’t like it’d help with anything. In which case, not telling me was a wise choice. More importantly, there were many other things I wanted to ask.

“Hey, it’d be nice if it was within your knowledge, but do you maybe know what this is?”

While talking, I put strength into my claws. What appeared, were the pitiful black mist claws with the length of a small insect.

When Lady Saintess had pulled me into the puddle just a while ago and the black mist had become a swimming ring, it subsequently tore off when my body became large

and returned back to my claws.

“What is that? These claws look peculiar.”

“I received it on the way to this town, from a God living in historic ruins. They’ve saved my life before.”

“A tool of an indigenous God, huh? Well then, let me see.”

When Ariante touched the claws, she displayed an instantaneous concentration. Thereupon, the black mist, as if melting, had detached itself from my claws and coiled around her finger.

And then.

“I see. Seems like quite a useful tool. It’s easy to use.”

In Ariante’s hands, it transformed into a splendid sword.

“Gah, I guess its use really does depend on the user.”

“What’s wrong, Reivendia? Even you, without any magic power, should be able to use it.”

“Well, somehow I don’t know the right way.”

“Pathetic...”

I am truly sorry.

“This thing can alter its shape freely, being like an extension of your limbs. For example.”

Once Ariante waved it, the mist changed its shape from a sword to a set of bow and arrow. However, it was a little different from a common bow and arrow. Just by holding the bow with one hand, the bowstring was pulled automatically and the arrow straightened itself.

“If you wish for a bow and arrow shape, and then imagine the arrow nocking itself and the bowstring being pulled, it’ll move voluntarily like this.”

“Eh? Isn’t that pretty great? So it can turn into anything?”

“Don’t celebrate too much. I told you it’s an extension of one’s limbs. In exchange for not using magic power, it consumes your physical strength, as if you were moving your limbs. So if your original strength doesn’t amount to much, you can’t expect a great deal of power or force.”

“Ah, it’s more than enough, since I didn’t plan to use it for attacking anyway. If I think of it as a tool for running away, it should have all sorts of uses.”

“That’s fine too, but make sure not to show that pathetic side in front of the girl.”

Ariante had a worried expression saying that. After she returned the black mist to my claws, she opened her mouth leaking out an “Ah”, as if she remembered something.

“This reminds me, Reivendia. Do you know a boy called Raiotto?”

“Raiotto? The one from Reiko’s village?”

“So you knew him. You guys just passed each other, he came to my dojo.”

“...What did he say?”

“ ‘I’ll beat the evil dragon and save Reiko.’ ”

“What good is beating me gonna do.”

I pictured Raiotto running at me with some square piece of lumber, and without thinking I started running around like a chicken with its head cut off.

“Calm down Reivendia. At the moment, that kid is grounded in my town.”

“Ah, is that so. I’m glad.”

“Even if he were to succeed in his training and leave the town, I’ll just think up some bullshit and send him the opposite way from you guys. There’s no need to worry about running into him.”

“That’s pitiful in its own way.”

“A necessary sacrifice.”

I swallowed my tears and apologized to Raiotto in my heart. Because I knew he was just worried about Reiko, it made it even harder to bear.

“Well, he probably won’t get that far. At most, he’ll get sick of it soon and return to his village with his tail between his legs.”

“...Would be nice if that happened.”

“— There’s also the question whether or not he won’t die before returning...”

Since there was a limit to being restless, I decided to pretend I didn’t hear a thing.

Chapter 33

A near-miss almost leading to collapse

“Oh no! The town is being buried in mud! If I don’t hurry and turn it back everyone’s going to sink and die—!”

That was the first thing out of the Saintess’ mouth, who had regained her consciousness. At first she was panicking, being practically in a half-crazed state, but when she had heard the clanging of instruments and seen the scenery of the band and people indulging in the festival while playing in the mud, her movements gradually eased up.

“Good morning Lady Saintess. Your body alright already?”

“Mr Lizard? Ah, erm... What is everyone doing...?”

“It’s a festival. No need to worry. It looks like everyone was anticipating when you were going to make the mud well up.”

It seemed Lady Saintess was aware they were using the mud, and yet she could never imagine that everyone would be even more grateful for changing the whole town into a swamp. Seeing how well they were prepared means the same thing should have happened several times in the past, but her memory of the demon times was most likely fuzzy.

However, even though she should be happy and relieved in these circumstances, for some reason she was rather dissatisfied.

“Aha, is that so... Hmph... Good for them!”

Then she once more sat timidly holding her knees facing the materials at the corner of the plaza. Apparently her pride as a demon was clashing with her being delighted by everyone’s safety. When I peered at her face from the side, she was quivering like a jelly with a bright red face.

“You don’t have to be so frustrated. It’s not like you still want to sink this town.”

“Shut uuup! I can do it if I try! I will make them fear me a little! Eiyaa—!”

Immediately after Lady Saintess screamed, the ground turned no more than slightly softer. Subsequently, from somewhere came a shout of joy “Even more mud of blessing welled up!”. Lady Saintess, stunned by the blow, flopped down onto the bed sulking.

This town will surely continue to be peaceful.

Relieved, I stealthily entered the ring of festivities. It was a good time to treat myself to some fresh vegetables. Ariante was keeping watch— after that, the town’s guards had stopped following me, “The Evil Dragon”, around persistently.

Still, I’d stand out too much if I were to wait my turn in line, so I headed to the back of the kitchen inside where the vegetables were being processed.

It was a space where the water was drained from the ground and sprinkled with dry soil and ashes, with a number of horses fastened.

If their hooves would be buried in mud for a long period of time, the horses wouldn’t be able to calm down from the stress. Although the permanent stable and cattle pen were operating using submersion countermeasures, due to the overwhelming flow of merchants some of their horses were being sheltered here. They were able to give them the leftovers from cooking like that, so the convenience in feeding animals was high.

I slipped between the horses with an innocent look. Those were horses only reared by merchants, so they were gentle. Even if I got close, they wouldn’t make noise or become frightened.

“Sorry, share some of the leftovers with me.”

Neigh, the horse made a sound. I wasn’t able to communicate with animals, but I thought he gave me an okay. After all, there was a vast amount of leftovers produced from the festival. They wouldn’t be able to dispose of all of it by themselves. I just had to hide in the horses’ shadow and get the carried in scraps.

Still, an unforeseen accident had occurred.

“Ah, Doradora! You were still in town!”

From the kitchen, the children came running carrying a large amount of vegetable leaves. Seemed they wanted to play and feed the horses.

Immediately, my heart gave off a dreadful alarm. How could that be. The children's existence had totally slipped my mind. I couldn't be seen called Doradora by Reiko. It was obvious she'd blow up.

However, running away through all that mud would be difficult. I'd probably get caught by the children soon enough. The desperate measure I took against the approaching children with sparkling eyes was,

"...Meeh"

I tried to pass off as a normal animal which can't speak, the hopefully-mistake-a-dragon-for-something-else plan. The thing was, I had completely no idea what sound a lizard makes, so unintentionally I let out a goat-like voice.

"Ehh? Doradora?"

"Meeh"

"He doesn't talk."

"Maybe he's hungry?"

"Meeh"

They started vigorously cramming vegetables into my mouth. They were very sweet and delicious. It was true I was happy and wanted to express my gratitude, but if I didn't distance myself from them as quickly as possible, I'd expose them to serious peril.

I was repeatedly making meeh meeh sounds with an enraptured look.

"Jeez, Doradora why aren't you speaking—?"

"Maybe he's still half-asleep after having a nap?"

Without holding back, the children had even clawed their way up onto my back. I looked around me in search for help. I could see Ariante standing some distance from

me, but she turned her face away covering her mouth. She was laughing for sure. How cold-hearted were these knight tendencies.

“...Evil Dragon Lord?”

However, both Ariante and I have instantly shuddered because of that brief comment appearing here all of a sudden.

There was a dull sound and Reiko, who dropped down a bamboo basket with clean vegetables, trembling all over with an expression of pure astonishment.

Undoubtedly, she procured them from the kitchen as a present for me. I was grateful, but the timing couldn't be any worse.

Ariante put her hand on the sword's handle, preparing for battle. It implied her preparedness for death, wanting to at least buy some time and let the children escape. She was a knight after all.

“Meeh”

The only thing I could do, was to at least try to deceive her.

I am a goat. A slightly unusual goat.

I was anxiously praying, trying to subject myself to autosuggestion.

“Kin girl, staking my own life, I won't let you pass any—”

“Oh, it's just a goat.”

Simultaneously when Ariante had put herself between Reiko and the children, Reiko muttered something.

“...Now, what did you say?”

“Not good, I've got to be tired. I shouldn't just mistake the Evil Dragon Lord for a goat. There's no way the Evil Dragon Lord would let the children straddle him like that. I surely have to be tired. That's a goat. Absolutely a goat. Unmistakably a goat.”

Reiko picked up the bamboo basket and briskly walked away. I'm saved. It seemed her

train of thought had overloaded when she saw the scenery of me being played on by children. The point is, we managed to escape an unacceptable reality just in time.

“My bad. I clearly lacked vigilance— sorry guys, but could you do me a favour and distance yourselves from that dragon? To tell you the truth, he became sick and can’t speak any more. We’re going to treat him from now on.”

“Eh? Is that true, Doradora?”

“Sorry, were you sick?”

There were children who were about to break down crying, so Ariante quickly added “He only caught a cold and his throat had swollen”. I got a little carried away and overdid it with my meeh meeh, so Ariante secretly glared at me telling me to shut up.

After the children dispersed, Ariante let out a long, long sigh.

“Reivendia.”

“Yes.”

“You better work on some dignity.”

“Even if you say that...”

I dropped my shoulders. My mood turned gloomy, thinking how the day when I would get busted wasn’t that far away.

Chapter 34

His name is Doradora

When I reunited with Reiko again, I was fed vegetables to my heart's content. Unlike the children it was a bit vexing, since she was offering the leaves one by one, but it was tasty nonetheless.

“How is the taste, Evil Dragon Lord?”

“Delicious. Thanks for going out of your way to get them for me, Reiko.”

“It's my natural obligation as kin.”

Reiko was also satisfied, puffing out her chest a little. There was scant difference to the time when the children had been feeding me, but maybe it was about the visual composition of Reiko holding out the vegetables by herself. Her standards of what was safe and what was out were difficult to grasp.

“Reivendia, an offering from me too.”

When I was eating with relish, Ariante called out to me. I turned back answering with “What's up?”, and petrified.

What she was holding in her hand was definitely meat.

It was a well roasted, fat meat chop. Was it pork or beef— No, in these circumstances it didn't matter what the meat was.

“I asked for a little favour and came back with this top-quality meat. If it's the Evil Dragon Lord Reivendia the amount might be nothing more than one bite, but this town's people would surely be delighted if you were to taste it.”

What is she saying? Didn't I thoroughly explain how I'm a herbivore?

Ariante nodded her head slightly as if she was reading my inner thoughts, and let out her aim with her gaze.

'No matter how I look at it, the image of you eating vegetables can't be seen as acting like anything else but a herbivorous goat. Even if it's a large piece of meat, eat it and show some dignity.'

'You know that telling me to eat meat would be like if I told you to eat a rock?'

'I'll eat anything, even a stone, if you'll eat that. Hurry up and eat, just try to think that the world will be ruined if you don't. Besides, even herbivores living in the wild eat a little meat.'

'In my youth, it wasn't like I couldn't eat it at all, but recently it's really hopeless. Especially fat, I cannot do fat. My stomach will disagree with it right away.'

Incidentally, this was only my assumption of the conversation's contents. Whether Ariante had the same imagined dialogue was exceedingly doubtful. Or rather, I think we had failed in our mutual understanding somewhere in the middle.

That was because she brought the meat right before my eyes with a vigorous expression, as though saying "You finally prepared yourself". If we had shared the same conversation just now, she wouldn't have resorted to such a violent act. As expected, there was a limit to using only eyes.

It couldn't be helped.

"Reiko."

"Yes?"

"Want to split it in half? You also had it rough, protecting the town while I was away. Think of it as a reward."

"How could I— such a trivial matter, I haven't put in any effort."

"Don't hold back and eat half."

I was fervent. If I had to eat it, I wanted to at least reduce the amount.

"That's right. Ariante, you went to the trouble of bringing it here, just looking would be dull. You can eat half of my share."

“...Right.”

I felt her kindness, since she gave up and cut up the meat.

“Ah! You’re here—! Lady Reiko—!”

Then with great timing came the water demon, or rather Lady Saintess, who as a demon respected and put Reiko far above herself. She was sulking in bed for some time, but it seemed she had regained her spirits.

“Ah, Lady Saintess. We’re right in the middle of having a meal, how about you have some of this?”

“Just the townspeople’s worship is enough for my stomach though?”

“Don’t say that. Once you eat the feast prepared by the people of this town, you’ll surely feel much better.”

“Hmm... Then I’ll have some!”

I casually handed over to her all that was left.

“Aaah, it was delicious. I guess meat isn’t bad once in a while.”

Finally I gave my impression, as if I ate a lot. It was a perfect response. When I wanted to ask everyone how it tasted—

“Ah, Lady Reiko. A demon got caught in the barrier again, couldn’t you exterminate him promptly?”

In the middle of eating meat, Lady Saintess hurled an abrupt remark.

“An enemy?”

“Yes, enemy! But with Lady Reiko’s skills, there’s no need to worry!”

“Evil Dragon Lord, what do you think?”

I had a hunch she wanted to tactfully use us. Well, after all her forte was defence, but she was quite hopeless when it came to attacking. It could be guessed from the fact

she couldn't even bring down someone like me. Having said that, I felt awkward sending Reiko to battle lightly.

"No, this time I'll take care of it. I'd feel bad doing nothing and just eating at the festival for free."

Whether or not it was because she had discerned my thoughts, Ariante stood up along with the clanking of her armour. We discreetly moved towards the town's outskirts, so as not to put a damper on the festival which rarely ever happened. Maybe because they trusted the Saintess' barrier, there were almost no guards.

What turned up near the wheat field were the weeds, thriving in the mud.

"Reiko, you might cut yourself walking barefoot. Want to ride on my back?"

"It's not possible for me to get wounded from mere grass."

"It's fine, it's fine. How about taking a nap after the meal? You're still going to grow from now on, so you have to get plenty of sleep."

"I see. I've to hurry and grow up to become stronger, right? Understood."

As soon as Reiko had clawed her way up onto my back she started breathing slowly, soundly asleep. I noticed it recently, but when I tell her to sleep, this child really falls asleep immediately.

Once Ariante saw her sleeping face, she flashed a slight smile.

"Be sure to make her eat and sleep properly. Showing such power at that age, if she doesn't have either of these things her body won't last."

"Ah, that's why you came forward to fight in her place?"

"Well, yeah."

Feeling grateful, I remembered my original aim of getting Reiko to sleep... and out of earshot.

"By the way, the thing just now with trying to make me eat meat, wasn't it cruel? If I rashly did that and threw up, it'd just lower my dignity instead."

“It’s okay. When humans get desperate, they can eat almost anything.”

“I’m not a human though.”

“You can talk so it’s pretty close.”

What I’m saying doesn’t get through to her at all. That’s exactly why the human warriors are a troublesome bunch. They tend to think that just by using guts all things will somehow work out.

“Ah guys, I see him—. That demon sitting right next to the barrier over there.”

The demon was huge, with a pair of wings and a silver coloured body.

Is that... I wondered. Isn’t that the dragon which came to assault the town that Reiko told me about? The pitiful one that got mistaken for Doradora (me), went down with one blow from Reiko and had been educated to never again attack human villages—

“You didn’t learn your lesson and came back?”

Ariante unsheathed her sword and started drawing near him, but his state was strange. The silver dragon didn’t assume a stance, he didn’t even emit any hostility.

And then, the moment he noticed our figures, he slowly said.

“My name is— Doradora.”

What exactly had happened to him?

Chapter 35

The Proud Dragon of Fierce Winds (self-proclaimed)

He was surrounded by an air of sorrow, looking completely like a fierce beast that had its claws and fangs removed.

“I am Doradora... I am Doradora...”

Without any sign of light in his eyes, the silver dragon was only repeating that sentence, as if he was talking in delirium. Even an amateur could tell he was in a dangerous mental condition. Most likely he’d break like glass with just one more push.

What the hell. Did Reiko get so vexed with not being able to find Doradora, that she went and made a new sorrowful one appear?

I trembled as guilt flowed over me. Though the guilt wasn’t enough to make me go and help him. Then, Ariante pulled out her sword.

“Hey, Doradora.”

“Mm, what’s up? What is it you want me to do...”

“Not you, him. Don’t just react naturally to someone calling Doradora.”

“Sorry, it slipped out.”

While seeing off Ariante, who was approaching the silver dragon, I stealthily distanced myself. It wasn’t because I was frightened. I wanted to prevent Reiko from waking up here at any cost. Otherwise, she’d just deal the finishing blow to his already paper-thin psyche.

Incidentally, Lady Saintess was lying low even farther away, covertly examining the situation from the tall grass’ shade.

“I am... The Proud Dragon of Fierce Winds... My spirit won't ever yield...”

“Oi, one called ‘Doradora’. I’ve no idea what you came back for, but if you treasure your life, you best return before the wolf wakes up. After all, I feel what happened to you is slightly regretful.”

“I am... I am...”

At that moment, he moved. The silver dragon brandished his right arm and flung his huge claws at Ariante.

The attack’s wind pressure blew up a dust cloud, simultaneously resounding with a thunderous boom.

“Ariante!”

“Stay there!”

An immediate response came to my scream. Ariante caught the giant claws with just her left hand covered in armour, and a fierce competition of nothing but physical strength unfolded.

“Can you see it, Reivendia? His state is strange.”

“Yeah, I knew that from the start.”

“I don’t mean that kind of strange. His spirit had been broken this much, I don’t think he’d have tried to start a useless fight. It doesn’t seem like he’s just deranged.”

Once Ariante had finished speaking, she moved. She escaped the deadlock by fending off the claws’ force by parrying them down to the ground, moreover she dashed in one breath up the dragon’s arm right up to his face.

“Don’t think badly of me.”

Just like that, she vehemently launched her armour-covered knee at the dragon’s forehead. The dragon’s tough skull and the armour’s metal reverberated, causing an echo to resound, as if someone had struck a bell.

Before long the dragon’s body had lurched and he flopped down without any strength

onto the ground.

“I put him to sleep for now. We should bind him with iron chains or something while we can.”

“Woo amazing. You’re really strong.”

Thinking about it, even though Reiko had a large handicap, Ariante was the only one to make her kiss the dirt.

Staring at the fainted dragon, Ariante muttered “Well then...”

“For the time being, should we try having him and the kin girl talk as shock therapy once he wakes up...?”

“I feel it’s a wrong way to tackle this problem. It’d be like thrusting down a person who almost drowned once again into water.”

Fortunately, Reiko was still soundly asleep. Ariante scratching her head turned toward me.

“Anyway, let’s start with restricting his movements. Reivendia, take the kin girl away from here and—”

In the next instant, Ariante’s body was blown away. I crouched and shut my eyes, not being able to withstand the delayed blast wave and dust blowing across the ground.

When I cautiously opened my eyes, I saw the silver dragon standing, dyed in the same purple colour as Lady Saintess before. He leaked a white lump of condensed air from the corner of his mouth. He had to have produced that fierce blast wave by releasing compressed air. The so called breath, which the dragon kind was known for.

“My Great Self thanks you for severing his consciousness. After all, this thing resisted me quite vehemently before coming to this town. I finally took hold of him.”

There’s no doubt. This silver dragon was being controlled. The one talking now had to be the previously mentioned spirit demon.

“Y-You— Shouldn’t you be dead?”

“Do not get carried away after erasing just a miniscule part of the greatness that is me. I have determined there was too little maliciousness, so I could not breathe... Never have I thought extinguishing me with that method was possible.”

“Is that so? I’ve no idea how it happened, but probably everyone did their best to defeat you.”

I started backing away slowly, after giving him a humble excuse. All the while I was trying to pretend like the annihilation of his form was someone else’s doing.

“Now then, you are that Doradora, the one who destroyed one of my forms.”

No good, it got exposed anyway. Ariante was blown away somewhere, I couldn’t even see her figure. Lady Saintess shut herself inside the barrier. Reiko was sleeping.

“Hey, maybe we can calm down and talk?”

“I shall not listen to your nonsense.”

The controlled dragon had opened his mouth and started gathering magic power. It wasn’t a simple wind breath, but a sphere of violet coloured magic power.

However, there was movement trying to forcefully close the mouth in which the power was accumulating.

“W-Wrong... Doradora, is me... I’m Doradora...”

The original owner of the dragon’s body unexpectedly started showing resistance. What in the world had happened to him? Why was he so obsessively fixated on the Doradora name?

That was something which shall not be known to anyone except Reiko. I also didn’t especially feel like knowing, either. If I learned that, I might have trouble sleeping at night.

“You fool— why are you deliberately hindering me. You are my subordinate. A fellow of the Demon King’s army—”

“...I have, sworn. Swore by my pride, even if I have to oppose the Demon King...!”

“You fool! I do not give a barest whit about your resolution!”

Along with a bellowing cry, the spirit demon released a purple orb. Still, maybe because of the resistance from the silver dragon host, its force was akin to a gentle breeze. It split apart and vanished the moment it touched the defenceless me. As soon as that happened, the silver dragon regained the ownership of his flesh.

“Yes, I AM Doradora! The king governing all the sky’s winds. Just because I lost to some little girl, don’t think you can break my pride with——”

His speech only made it that far. Ariante, who came back running, threw a punch at the self-proclaimed Mr Doradora’s temporal region, while Reiko, who opened her eyes after being denounced as a little girl, had finished him off with an uppercut to his lower jaw. This time, the silver dragon has fallen down for good.

Chapter 36

A whip for the corpse

The fortunate thing was that Reiko's movement was too quick. Surely the silver dragon wasn't able to process eating Reiko's fist, so he shouldn't have felt significant fear. This way his trauma shouldn't deepen any further.

Now then, the problem starts from here on.

"Evil Dragon Lord, how should we proceed with this dragon? If I may be so bold, I have an excellent suggestion."

"Uh huh, for now let's hear it Reiko. Though I'll dismiss it, no doubt."

"— Let's start off with crucifixion..."

"Nah, never mind, I don't want to hear it after all."

I crouched on the ground, plugging my ears. Ariante pilfered an iron chain from the nearby windmill and silently restrained the dragon.

"Oi, Kin girl. Could you feel around for that spirit demon's presence? Is he still attached to this dragon?"

"What are you saying. The Evil Dragon Lord has already defeated that thing."

"The problem is, what Reivendia had defeated was apparently only a part of him. This dragon had also been possessed till just a while ago, what about now?"

I knew exactly why Reiko became a little sullen. That was because, someone said I failed to bring an enemy down. Even so, for the time being she gave the dragon a sidelong glance and started examining him.

"...It's small, but I sense a presence of different nature. He's probably still inside."

"Still, we've no idea whether it's his main body or one of his forms. Quite a nuisance

he is. What do we do, Reivendia? Should we start with disposing of this dragon?”

“Why are you turning to me for such a cruel decision?”

Dejected, I walked up to the dragon. I tried poking his leg, but he didn't transfer to me conveniently like he did before. As I could expect, it seemed he had learned something.

“Ah right, Lady Saintess. Can't you do something about him? Like some clever way to expel that spirit demon.”

I had turned back and called out to the cowardly Lady Saintess, who was examining the situation from way back. She came up to us timidly and created a whirling ball of water in between her hands.

“This is the repelling demons water, which is protecting the town— should try it out and pour it on him? He just might run away.”

“Ooh, quite a reliable thing. Then, go ahead.”

Splash, she dropped the ball of water on the dragon's face. Just like a fish which had washed up ashore, the restrained dragon's body started vigorously writhing. He was clearly suffering. If this continued, the silver dragon would breathe his last breath way before the spirit demon was brought out.

“There are times like this when we pour water on our students, who have fallen in the middle of training...”

In contrast to me, who was seeking help in a panic, for some reason Ariante was deeply moved. Her seeing this and not really having any sense of impending crisis was scary. When I had looked up to the sky with grief, Raiotto's face came to my mind. I think he still should be hanging on... just barely.

Then Reiko exclaimed “Continue... One hit is not enough. Throw a waterfall on him,” with a countenance befitting a complete fiend.

Furthermore, Lady Saintess, who respected Reiko, gave a simple-minded bow and intended to follow the order through.

“You can't! Erm... we can't have this dragon dying just yet. Because he has utility value, or... because he's a poor thing... yea, all sorts of things...”

Since I hadn't really thought up of a useful reason a bead of sweat began to form.

"Besides, when we think about it, driving out the spirit demon would just repeat the same thing. Wouldn't it be better here to watch his state temporarily?"

Reiko clapped her hands with sparkling eyes.

"Indeed, as expected of the Evil Dragon Lord. Hey water demon, stop shooting water at him. Didn't you hear the Evil Dragon Lord's words?"

"Eh? The Evil Dragon Lord has spoken? I didn't hear anything though— Ah, so that's what it is! I didn't hear it, but Lady Reiko was able to hear the genuine Evil Dragon Lord's voice! As expected!"

Because Lady Saintess thought of me as a lizard (fact), she showed an absurd response. Struck by that, Reiko faced me with a face full of wonder.

"Ah, has the Evil Dragon Lord said that directly to my heart...? What an honour..."

Ariante had an expression like a rock. I could surmise her plan of wanting to completely avoid partaking in this conversation. I also didn't have any particular reaction, but I definitely decided to separate Reiko and Lady Saintess at the early stages. Whether these two meshed together well or not, I felt it could only go in an unfavourable direction.

"Reivendia, if we aren't going to kill this dragon, I've a proposal."

Seeing an opportunity, Ariante raised her hand. I nodded my head without hesitation, asking her "What is it?"

"Since it's a spirit demon, which on top of not having substance can also use many forms freely, it'd be hard to deal with him using simple strength. Instead, we should gather enough sealing tools or experts in that field. Therefore, I'm thinking of briefly returning to Peryudōna and bringing back a few people I know."

"Oh, that sounds great. I also agree to that."

Actually, I had no idea whether it was an excellent plan or not, but if it was true nobody would die, anything was fine.

“Thanks for the approval. Well then, I leave the task of monitoring this dragon to you, so that the spirit demon doesn’t run away. It should be fine if we trap him inside the Saintess’ barrier. In the unlikely event that some other demon comes along, just leave it to the kin girl.”

“Please hurry up. I can’t help being worried.”

“You don’t need to. With my horse, I’ll make it there by dusk.”

It was already into early afternoon. Different from how we took almost two days to come here, Ariante’s horse had to surely be excellent.

When Ariante blew her whistle, a single chestnut coloured horse dashed out from between the town’s buildings, splashing the mud with his hooves. With a pure white mane, he had way too much style for a horse. So much so, that I wondered whether he wasn’t a horse type demon.

The horse came up to us, and as if trying to ascertain the situation, he surveyed the surroundings.

And then—

He had a double take when he saw me. Almost as if he was saying “Is that for real?”

These were most likely the eyes of an adult, like one who noticed a child mixed in amid the battlefield. It was a gaze questioning the reality— why exactly did a common lizard get lost here?

I responded with a complacent smile, reminiscent of an elder. I wanted to ask the same thing.

Chapter 37

Is the case closed...?

Hearing the festival's uproar from a distance was somewhat dull. Still, it wasn't a big deal if the situation would be resolved in exchange for just a little boredom.

After Lady Saintess drew an impromptu waterway encircling the silver dragon, we were just continuously observing him while yawning mindlessly.

"Peaceful, isn't it?"

"Yes. I made sure with my fist he won't wake up the whole day."

"I see."

Peace was built on a noble sacrifice. I offered a silent prayer, wishing for the silver dragon's peace.

"Ahh, I'm really relieved you're here, Lady Reiko. No matter what frightening demon comes along, it's no biggie. How about it? If that's alright with you, would you like to live in this town?"

"Don't spout rubbish. We're in the middle of a journey to defeat the Demon King. We don't have the leisure to spend our time carefree in such a backwater village."

"Is that so—. That's a shame."

The Lady Saintess' grateful request was flatly refused by Reiko. Well, even if she didn't reject that, I would have. When it came to a long-term stay, I felt like sooner or later Lady Saintess would have once again touched Reiko's "reverse scale".^[1]

When that happened, I wouldn't be able to take responsibility for the townspeople's inevitable suffering.

After leisurely keeping an eye on him, as soon as Ariante returns I intended to leave it all to her and depart this town.

“Lady Saintess, how are the surroundings?”

“There’s absolutely no demon presence. However, the possibility of the town’s guards coming here may be a worry. Although it looks like everyone is still busy drinking.”

“Right, if they were to find a big demon like that lying around, the festival would be ruined.”

Then, Reiko made a karate chop motion and proposed one of her wonderful ideas.

“Before it happens, should I put all of those people to sleep? Just like this dragon.”

“That’s called putting the cart before the horse.”

A grand bonfire, serving as a hurriedly constructed altar for offering the town’s harvest as a sacrifice. The whole town painted vibrantly by the brocade clothes along with a long table laid out with an astounding feast. There, amidst such brilliant scenery, all the residents faint, falling flat on the ground.

Since the gap was too large, that scene coming to pass would invoke nothing but terror. I felt that if some passing travellers were to come by, they’d mistake it for a wicked ritual that had somehow gone terribly wrong, sucking out everyone’s souls.

“It should be fine. If there will be anyone coming here, I’ll stop them. Please look.”

Brimming with confidence, Lady Saintess puffed out her chest and enveloped her body with water. What appeared shortly after the water was blown away was the same figure of a child I had met first.

“Surprised, aren’t you? I was the little girl who showed you the way all along!”

“Waaa, I’m so surprised.”

“Somehow your reaction is weaker than I expected...? Well, whatever. If the guards draw near, I’ll say I’m lost or something. This way I’ll be able to lead them back to town.”

“Okay, I’m counting on you.”

Lady Saintess, happy she could be of use, turned her face to Reiko grinning widely.

“Say, Lady Reiko. I can change my shape freely like this. After all, water doesn’t have any settled form. I can change into anything you like, so do you have any requests—?”

“Anything...?”

Didn’t expect that. For some reason, Reiko showed an interested expression. I thought she’d brush her aside with a “You’re loud, shut up” at best, but did she also possess the innocence appropriate for her age?

Then Reiko turned to me abruptly.

“Evil Dragon Lord, I’d like to discuss something.”

“Hm?”

“If you were to forgive the act of imitating your divine appearance, could this water demon copy your genuine form?”

What’s her aim, I wondered. Doesn’t she always see my figure, whether it’s small or big?

“I don’t mind, but for what reason?”

“To tell you the truth, I thought of it just now, when I saw the festival’s play. If the likes of that water demon have a play conveying their history, it’d be strange if there wasn’t a saga propagating the Evil Dragon Lord’s grand feats.”

“Okay, I’m starting to have a bad feeling about this.”

As a dreamy, enthralled smile blossomed on her face, Reiko continued.

“Therefore— I am thinking of drilling into this water demon the Evil Dragon Lord’s whole 5000 years-long lifetime and turning her into an actress. You can rest easy, knowing I will guide her personally.”

I shook my head in a solemn manner. That was because I saw Lady Saintess turn into an undefined, mushy-like form from the excessive unrest she felt.

“You see, my lifetime isn’t something to be played out by mere strangers.”

“...As I thought, it’s not allowed. Could you at least consider having a small part re-

enacted?”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. As long as it was properly conveyed to you, I’m satisfied.”

As a matter of fact, it had gotten conveyed to Reiko the least though.

“Hey, since we’re kind of free now, how about taking another nap? Our departure just might be in the middle of the night, you see.”

“Understood.”

After I encouraged her to sleep, Reiko scrambled to her usual place on my back and once again easily fell asleep. Lady Saintess, who returned to her original adult form relieved, fixed her gaze on her.

“It’s strange, isn’t it? For some reason, Lady Reiko is awfully attached to you, a lizard.”

“There are some complicated circumstances in play. Also, don’t call me a lizard too much in Reiko’s vicinity. If by any chance she were to wake up, you’d wind up just like that dragon.”

I didn’t know whether Lady Saintess heard my warning or not, since she was just staring at Reiko’s sleeping face.

“At any rate, she really looks like a common human child, doesn’t she?”

She doesn’t look like one... it may be hard to believe, but she is one.



After she reinforced the swift horse’s legs even further with magic power the trip was as quick as could be. Ariante, who had returned to the town faster than she anticipated, decided to first stop by the dojo. Many treasures and tools she had collected as an adventurer were stashed inside. Among them, there just might be something useful. It was also a place where many soldiers were stationed, so she just needed to ask and they’d surely help her seek out practitioners with confidence in their abilities.

“Oi, everyone——”

However, what Ariante saw when she opened the door leading to the dojo was, sprawled upon the wooden boards, the lifeless corpse of Raiotto.

Among the many surrounding the body, there was a guy boiling questionable liquid medicine, a fellow chanting dubious magic incantation and a chap barking out encouragement, things like “If you can dream it, you can achieve it!” Generally speaking, it was a gathering of various lifesavers’ types (trash).

It was likely they were the ones who drove him to death in the first place.

A suspicious looking practitioner with a face covered by a black hood shouted.

“Shit! Ariante came back! Hurry and hide it!”

“How the fuck are we going to hide it now!”

“It’s good, it’s all go—od. He’s only sleeping, I’m telling ya. It’s fine if we just insist that.”

“Just look, everyone. The medicine is surely going to work now! That thing before was just a small error!”

Ariante ignored them and headed towards the showers on the dojo’s interior. After filling a basin with water she walked over to Raiotto, who was on the brink of death, and dumped all of its contents on his face.

The lad sprung up just like a fish thrashing around. When he finally managed to escape from the water, he tossed about coughing violently.

“Ah, she did it! He came back to life!”

“As expected of Ariante!”

“Guys, are you stupid? He pretended to be dead. Being thoroughly fooled by a child, you guys are something else. Or rather, at least check the pulse. No one checked that despite trying to save him?”

“Shit!”

The same time Ariante pointed that out, the lad who was a corpse tried to rush outside the dojo, with such vigour that one would believe he literally just came back to life.

Still, his movements were blocked by the several dirty adults cutting into his path.

“It’s not nice to lie, Raiotto. You had us all awfully worried there.”

He flashed a wicked smile.

“Stop lying! You were enjoying it, you bastards!”

Tired of the loudly arguing voices, Ariante intended to broach the real issue at hand. However, she started to have a bad feeling.

— *Pretending to be dead.*

For some reason, that phrase had strangely bothered her. Ariante searched her memory, whether there was something she missed regarding the demon they recently fought.

The most suspicious was the moment one of his forms vanished after possessing Reivendia. I could predict that if it was a demon thriving on maliciousness, he’d be considerably weakened after sticking to that harmless lizard. Still, was it really enough to annihilate him completely?

Deep in thought, Ariante shook her head, as if trying to admonish herself.

“No, there should be no doubt. Kin girl has confirmed the disappearance of his presence.”

That child’s ability is in a different league. At least with detection, she should be more precise than anybody else. There’s no way she’d make a mistake...

— *Meeh.*

— *Oh, it’s just a goat.*

Just when she had wanted to conclude her reasoning, what came to her suddenly was the idiotic exchange from a while ago. And the instant she realised its meaning, Ariante flew out from the dojo with enough force to tear the door down.

“Lady Ariante?”

“Sorry everyone! Send all the practitioners proficient in demon detection or sealing to the nearby granary town! I’m going ahead!”

Jumping upon the horse, which surmised the serious atmosphere and ran parallel to her, Ariante gripped the reins with all of her might.

Only when it comes to Reivendia, that girl’s perception can’t be trusted at all. Which is obvious, since he’s the source of her wrong impression which in turn became the origin of her abilities.

Thus to her, the survival of the spirit demon which came into contact with Reivendia is something that—— [Mustn’t be]. It doesn’t matter whether that’s a fact or not, she should have recognized it as [Vanished].

“If that’s true, his aim is——”

If the spirit demon is still lurking inside Reivendia’s body, his aim can only be one person. That kin born with magic power stronger than anyone else’s.

[1] Dragons supposedly have one “reverse scale”, which makes them go apeshit crazy once its touched. It’s used as a metaphor for something dear to someone, a matter that mustn’t be brought up etc.

Chapter 38

The torrent of darkness

[Guaaaa! Darkness! I am being swallowed by a torrent of darkness!! It is too overwhelminnggg!]

That's why I told you... I tried to stop you. I told you for your own good, you should've turned into a grasshopper and returned where you came from. You ignored me and look what happened—

While sympathizing with the resounding in my mind death throes, I reflected on the short memories we shared.

-----.....

Due to the approaching evening coupled with the boredom of keeping watch, I was being overwhelmed by waves of sleepiness. Even if I stayed awake I wouldn't be of much help anyhow; besides, Lady Saintess was keeping watch properly. Reiko, who needed an overseer at all times, was also asleep, so it should be fine for me to rest, right?

By the time my train of thought got there, the weight of my eyelids had already peaked and I was half-asleep.

The problem occurred a while after.

Suddenly the chills ran through my whole body while I was sleeping flat on the ground. I opened my eyes frightened and tried to move my body. However, it didn't budge even an inch. It had to be the so called sleep paralysis. In my field of vision I saw the carefree Lady Saintess kneading and playing with mud, not even being able to move my mouth and call for help.

What the heck is happening? As I was bewildered in a petrified state, a voice echoed inside my mind.

[Kukuku... you fell for it thoroughly. You certainly did not think My Great Self would fall to such a trivial attack, did you?]

I wonder what does he mean by an attack? When I groaned (no voice came out due to sleep paralysis though), the mysterious voice snapped at me like he was angry.

[Stop acting the fool! You erased your heart's maliciousness during my attempt to possess you, trying to purify me. That was quite a feat you accomplished, yet I still narrowly escaped the danger all the same. Afterwards, I erased my presence and bided my time in obscurity.]

[Ah, I see. You're that spirit demon?]

I didn't need to speak out, since it seemed he understood what I wanted to say just by thinking. Be that as it may, the misunderstanding was awful. That wasn't a purification attack. It was only due to my way of living being unbelievably pathetic.

[What foolishness... Are you not at least one of dragon kind? The worst evil deed a member of the dragon kind, standing at the summit in terms of strength, had supposedly committed is "Hogged a tree with delicious leaves all to myself"? Such nerve to jest, even if the heavens allow it? I would never accept it.]

[It's a misunderstanding. Strictly speaking, I'm more of a lizard than a dragon. I don't have magic power, and I also don't have any strength.]

The spirit demon turned silent. However, I acutely felt a flare of seething wrath after a moment. His pride must have been hurt, being nearly annihilated by a mere lizard.

[Well... nevermind. At any rate, I shall have you pay the price for insulting me. The one who is with you— that girl with the dreadful magic power. I will capture her, and turn you into dust using her magic power.]

[I'm telling you this for your own good. You better reconsider laying your hands on her. There's no way it's going to turn out well.]

[Hmph... A shameless deception. Are you so fearful of me obtaining that power?]

I wondered what I should do. It was like he couldn't understand what I was saying. I felt as if a child, who wanted to play at the storehouse with the easily flammable hay, was telling me "Are you so fearful of me playing there?" Clearly he was the one who would be exposed to danger.

[I mustn't forget to voice my thanks for how well it went. When I possessed that water demon, the girl had not given up her vigilance for a split second. It would have been impossible to take hold of her even if I came in contact, and if I made a wrong move, she might have annihilated me along with the water demon.]

It looked like Reiko had been overflowing with bloodlust when I wasn't paying attention. Scary.

[However, after transferring into you, her alertness has disappeared completely. So much so that she now sleeps defenceless upon your back. Taking hold of her now is a simple matter.]

It wasn't good. If it went on like this, he'd pick a fight with Reiko. I desperately concentrated my mind and prayed silently.

[I've hogged a tree with delicious leaves all to myself. I've hogged a tree with delicious leaves all to myself...]

[You are wearing on my nerves. You surely cannot be presuming it to be some sort of convenient incantation with guaranteed effectiveness. Besides already acclimating to your lack of maliciousness, I have also replenished my magic power using the form which possessed the silver dragon. The powerless breath you were struck with was a replenishing cluster of magic power my other form sent forth. If I have that much, I will be able to take action briefly, even if it is inside you.]

I wonder if it's like breathing in an air bag? As far as I understand, my insides seem to be an uncomfortable place to live for that spirit demon.

[Well, enough... I can finally say my farewell to this place. I now will obtain the supreme vessel. With that much strength, I will be the one to sit upon the very throne of darkness. Without a doubt I will be able to cross my swords with the Demon King, whom I have yet to meet. The one standing at the apex is going to be ME!]

[Hello, can't you hear me? I'm telling you, you should definitely give it up. Just change back into the grasshopper demon and go back. Otherwise, you'll end up regretting it.]

[Silence, you good-for-nothing filthy lizard! Tearing you apart will be the first thing I will do after possessing this girl! Buahaha, you fool!]

While the spirit demon was overflowing with disdain and repeatedly calling me names, the sleep paralysis cast on my body was cleared like a receding tide. It seemed he began moving towards my back, trying to possess Reiko. The abusive voice I had heard in close proximity became like an echo in the mountains.

However, that voice soon turned into a loudly echoing scream.

[Guaaaa! Darkness! I am being swallowed by a torrent of darkness!! It is too overwhelminngg!]

I knew it... When I turned my head to take a look, I saw the Reiko in question still peacefully sleeping.

Chapter 39

A genuine Evil Dragon

“Reivendia! Separate yourself from the kin girl right now!”

Ariante, who had returned on her horse without bringing anyone, shouted rushing over to me. I was already falling asleep, so I rubbed my eyes and groaned out “What’s the rush?”

“Good, it looks like he hasn’t seized her yet. Anyway, separate yourself right now. It’s possible that the previous spirit demon is still lurking in your body. I’ve called experts as reinforcements from the town, and until they’ve verified the spirit’s presence, I want to isolate you inside the barrier.”

“If that’s the case it’s fine. He attacked Reiko just a while ago and died... Poor thing...”

Sighing in relief, Ariante’s expression loosened up.

“So that’s how it turned out. Your kin really is something else.”

“Although I’m glad she’s safe... it’d be better if he just listened to me.”

“That’s asking too much. Demons are fundamentally different from normal animals, since the main principle governing their conduct is bringing harm to humans. They just can’t be reasoned with.”

I looked at Lady Saintess single-mindedly building a tower out of mud.

“What about her?”

“She’s a rare case. She was born as a demon, but had obtained people’s faith by chance and switched over to being a deity. In the first place, there’s no clear distinction between demons, spirits and gods. We tend to brand the ones helping humans gods, the ones bringing harm demons, and neither of those as spirits.”

In short, the distinction seemed to be like one of poison and medicine.

“The ones born naturally with an amassed animosity towards humans are demons. Still, it’s not like the chance of turning out like her after being revered through a long period of time is non-existent.”

“Then what about him?”

I pointed my claw at the silver dragon that was still lying unconscious. The three-headed elephant too, despite not being here, was forced by Reiko to mend his ways. What happened to the rule of them having to harm humans as demons? Ariante continued earnestly,

“The answer is even more simple. Demons have the instinct to obey the more powerful of their kind. Even for an advanced demon possessing intelligence, going against it is hard.”

“Reiko is included in the demon hierarchy?”

Moreover, reigning near the top.

“She’s the Evil Dragon’s kin after all. She probably belongs to the demon category.”

The basis of that argument was weird. To begin with, how could a kin exist despite there not being an evil dragon?

I looked at Reiko’s sleeping face. Even though she looked like a common child, she was immensely more troublesome than one.

“It’s strange.”

Suddenly, Ariante stood up. Lady Saintess also had demolished the mud tower and started accumulating demon repelling water in both of her hands.

“Eh, what’s wrong you two?”

“The flow of clouds has sped up. Besides, an enormous magic power is approaching. Reivendia, if you’re a wild animal, don’t you have even a little intuition?”

“Well, I can grasp someone’s general strength if the target is before my eyes, but I’m not able to sense rough hints like that.”

“Okay, stand back.”

After being branded as useless I steadily retreated between the tall grasses. The sky, dyed red by the setting sun, very quickly started losing its glow. Covering the skies was an eerie, purple-coloured lump of clouds. Drifting heavily but not shedding a single drop of rain was just all the more queer.

“I get it. It’s a very big demon.”

Lady Saintess faced the enemy with a menacing, tense edge, like a hissing cat. Ariante had already prepared her sword and was adjusting her breathing. Before long, the purple cloud started descending to the ground. With such movements one couldn’t possibly mistake it for a common cloud. Before I knew it, the music accompanying the festival had ceased. Most likely the townspeople had noticed the peculiarity and evacuated indoors.

It’s coming.

The cloud came down threatening to crush everything in its path. As it approached ever closer the line of sight of the two combatants on either side of me slowly crossed and then—

[Shit... Damn you! You wicked child, do you intend to swallow even my main body?! You guys! Don’t just stand there, stop her!]

The purple cloud started talking. The two girls were facing me now— or rather, faced Reiko on my back. She was still asleep, but if one looked closely the purple cloud was certainly flowing right into her.

“I can’t believe she’s even absorbing his main form...”

Ariante sheathed her sword and with her finger lightly poked the sleeping Reiko’s cheek.

[What is she...! Just how can this child’s darkness be so oddly enormous...! Moreover, her darkness is so exquisitely abstract for no particular reason...!]

“I’m also curious. I’ve wondered why for a long time.”

[Stop playing dumb, you good-for-nothing lizard! There has to be... Something! Like

her past, which enabled her to have so much darkness!]

“Yeah...”

I nodded very, very deeply. I was filled with remorse and an enormous amount of sympathy in my heart. However, such thoughts didn't continue for long.

“Wait bastard. Just now, what did you call the Evil Dragon Lord?”

The God of Death had awoken. Reiko got off and stood on the ground, looking up imposingly at the purple cloud with her blue eyes shining brightly.

[Oh... You woke up, little girl! I told you to stop and you dared to sleep like a log! Hurry up and stop pulling me in!]

“I haven't done anything. Only a weak insect threw itself into a windmill and is dying of its own accord——”

That metaphor was pretty cool. It appears she's in high spirits after a short nap.

“It seems like the Evil Dragon Lord in all his kindness let you off after erasing only a part of you, but I won't forgive you. You committed blasphemy against the Evil Dragon Lord. Know here the folly you committed is the ultimate sin.”

[Don't mess with me! As a demon I am prepared for death, but do you think I am going to accept such an unreasonable way of dying?! Being swallowed up by an unreasonably abstract darkness... Since it has come to this...!]

Along with the spirit demon's roar, the purple cloud started whirling like a tornado. Then it rushed at Reiko trying to pierce her with all its might.

“Reckless.”

After Reiko murmured that, Ariante, Lady Saintess and I uniformly nodded in agreement. Just the air pressure from Reiko's punching fist had scattered the tornado and restored the clear evening sky.

[Shit... Is this how far I go...? However, at the very end I will at least peak inside your darkness... Your genuine darkness...]

The last traces of the cloud, torn to shreds, uttered its dying words. Looking closely, the countless fragments of the cloud coiled around Reiko, putting up its last resistance.

“I see. You want to know my darkness that badly? Then I shall tell you. I have—”

Reiko raised a wicked smile, as if she had come so far by killing countless people, and declared.

“— not been able to suppress my anger after Raiotto tried to expel me from the mansion, so I secretly put the lima beans he hates inside his meal.”

[Her too! She’s the same as him! Damn it all! I told you to stop screwing around—
Aaagh...]

The spirit demon’s voice was suspended like a string snapping off and the purple cloud fragments disappeared without leaving behind any trace. I felt really bad and decided to at least offer a prayer.

“I am terribly sorry, Evil Dragon Lord. I got carried away by the demon’s provocation and have revealed disgraceful behaviour against my better judgment. Even if that may be something I did in the past as a human— to act rudely against the household head’s child, was an act not befitting a proud slave.”

“Isn’t it fine? I think it’s good to fix someone’s pickiness.”

“That in itself is a problem too.”

Reiko tilted her head and made a perplexed expression. I guess the fact it was ultimately for Raiotto’s sake had to annoy her.

“Well, with this we’ve exterminated the demons aiming at this town and can finally say the case is closed. So how about we all return to the festival and eat something? And then Reiko, we’re going to depart once again and head for a suitable town.”

“Regarding that, Evil Dragon Lord...”

Reiko began to talk as though she wanted to discuss something trivial.

“Hm? Is something wrong?”

“As a matter of fact, after swallowing that demon I am filled with more magic power than usual.”

“Yeah.”

“In addition to that, as a result of revealing my heart’s darkness the control over my power has slightly weakened.”

“Right, that was your darkness. And then?”

“Being still inexperienced, I feel like I just might fail to keep my magic power under control, so if it’s not too much to ask, could Evil Dragon Lord lend me his strength to suppress it?”

“Ah, so it’s something like that. Yeah, it’s fine. Let me see... hm?”

I had said it too lightly since I didn’t really digest the contents. At that time, a group of flustered soldiers came running probably because of the purple cloud.

“Miss Ariante! Just what in the world was that purple cloud—?”

“Step back! Something much more dangerous is coming!”

Not leaving me any gap to stop her, Ariante, without any hesitation, dashed at Reiko swinging her sword. Moreover, it wasn’t the harmless sword she used before but a genuine one.

Reiko stopped her blow with one finger.

“R-Reiko?”

There was no answer. Reiko swayed left and right like a drunkard, with her head hanging low.

Then in an instant, a dramatic change took place.

Scales had emerged on Reiko’s limbs, as though imitating mine, and from her back sprouted black wings. On her slowly rising face was a pair of dazzlingly shining blue eyes, and her lips were sealed shut.

“Stop it Reiko. Forget what I just said. There’s no way I could do something like—”

“It’s no use Reivendia!”

What Ariante had said was correct. As soon as Reiko had flapped her wings, a shockwave like impact spread through the area, sending everyone flying.

Chapter 40

The Evil Dragon Lord and kin

I thought the world was ending. Rather than some Demon King, a much more realistic and close to me fear had at last manifested itself.

“Uuu... I wonder just how can I apologize to mankind...”

Blown away by the gale and toppled upside down, I was weeping softly. I tried to do my best, but in the end I didn't manage to set Reiko in the right direction.

If that's how it was meant to be, I should have solved her misunderstanding right at the very beginning, when she came to the cave. If I would have done that, this tragedy wouldn't have— No, thinking about it, I've explained more than enough. In spite of that, this was the conclusion.

So exactly what the heck should I have done?

“Oi, Reivendia. You can cry and lament all you want, but could you get off me first?”

When I stirred to the unexpected call out of nowhere, trapped under me and covered in dust Ariante began to crawl out.

“Yikes, sorry. I didn't notice you were buried under me.”

“I don't mind. After all, it's the result of me immediately using you as a shield, so we're even.”

“I don't think you should deliberately say things like that. Depending on the circumstances, it might worsen your relationships.”

Turning a deaf ear to my warning, Ariante removed the dust from her armour.

“However, we're lucky it was merely the wind pressure of her wings. If that was a genuine attack, everyone here would have been dead.”

“R-Reiko wouldn’t have done that, would she? Despite looking like that, she has her gentle side—”

Thus, I decided to recall the good deeds Reiko had done.

She had released people captured by the bandits. (Because she judged them unsuitable to be used as slaves) In order to keep the town safe, she purposely wanted to take the whole territory under control. (With willingness to cause an all-out war)

“— Erm, deep down, that is. Deep down I think she’s a gentle child. Just her common sense is a little...”

“Oi, you’re trailing off there... Anyway, because she’s influenced by the berserk magic power, her original character doesn’t matter. You better think of the person standing there as a literal Evil Dragon itself.”

Ariante pointed with her sword at the sky. After gulping loudly I turned my gaze upwards. There was a silhouette floating on the red dusk sky with her black wings spread wide. Emitting an ominous aura from the whole body, her eyes were filled with blue brilliance of madness, as if intent on obliterating everything she sees.

“At any rate, do I really look like that in her eyes? Quite a shocker if that’s true.”

“What are you saying now? You look pretty evil when you’re big. There’s no helping it she turned out like that.”

“I think it really isn’t okay to judge people based solely on their looks.”

While glaring contemptuously upon us Reiko still maintained her inaction. In that case, I knew what could be done.

“How about running away till she cools down? Wouldn’t she return to normal after exhausting her magic power?”

“Please don’t—! During that time this town would disappear—!”

Like a geyser, Lady Saintess gushed out from the ground in a half-liquid state. And then, as soon as she had returned to her human form, she caught my head shaking it around and repeatedly calling “Please do something!”

“Cal-, Lady Saintess, calm down...”

She let go, crumpled down on her knees and covered her face. She had completely broken down.

“Uuu... I can't believe Lady Reiko would turn out like that... If that's how it is, I should have plunged right into the festival, revealed my true form and have been spoiled to my heart's content...”

“Saying such tasteless things, would the people really recognize you as Lady Saintess?”

I felt they'd have been all the more angry instead. Or rather, it was too soon to give up. If Ariante, Lady Saintess and the soldiers were to combine their strength, they should be able to at least hold out until she turned ba---

“Take shelter!”

And yet, one part of hope was already lost. As expected of the town's professional soldiers, their judgement had been more precise than mine. Convinced they had no chance of winning no matter how much they struggled, they started running away with amazing speed.

“It's okay! If we take shelter in the town, Lady Saintess will surely do something!”

“That's right! We still have Lady Saintess on our side!”

But it was unlikely they'd have supposed that the support for their escape, their guardian, was useless. The Lady Saintess in question was throwing a tantrum like a child and expressing her unfulfilled desires before the impending death. Mainly how she wanted to be pampered. I guess I couldn't expect much here either.

“In that case, Ariante. I can count only on---

“Eh?”

Ariante had straddled her favourite horse intending to tug the reins any time now.

“Wait, what are you doing! What about your pride as a knight?!”

“Forgive me.”

“Please stop apologizing in such a serious manner. The sense of impending doom will just get worse.”

“No, there’s really nothing we can do here. I wouldn’t be at all surprised if someone called that a Demon King.”

Demon King’s reputation was cheap. If one could become a Demon King with just their wrong impressions, wouldn’t the world become filled with them?

“...Err Ariante, I’m going to ask just in case, but you won’t be able to stall for time, will you?”

“I could buy some time if I had about 50 people and carried out all the necessary preparations.”

“In other words it’s impossible now.”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Even so, you shouldn’t decide to run so quickly.”

As I laid flat down and clutched my head, Ariante looked up at Reiko.

“That’s because even though I’ll forsake this town, I’ll have to work out some countermeasures for later. Her using up her strength and turning back would be the best outcome, but in the worst case scenario she may be swallowed up by the Evil Dragon’s magic power and will remain like that her whole life.”

“Even so...” she continued, “she has been strangely quiet after flying up. Maybe she still has some self-control left?”

“Eh? Really? Reiko’s amazing, doing her best and not giving in.”

Soundlessly floating mid-air, Reiko was intently looking down on the surface. Looking closely, she was actually repeatedly opening and closing her mouth.

It wasn’t a distance where I could hear anything. However, Ariante read the movements of her lips and conveyed the fragments she inferred.

“Saintess. Water demon. Destroy. Unforgivable. Vegetable scraps. Branding as pet. Tear

apart. Death by burning. Must be punished. She's just repeating words like that."

Oh my goodness. Lady Saintess' self destructive behaviour had made a full circle and came back as an advantage, buying time while Reiko took a lengthy consideration trying to decide the means of execution. Intending to protect the town even at the cost of self-sacrifice, she certainly was a paragon guardian.

But for some reason, my tears wouldn't stop. Please, somebody save this child. Due to the excessive terror caused by the phrases she heard, Lady Saintess clung to my legs with her teeth chattering.

"That's a godsend, I say. It'd be great if she would just continue hesitating like this forever..."

It seemed Ariante didn't possess a human heart. Considering a method of this continuing endlessly; Lady Saintess would just die emotionally, wouldn't she? Having said that, making a wrong move and breaking this risky equilibrium was out of the question.

"E, e, e, eiyaa———!!"

Ah. Not being able to bear the figurative rope slowly strangling her, Lady Saintess ultimately set out on her futile struggle. She faced Reiko and released a surging water current like an upside down waterfall.

Even Reiko had a reaction to that. Still not moving her body even an inch, she inhaled deeply—— then spouted scorching, deep blue flames dazzling the eyes. As soon as the water current, trying to swallow Reiko whole, came into contact with the flames, it evaporated completely, not even leaving behind mist. Without losing its vigour, the breath of hell fire continued in a straight line aiming for Lady Saintess.

"No! Stop!"

Honestly speaking, even when I looked back on it later, I still couldn't say clearly what I was trying to accomplish. I might have been scolding Reiko, or I might have been chiding Lady Saintess' rash counterattack. Or I might have simply screamed in turmoil.

What I did accomplish amidst the fright and unrest was to cover Lady Saintess, who had utterly frozen before my eyes.

“Reivendia!”

Simultaneously with Ariante’s scream, the heat touched my back. As a matter of course, these flames which could even melt steel, wouldn’t be stopped by the likes of my scales—

Hm?

Since I didn’t feel any pain or heat, when I timidly raised my line of sight from the ground, the flames disappeared before I knew it.

“A-ah? Did Reiko stop it in time?”

“No, she didn’t stop the attack till the very end.”

Ariante denied my suspicion. Sheathing her sword, she made an all too serious face.

“Well then, why...”

“The instant the flames came into contact with you, disregarding that child’s will to attack, they vanished. I see— so that’s how it is. Though slim, there’s a glimmer of hope.”

“Eh? What do you mean? Don’t just grasp it yourself and explain so that I can also understand.”

“In short it’s like this.”

With her hands free after sheathing her sword, Ariante firmly clutched my tail.

“Clench your teeth!”

This time Reiko swung her right hand, launching a slash of light in the form of a claw. Roughly the same time I recognized it visually, my body was lifted up into the air in a wide arc.

“Haa!”

Gripping my tail, I was swung as hard as she could. While raising a mute scream without any time to clench my teeth, I collided with the light slash.

The outcome was that the slash attack vanished, not leaving even a scratch on my skin.

“That child’s attacks— will work on anyone but you. On the master, “the Evil Dragon Lord”, that is.”

Ariante said so, brandishing me like a sword.

Chapter 41

A firm resolve

In the fast spinning world, my whole life flashed before my eyes. My past of eating grass. My past of nibbling on the tree bark. My past of soundly sleeping in the cave.

While looking back on the recollection of my lifetime, even I myself thought the path in life I've taken has been a shallow one.

However, the tranquillity didn't last long. After all, the final destination of a swing in a wide arc is the cruel ground.

“Ngyaa———!!”

Letting out a scream delayed by one beat, I pathetically crashed into the ground with a loud “Thump!” And then, holding my breath, I felt faint from the agony.

“We've still got hope, Reivendia. As long as we've you as the weapon, we might be able to fight back.”

“Uuu... Stop. You cannot do this, Ariante. You pounded me on my stomach with all your strength. Besides, my tail will definitely be torn to shreds. That's why, please, stop readily fixing your grip on my tail.”

“Do your best. Don't lose. You are the true Evil Dragon.”

“Isn't your encouragement too sloppy? Also, I don't want to be an Evil Dragon.”

Along with the appearance of a possible breakthrough solution my spirit was close to a breaking point, but for some reason, in a matter of a few breaths the pain was already fading. Looking closely, Ariante's hand was glowing faintly.

“Ah, you...”

“Even though I may look like this, I specialize in magic. Not to mention taking care of the dojo. Obviously I had to learn one or two recovery spells for the disciples.”

Yet, I had felt a strange chill. I wasn't sure about this, but I felt the signs of a vicious purpose, to what should be by nature a gentle and holy recovery magic.

"There we go, now the tail won't be torn off, and there's no problem even if you crash into the ground after being swung."

At once, I've discovered the origin of this ominous feeling. It certainly deserved to be called an endless hell. At any rate, she seemed to have entirely no hesitation using the technique of tying in torment and recovery. She had to be considerably used to it.

"Let's go!"

"Wait, my heart still isn't gyaaaa—!"

Ariante broke into a run. I was being dragged on the ground, my back leaving a trail in the dirt. Ariante shouted, while repelling Reiko's incessant hail of slashes with her sword (me).

"I'm going to carry you up to her! Throw yourself on her when you see an opening! As long as you stick to her, she should become unable to use her magic power!"

"W-Wait, isn't Reiko flying high in the sky?"

I asked, trying desperately to not bite off my tongue. At that moment Ariante bent her knees low.

"In that case, all we've to do is fly."

In an instant, gravity was doubled. As if we were ejected out of a ballista, our bodies dashed through the air aiming at Reiko. Ariante's powerful legs alone had accomplished that.

In order to intercept us, Reiko released a countless number of fireballs. Although they were the size of a fist, their sheer number had warped the light into a heat haze and strangely distorted the surrounding space.

"I'm counting on you!"

"I don't care anymore..."

Treating me like a shield, Ariante slipped through the attacks by putting me in the front. My body exposed defencelessly in front of the barrage, I felt like nothing but a hostage.

As soon as they hit me, the fireballs vanished like an illusion. The remaining heat wasn't more than an itch. We could do it. Reiko's attacks didn't work on me.

“We'll soon reach her! Stretch your limbs, Reivendia!”

I held out my limbs towards Reiko, who was imminently drawing near. And just when I wanted to call her name— our balance suddenly crumbled.

The cause was a blast of wind that came simultaneously from our front and rear. In the front – a gale created by Reiko lightly fluttering her black winds; in the rear – a shockwave born from the fireballs, which slipped past us and landed on the ground. Played by the two winds, we were flicked from our trajectory and sent spinning.

“Oh no!”

The one who helped us with our descent, we who should have ended as a shallow red crater in the dirt, was Lady Saintess. She created a puddle of water like the one that pulled me in not long ago at our landing spot, and caught our bodies amidst the splashing water.

After that she promptly rushed over.

“A-Are you okay?!”

“We're fine. You've my thanks.”

Ariante went out of the water and turned her gallant gaze towards Reiko.

“We're screwed... It looks like I can't erase the wind...”

Buoyantly floating on the water, I became pessimistic. Though I could extinguish direct magic attacks, the temporarily born wind was simply a physical phenomenon. Despite fundamentally being a product of Reiko's magic power, it seemed like I was unable to go to the source and erase it.

“These endless balls are troublesome. We let them slip past us and they'll explode.

Like how she went after Saintess earlier, a large attack is easier to erase in one go.”

Ariante turned around and faced Lady Saintess.

“Sorry, but could you become a decoy once more? You need to provoke her to the utmost limit in order to induce an attack as big as possible.”

She pretty much told her to go and die voluntarily.

“I don’t want tooo! Even that thing earlier, I thought I was going to diee!”

“If you don’t risk your life, this town will perish.”

“Uu, uuuu...”

That was dirty. I was starting to think that the most wicked person here after Reiko was Ariante. This time, she turned her fangs to me.

“You also resolve yourself, Reivendia. She’ll scatter the momentum of a leap with her wings. This time I’m going to hurl you directly.”

“Uwaa, I wonder if I’ll live.”

I had a hunch my whole body’s blood would lean to one side from the centrifugal force and I’d die.

“It’s not the time to grumble something under your nose. Look.”

The state of Reiko in the air was strange. She didn’t attack despite us being full of openings and was simply growling like a beast. No, it wasn’t just that. I understood it when I strained my eyes. Her wings were slowly but steadily stretching out. Furthermore, the pattern covering her limbs had turned into genuine claw scales before I knew it, transforming the white thin arms, making them appear like armour.

“Not to speak of turning back, she’s looking more and more like a dragon. If we take it easy it might be too late.”

“Jeez, just what am I going to do with this child...”

Though she was claiming to be kin, she could take herself a bit less seriously.

I let out a long sigh. And then I calmly turned to Ariante.

“Hey, Ariante. You’ve sent me flying in my original size, right? You think you can throw me?”

“It’s possible if I use all of my strength, but there’s still time till the medicine expires, isn’t there?”

“It’s fine. As long as Lady Saintess absorbs my magic power I can return to my former size. If it’s my original body, I might even be able to stand a bit of wind.”

Ariante stared at me blankly.

“What’s wrong? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“What’s with you? No, it’s great you’re cooperative, but I thought it’s unlike you.”

“I’d prefer to run around if buying time would be enough for her to turn back. But with how things look like, the more time we take the higher the chance Reiko will turn into something awful.”

“Well, using reason that’s how it is, but—— What’s going on? Did you hit your head?”

That was an excessive way of saying it. I’ve merely decided to muster up the little courage I had.

“All right look, I recalled something when I was just now swung about by you.”

“You can’t mean the Evil Dragon’s past?”

“Not that. Not past like that, it’s from the time when I was born and still little.”

It wasn’t like I was born huge. There was a time I wasn’t much different from the common lizard.

“Around the time when I was a small lizard that couldn’t speak much, I was saved by human children. Because I’ve been raised as emergency rations at the human habitat——”

“I’m a little curious, but it’s not the time for a long story. Just say your conclusion.”

Nnn, I've furrowed my brows.

“Well, in the long run... what I want to say is, I don't... dislike Reiko that much.”

Chapter 42

If that was my fault

I am a coward. From the moment I was born, I've never even thought about fighting demons. In the first place, just imagining a fight made me paralyzed with fear.

The me like that was strangely calm, despite having perhaps the most sinister demon before me.

"I'm seeing you in a new light. I thought of you as nothing but a pathetic lizard, but heedless of danger you want to save that girl... you've actually got some guts, don't you?"

Flashing me a smile, Ariante grabbed my tail. She was misunderstanding me a little. I've certainly mustered up courage, but it was only a resolve to be swung as a weapon. I didn't really consider opposing Reiko dangerous.

"How should I say it... it's not like that."

"You should close your mouth now. I really would prefer to turn you into your original size first, but looks like it won't go that easy."

When Ariante's and Reiko's gazes locked, the lightning-like tension could be felt in the atmosphere. She was coming. Reiko extended each of her five blade-like claws and came swooping down, trying to mow us down like weeds.

Rather than saying I stopped it, Ariante was the one who skilfully handled me. This time instead of swinging, it was more appropriate to say she put me down. She foresaw the trajectory of Reiko's assault, and holding my body with both of her hands thrust it in the position where it'd hinder her the most.

When the claws flashed—

Right after clashing with my stomach, Reiko was sent flying hard and landed on her back with a loud thud. Not being able to process what happened, she tilted her head puzzled in her half dragon form. Even though the source of her power, her wrong

belief, was going strong, she probably wasn't able to recognize who I was in her berserk state. Or she might actually have been refusing to accept the present reality, thinking "the Evil Dragon Lord cannot possibly be used as equipment", like how it went down when I was mimicking a goat.

Seemingly being on guard, she had once more flapped her wings and soared high into the air.

"Okay... good, just fly there and watch. Saintess, you ready to turn Reivendia back?!"

"Please leave it to me!"

From Lady Saintess's feet appeared several water snakes which coiled around my torso. Then she had reeled the snakes like a rope in a tug of war and began to absorb the magic power.

However, maybe because she inferred something, Reiko moved into the offensive. The dragon scales coiling around her limbs stood up and the enormous wind born from her wings shot them like bullets.

"Shit!"

Cursing, Ariante started dynamically swinging me around. My eyes were spinning and I felt like puking, but I somehow managed to clench my teeth. Given the wide scope of the attack, Ariante's hands were tied. Lady Saintess also hid behind me, stopping the magic power absorption.

Moreover, I could dispel the magic power put into the scales, but I couldn't void the wind. Each time the scales collided with me, I could feel a relentless pain run through my flesh and bones, as though I was hit with stones. Besides, Ariante's stamina wasn't limitless.

If we continued being shot at like this, we'd sooner or later succumb. And then, exactly when I was starting to believe we'd meet with a tragic end, something occurred.

The path of bullets riding on the windstorm brought forth by Reiko suddenly bent, and they were sent flying in the other direction.

"Fuu, disregarding me and trying to control the winds, what an absurd—"

The silver dragon, which should have been bound and battered, had undone the iron chain and stood up. Seeing a portion of his body charred he must have been hit with the fireballs, which melted the binding.

“— Come now, the stage is ready! Let’s now have our rematch, shall we, little girl?! And when I win, I will have you return my true name! That is how I will be able to discard this shameful Doradora name, and— Ngaa!”

The huge fireball released by Reiko hit the silver dragon directly and blew him far away.

“We should be thankful, that dragon had earned us precious time. Let’s erect him a tombstone later.”

“Hold it there, Ariante. He’s probably not dead yet.”

“How so? The power of that was pretty amazing. Even the ground is gouged out. It’s true the dragon kind is a tough bunch, but we’re talking here about that girl’s offensive ability...”

“That’s true thinking logically, but...”

I groaned.

“How should I say it... Even though she became like that, I believe she’s still the same Reiko. I mean, how she’s a nuisance to others, how she’s strangely only listening to me; just because she turned more violent than always, I don’t think she changed fundamentally...”

When I had realised this, I suddenly was no longer afraid. I didn’t know whether this was true. In actuality, she might already be reduced to nothing more than a demon. However, thanks to that my trembling stopped, so I didn’t mind.

Reiko, who got rid of the nuisance, turned over here in order to continue hunting her original prey. Behind her back the evening sun was slowly setting. Its place was being taken by the translucent moon floating on the horizon.

“Fundamentally the same, huh. She really is an incorrigible problem child, isn’t she?”

Ariante laughed in spite of the critical circumstances.

“That’s right. So I’ve reflected a lot, whether I’ve slipped somewhere or not, and—”

Fwoomp! The sound of my noticeably larger paws echoed in the surroundings.

“I’ve finished! C-C-Can we start?!”

With her legs quaking, Lady Saintess shrieked at us. As soon as we nodded, the plan went into motion.

First off was Lady Saintess’ provocation.

“Heeeey! Stuuuuupid!!!!”

She had really shabby vocabulary. Even Reiko, who had lost most of her reason, looked down upon her with a gaze full of pity rather than rage. In this way, we passed a while of painful silence.

“What do we do, Reivendia? We pointlessly got some time, in a setting where we don’t particularly need it.”

Who would have thought, that even though she had relentlessly touched Reiko’s “reverse scale” unintentionally when she was simply being herself, she’d just look pitiful when she tries to touch it on purpose.

“Uuu... how... I was sure she’s going to get mad...”

“Don’t cry, Lady Saintess. Right, you just need to make fun of me. This child, she gets the most angry when someone ridicules me.”

Or when someone brings up Raiotto.

“Ah? Is that so? In that case, it seems like a piece of cake. Well, here I go... Heeey!! Your pet is a useless lizard!!!”

Reiko roared loud enough to distort the surrounding space. I was a bit hurt. But I didn’t have the leisure to feel sad. Roaring, Reiko was converging the magic power in her

mouth; I surmised she was going to unleash an attack that would, let alone us, wipe out the whole town in its aftermath.

“I-I’m leaving it to you!”

With her body bent forward, Lady Saintess vigorously pulled the water snakes for one more time. At that moment, my body returned to its original size, a transformation into a form befitting an Evil Dragon.

Of course it was a mere false impression. I was powerless. However, right here and now, that was entirely irrelevant.

“Reiko, if I am to blame for you turning like this——”

Reiko was spouting flames. The quality was on a different level from what she had released so far. Focusing in a sharp straight line, it was a beam set on thoroughly burning all creation to the ground.

I clashed with this beam with my whole body and erased it without leaving any trace.

“—— it’s because I didn’t scold you properly upfront.”

Starting from my tail my body rose into the air, and after a quickly accelerating full rotation around Ariante I was flung at Reiko.

Chapter 43

A belated graduation

I'm able to speak the human language. Reiko would probably explain it as "There's nothing the omniscient and omnipotent Evil Dragon Lord doesn't know."

Naturally, that wasn't the case. The reason I was able to understand human speech was nothing other than mingling with humans in the past.

Well, it wasn't much of a good memory.

When I was still a lizard that couldn't speak I had been kept as livestock, serving as emergency rations and weed disposal, whereas once I became able to speak, I was brought to various places as a spectacle. I didn't earn much as I couldn't really perform well, so I still remember my owners changing one after another and being frequently sold off using scam-like methods.

However, it's not like nothing pleasant ever happened. It was the interaction with children, who instead of telling me to go earn money, ride the ball or do something fun, had fed me innocently. To begin with, the reason I had been able to escape the fate of a livestock animal in the first village was because I picked up some broken language from the children who fed me. Thanks to that I was evaluated as "I'd feel sick eating him" and escaped the literal hatchet.

That's why to me, the human children were not only my lifesavers, but also the ones who granted me an irreplaceable time of respite.

Well then—— Coming back to the present time. In no more than a few days the fixed idea of a "human child" I had was shattered like a glass hammer. The "human child" I had imagined doesn't suddenly go through an awakening, doesn't soar to the skies with black wings and neither does it spout burning hot flames.

Hurled straight in Reiko's direction, I focused on the front and muttered.

"But you know, Reiko. Since my body became big, you were the first child who came and talked to me without fear."

Saying I wasn't happy would be a lie. The overwhelming bewilderment to the astounding visitor in the form of a sacrifice was naturally large, but I truly felt that talking for the first time in a while dispelled my lengthy boredom. Like that I had ultimately fallen into days filled with too much stimulation where I didn't even have a moment of boredom, but still, I became confident of one thing.

"You may be quite twisted and warped, but there's no doubt you're a kind child. Becoming something like an evil dragon doesn't fit a good girl."

The distance between me and Reiko shortened. I've just erased her powerful move. She shouldn't be able to proceed to the next one so quickly.

However, it was after all Reiko, who was known for thwarting all norms. Immediately after she had promptly regained her stance from releasing the flame attacks, she spread out both of her wings, which were already rivalling my current size, and flapping them raised a storm like gale.

It was the one counterattack I didn't want the most. Likely she sensed that magic power didn't work on me after I've once again extinguished her attack.

"Kuu..."

Even though I tried to push through forcefully with my momentum and mass, the winds inexorably blocked my way just like a wall. The initial velocity I had thanks to Ariante throwing me with all of her might was rapidly falling and the linear trajectory to Reiko was starting to lack in altitude.

Amidst the dense winds where I practically couldn't breathe, I mustered the air from my lungs and screamed with all my strength.

"Oi! Don't you recognize me?!"

Reiko froze. While her body was still being corroded by the dragon transformation, Reiko's movements stopped. Stiff, as if she was fighting against something, her body was twitching and shivering. As expected, Reiko was desperately holding out.

In that case I also ought to do it properly. I didn't mean anything stiff like an evil dragon stopping his kin. It also wasn't to prevent a genuine evil dragon from being born and saving the world.

After all I was an utter coward. Therefore, there was no way I could have the nerve to abandon the eccentric girl who idolized me.

“Hunt God! Please send me to Reiko!”

I focused with all of my strength on my claws. Not to use as a weapon, but for a more simple purpose: into a crooked form to [catch and pull.] A single hook stretched out vigorously from my right forefoot, and just as I wished it got caught on Reiko’s wings.

“Ngyaaa! Heavy! I’m too heavy!”

I intended to pull her towards me, but even though all my body’s weight was hanging on her wing Reiko didn’t budge an inch. Meanwhile, since all of my weight was being supported solely by my right leg I let out an almost shriek like scream. Whenever Reiko moved I was swayed like a pendulum, a truly hellish aerial stunt situation.

“I can’t! I can’t do it! These circumstances are more vicious than falling down normally!”

“Reivendia! Those claws move according to your will! Shrink them and climb up to her!”

Ariante sent me an advice from the surface. Even though she was saying that, the driving force behind these claws was my physical strength. In these circumstances, it was the same thing as just pulling myself up all the way to Reiko with only my right limb—

“Nryaaaaa!”

I quit wasting my time on thinking. At any rate, logically thinking the number of things I wasn’t able to do was much higher. I shouldn’t think logically. Believing firmly I could do it, I single-mindedly exerted all of my strength.

— *Just like Reiko has always been doing.*

Simultaneously with numbness so deep I couldn’t feel my right forefoot anymore, I pulled my body up in one go. And then, once I perceived Reiko right before my eyes, I embraced her tightly with both my arms.

“Okay. It’s, fine, now.”

At that time, inside the distant underground ruins on the grasslands. Looking up at the sky through the cavern’s ceiling, unbeknownst to everyone Hunt murmured quietly.

Chapter 44

The sacrificial maiden once again tries to be eaten

Contrary to what my claws looked like, they weren't really sharp and neither was my grip strength substantial. I was way too pathetic to be called an Evil Dragon Lord, but instead, I was more than suitable to embrace a small child.

The moment I held her, as we had thought, Reiko's wings vanished and the dragon scales covering her limbs started fading away.

"All right! Even if you die, don't let go of her!"

After shouting that, Ariante faced Lady Saintess and raised her hand as the signal. Thereupon, the same pool of water, which dragged me in at the inn, had appeared at our landing place. This time its size was more akin to a pond.

"Mr. lizard! Make sure to talk her out of it! Otherwise, my puny barrier won't be able to hold!"

"Leave it to me! This child will surely listen to—— ngyaaa!"

I hit hard the water surface with my stomach. While focused on protecting Reiko from the impact of the fall, I forgot about my own landing.

Disoriented, my field of vision was filled with sparks. Even so, I didn't let go of Reiko. When I plunged into the water holding my breath, Lady Saintess closed the barrier's entrance above my head. Unlike before, I didn't start drowning. The water level had immediately receded and laid us down on the water covered bottom of the white space.

"Hey, Reiko. Do you recognize me?"

"...Yes, Evil Dragon Lord."

When I called out to her, Reiko responded while still giving me a dumbfounded look. I was glad. It seemed she regained enough of her consciousness to communicate with me.

It was when I loosened both claws in my relief. From the loosened gap the black scaled pattern once again tried to engrave itself on Reiko's body. Flustered, I right away fixed my grip.

"W-What's this...?"

"I am ashamed to have shown this disgrace in Lord's presence. Everything is the fault of my inexperience."

Reiko spoke with a kind of philosophic undertone in it.

"Despite this magic power being not more than a miniscule portion of the Evil Dragon Lord's strength—I already cannot control it. If it wasn't suppressed by Evil Dragon Lord in this way, this vessel of mine would soon be reduced to nothing but a wicked demon."

Even though she was saying that, in fact it was Reiko herself unconsciously holding back the erosion. I might be repeating myself here, but I never had such monstrous power.

"Look, Reiko. You can't give up lightly. If you just keep at it, you actually might be able to suppress it easily, you know? I'll patiently keep you company until you can control it well."

"Your consideration of this undeserving one pierces my heart with its kindness. However, a kin's lack of capability causing trouble for the Head is nothing but putting the cart before the horse. To say nothing of the Lord's haste to subjugate the Demon King. Needlessly wasting time on the likes of this useless subordinate does not stand to reason."

"What's wrong with you? What happened to your usual pointless positivity?"

Maybe she was feeling down... But she looked too calm for that. Instead of appearing dejected, she seemed strangely detached.

"You need not worry, Evil Dragon Lord. I did not fall into despair. Rather, precisely because I became like this, I realised how I can be truly helpful to you."

"I've a bad hunch about this, but let's hear it first."

Reiko smiled gently inside my arms.

“— This time, please enjoy me as your mea—”

“No.”

I refused before she had finished, so Reiko sulking puffed out her cheeks.

“Evil Dragon Lord, I had not yet finished speaking.”

“That much was more than enough. Listen here, Reiko. How many times did I tell you? I won’t eat you because I’m herbivorous.”

“However you should have eaten my soul. Actually the reason I was able to become kin was because the Lord has eaten my soul.”

“Ah right... Yeah... That was...”

Precisely this careless remark of mine marked the beginning of my ordeal. Although if Reiko didn’t possess some peculiar talent it’d have been simpler. When I was scowling in regards to the past few bitter days, Reiko started chattering in protest.

“I am inadequate as the Evil Dragon Lord’s kin. Still, there is something I noticed during our short journey. It appears that, although just a little, I am endowed with magic power of my own.”

“Yep, I know.”

With too much actually.

“As expected of the Evil Dragon Lord, you were aware of it. In that case it makes it simple. If the Lord would eat my soul, it would not only return you the magic power given me as kin, but would allow me, as your flesh and blood, to give you my insignificant power. If I can’t become useful as kin, I want to at least help as your nourishment.”

“Haaa, Reiko...”

I let out the longest sigh in my whole lifetime. Even so, Reiko still continued.

“As inexperienced as I am, I see no other way to be more useful. Please, let me be helpful as your kin for this last time.”

“Just why do you judge everything based on being “useful” or “useless”?”

Slightly raising my tone of voice, I brought my face closer to Reiko.

“It was the same when you first came to me. Although you said it’s for help in subjugating the Demon King, what’s the point if you die and won’t be able to enjoy the following peaceful world? Everything comes first and foremost after you, so stop throwing away your own life as someone’s tool.”

“With all due respect, there is no one who would mourn me. That is why, at least as a tool—”

“I’m here, aren’t I?”

In order to scold her, I poked Reiko’s head with the tip of my nose.

“...Evil Dragon Lord?”

Reiko was flabbergasted. It was a given, since I made a remark completely unbecoming of an aloof Evil Dragon.

I couldn’t yet reveal that long ago, I was raised by humans and lived a pretty mediocre life. I still had to wear the mask of an Evil Dragon, otherwise this child would go berserk.

However, expressing just a little bit of my true feelings shouldn’t be a problem.

“I’ve lived alone a long time, and when you came along... how should I say it...”

I had called Reiko a “comrade” before. However, thinking about it, the word comrade is used for people carrying the same goal and of the same rank. I had never aimed to subjugate the Demon King, and neither was I strong enough to fight alongside her. That’s why, it probably wasn’t as a comrade...

“Right, I feel like I’ve gotten a child or a grandchild. Though you’re a child who needs an extraordinary amount of care— isn’t it obvious I’d be sad if you were gone?”

“Evil Dragon Lord would... feel sad?”

“What are you surprised for? I can also be happy and sad as much as everyone else. I’d be sad if you were to die. That’s why I won’t eat you. So, if you understand, from now on don’t treat your life so crudely. Okay?”

While still staring in puzzlement, Reiko slowly tilted her head.

“In other words, I should become a dragon and the Evil Dragon Lord’s grandchild, is that right...?”

“You really are able to misconstrue everything each and every time into something edgy.”

“Is that wrong? If it is your wish, I will try hard and grow a horn or two.”

“Are horns really something that grows by trying hard?!”

The world seemed to be overflowing with things I didn’t know of yet. My common sense was steadily being broken. However, all of a sudden I found it to be funny and broke into a laugh.

“If you can grow a horn, can you also retract it? No, I guess nothing is impossible. After all you’re my kin whom I can trust.”

“...I understand.”

Reiko touched my claws with both of her hands. And then she exerted her strength and gently loosened my grip.

“I will try and do my best. I want to stay with the Evil Dragon Lord longer too.”

“That’s right, that’s the spirit. Rest easy, if it becomes dangerous I’ll stop it.”

The moment she separated from me, once again the magic power started gushing out from Reiko’s body. But this time the situation was different. There was no change to Reiko’s body; instead, a squid ink like black ripple was spreading out on the floor’s water. She was releasing outside the magic power she couldn’t control.

The dyed black water before long began to undulate like a living being and started to

form into a shape of a giant dragon. It was fine – I wasn't scared. This was also a monster born from Reiko's magic power. It couldn't hurt me, and if I were to charge at it I could easily bring it down.

Under my watchful eye, the dragon's figure was turning more and more vicious. The claws were sharp, fangs long, thorn at the tail's tip. Moreover he swelled up in size, looking stronger than my real appearance.

— *Is... this really okay?*

Anxiety crossed my mind. More importantly, just how long would he continue to grow? He was already more than twice my size. If it went on like this, I felt that even if I charged I'd annihilate only his portion. What should I do if he goes on a rampage and breaks the barrier before I manage to beat his whole body?

Thump. When I was regretting making a rash promise, a weight jumped onto my back which was dripping with cold sweat.

"I'm feeling much better. As expected, the Evil Dragon Lord's judgment was flawless. Where there is a will, there is a way. It seems you did not trust me in vain."

With a self-satisfied *hmph*, Reiko showed an invigorated expression and stood with shoulders set back, striking a victory pose – not unlike a drunk returning from a successful vomit in the alley.

"Ah, yeah. I'm glad, but—"

When I wanted to ask what about the clean-up, the black wings expanded on my back with a flutter. Of course it wasn't my strength, but Reiko's doing. My face turned blank once I predicted the following development in an instant.

"Then I request your assistance. Let us quickly send this thing flying."

Along with Reiko's declaration the magic power connection ran out, and the completely independent black dragon began to run amok. With just one movement he caused the collapse of the barrier space, and his thunderous roar almost shook the whole world. There indeed was the unmistakable figure of an Evil Dragon, but...

"Ugyaaaaaa—!!!"

Reiko mercilessly caught me unaware, and hoisting the dagger aloft she exercised the wings, soaring and charging at a rapid speed. There was no comparison to when I was thrown by Ariante. It was truly the living-cannonball treatment. Naturally, it was a direct hit at the giant dragon's chest. Yet instead of decreasing, the speed continued to accelerate even further with zero consideration for me. There were no brakes.

And then, just like that, we dramatically tore right through the barrier's ceiling.



On the verge of tears Reivendia, who had grown wings, flew out of the barrier. It seemed they had rammed right into a fresh gigantic dragon, but they quickly vanished after reaching the surface. Based solely on that scene Ariante, as a skilled adventurer, could generally surmise the sequence of events.

"He's as pitiful as always..."

Ariante murmured while smiling wide.

"Since it came to this, he probably won't be able to escape his whole life."

Chapter 45

A bleak burnout

“Reiko... I’m a little tired... Let me sleep a while...”

After we turned the embodiment of the berserk magic power dragon into dust, Reiko’s excitement didn’t settle down easily. Sitting astride me and revelling in the victory while we were continuously swivelling in the air, she kept on matching my screams with her roars. Reiko probably didn’t think I was screaming. She might have mistaken that I felt like singing happily in a choir. Because of that, I had to perpetually experience the terror of the skies.

As soon as the long flight came to an end, my knees immediately gave way and I pleaded for sleep in a caterpillar-like posture. With a quiet *thup*, Reiko hopped off my back and ran up to my face.

“Please accept my apologies. I caused you trouble without thinking, making the Evil Dragon Lord devote the words of encouragement for the likes of me. Please rest to your heart’s content.”

“No, I’m not tired because of lecturing you... Yeah... I guess it doesn’t matter... Good night...”

I acutely felt like the fire of my soul was about to burn out. I was extremely drowsy. When I closed my eyes, a soothing, shining waterfall filled landscape of dreamland beckoned me to—

“Hooray—! You did it! You really did turn Lady Reiko back!”

Foomp, Lady Saintess threw herself and clung to my face. Her face was gleaming with joy, but behind her back Reiko’s eyes were shining dazzling blue.

“Water demon, the audacity when the Evil Dragon Lord is trying to rest! I will have to kill you after all.”

“Kiss me? Ehehe, Lady Reiko, even if you returned to normal, that’s a bit too much. Ah

right, maybe now we can play together at the festival?”^[1]

Heck, this wasn't the time for me to explore the gently misting rainbow waterfalls of dreamland. The vast expanse of alternate reality occupied by Lady Saintess' mind was much more serious. If it continued on like this, those dazzling misty waterfalls would be fountains of blood instead. However, no voice of reason came out of my lips – the fatigue enveloping my body had absolutely no consideration for my fervent efforts.

Only Lady Saintess' screams and Reiko's shouts echoed in the plains for a little while. *Screw it*; thinking so, I laid flat on the ground. *It should be fine. She looks like she's fooling around with a friend.*

“Reivendia, resting is fine, but don't sleep. You look like you really might die if you fall asleep like this.”

“...Nn. I appreciate it.”

While Reiko and Lady Saintess were playing tag, Ariante walked in front of me. After clearing her throat in a stiff manner, she lightly touched my arm with a clenched fist.

“Not bad. Unexpectedly, your efforts were fitting of calling you an Evil Dragon Lord.”

“Do you really think so from the bottom of your heart?”

“No, not really.”

“That's what I thought.”

“Your screaming was similar to a dying lizard.”

“Not similar, but exactly like one.”

Ariante folded her arms and laughed. I responded with a hoarse laugh of my own.

“Still, it looks like you got a little bit better at babysitting. That girl seems to be even more attached to you than before.”

“You grasped even that?”

“I don't know the concrete details, but compared to before the volume of her magic

power has increased. Probably because her faith in you has deepened, the amount of strength she's able to control has grown too. Incidentally, in my estimation it's by roughly more than three times."

For a while silence descended between us. When I hung my head down in embarrassment, Ariante held the bridge of her nose and murmured,

"You really went and did something outrageous now, didn't you?"

"I only wanted to cheer her up a bit..."

"What exactly did you say?"

"You're my kin, so you can do it as long as you try."

"That has to be a goddamn joke. Looks like she really can do anything."

Far away in my field of vision the fierce chase of Lady Saintess by Reiko was still unfolding. If one were to exclude the glittering dagger she held, it was the very appearance of children merrily playing a game of tag.

"Well, it'll probably somehow work out. Despite appearances, she's surprisingly holding it together."

Boom, the flames exploded and Lady Saintess rolled right over to us with her eyes spinning. She passed out, but it appeared there wasn't any significant damage. As I thought – she might not be aware of it, but I could see she bore moderation in mind.

"Let's leave it at that for now."

"Yeah, I also think it's for the best."

Reiko, who came back with satisfaction written all over her face, climbed onto my back and clung to me tightly with her whole body.

"Evil Dragon Lord, I am grateful for before. The words this vassal of yours received, I will not forget a single phrase till my life comes to an end."

"For some reason I feel uneasy, for the time being could you repeat what you memorized?"

“ [As the kin of my omniscient and omnipotent great self, you also are the possessor of an almighty power. Until the day we cast the foolish Demon King into his eternal prison and rule over the world, let us walk the path of dominance together.] ”

The speed at which she altered her memories was amazing. Just where did exactly the promise of not forgetting it for your whole life go? Ariante too, please stop looking at me with eyes half-believing what she had said. I'd never have been able to come up with that.

“You also said that I am like a grandchild to you.”

“Ah, you remembered that one right.”

“I think it would be presumptuous for the likes of me to call myself as a dependant of yours, even so, I was happy. Somehow it feels very comfortable.”

“Yeah, me too. I'm happy if you think that.”

“Yes, in which case, let us make haste to bring down the Demon King.”

“Could you try and put a little more order into the cause and effect of the conversation? My comprehension isn't able to catch up with your speed.”

Then she began her fervent speech filled with determination about defeating the Demon King. While I was listening to Reiko's voice, who was orating her exaggerated and reeking of blood speech, I had been nodding my head, each and every time saying “no” or “you can't” and— before I was aware, I fell asleep like that.

After that, with my personal dreamland shattered, I made terrible noises throughout the nightmare I saw, where Reiko was riding on me and we were charging at the Demon King.

[¹] In Japanese it was a perfect homophone written in different characters, read as *chuu suru*, which means to execute and to kiss respectively.

Chapter 46

Till we defeat the Demon King

When I woke up, it turned out we were banned from entering the town. Thinking about it, I guess it was justified. Reiko went berserk in front of every single guard's eyes, and she tried to turn it into a barren wasteland. I did try going to the guard post and apologize for that whole affair after I woke up, however—

“It's fine, totally fine, we don't mind at all. But because of all the mud strewn across the town it's hard to properly welcome the Evil Dragon Lord and Kin Lady. How about proceeding to the next town?”

“We already got all of your belongings packed and ready.”

“Ahh, I'm moved to tears; who would have thought we would be able to see the genuine Evil Dragon Reivendia in our lives. It's an amazingly rare experience, isn't it? It probably won't happen ever again. There mustn't be much to do in such a remote town either. Well then, please make haste in your journey to subjugate the Demon King.”

I felt their strong determination to prevent us from entering. I didn't have the nerve to deliberately ignore their will, so leaving the guard post I only had them fasten the entire luggage to my back, looking all set and ready for the journey ahead.

“Then let us depart Evil Dragon Lord.”

Although I hadn't yet said even a word, waiting in front of the guard post Reiko greeted me in high spirits overflowing with enthusiasm. I really would like her to stop being so strangely fixated only on subjugating the Demon King. She could instead pay a little more attention to my real feelings.

“Wait a minute Reiko. I still have something to take care of.”

“Understood, I apologize for my lack of consideration. What great matter could it be?”

“Well... Let's see...”

I'd like to munch on some grass for at least 5 years here. I decided to keep it a secret since I had no idea what would happen if I said that. I thought it over and went with a random excuse to buy time.

“Right, we’ve to say our farewells to Ariante and Lady Saintess. There’s no doubt they helps us out in various ways.”

For some reason both of them were gone when I woke up. There was only Reiko, who had been continuously murmuring some unsettling plan like a lullaby in my earshot, and the stretched flat on the ground unconscious silver dragon.

“If it is that female knight, she was invited to the festival not long ago. According to what I heard, it appears she is being extolled for her merit of exterminating an unthinkable powerful demon, but I cannot help but wonder when and what exactly has she defeated.”

You, you dummy. It looked like stopping her became Ariante’s achievement. Well, that made sense. I was technically standing at Reiko’s side, so if I were unlucky, I might even be made out to be a mastermind behind this.

“I see... but it’s surprising. Ariante didn’t seem like someone who would be good with such gaudy atmosphere.”

“During that time, a bunch of adventurer reinforcements prepared by Ariante arrived. They were a group of sycophantic parasites. As soon as they heard about her meritorious deed, all of them puffed out their chests as though they took part in it and dragged the female knight to the festival.”

“Wow, what a group of crafty people. Reiko absolutely mustn’t turn out like that.”

If not only her abilities but also her morality were to fall into darkness, she’d become unmanageable.

“Since she was made a focal point of the festival it’d be hard to meet her. We can’t even enter the town. Then what about Lady Saintess? Wouldn’t she come out if we were to call out near the waterways?”

“That is even more serious.”

“Eh? Something happened?”

Reiko nodded with a blank face, responding,

“The female knight was lauded as the [Second coming of Lady Saintess!] , so she is sulking and does not want to come out.”

“Ah, is that so? No wonder that looking closely the mud strewn throughout the town has increased slightly.”

She probably threw a tantrum, and in the end only pleased the villagers.

“What should we do? If it is necessary I will drag her out of the barrier.”

“Nah... since it's like that, it might be better to leave her alone—”

Sploosh, suddenly water gushed from the ground and transformed into the figure of Lady Saintess. It looked like she was dissatisfied about being left alone.

“That's cruel, not even a word of encouragement! Why is that?! Why didn't it become my achievement?! I also did my bessttt...”

“Even if you say that...”

It was probably wholly due to her lacking any sort of aura of a powerful person. Even though she should be fairly strong, she somehow had a vibe similar to mine.

“If you're that dissatisfied why don't you just go to the festival? It's Ariante we're talking about, she'll no doubt explain you're the real Lady Saintess.”

“Eeh, but that's embarrassing...”

With her cheeks dyed red, Lady Saintess was bashfully squealing. If she also found coming forward unpleasant, just what exactly did she want?

“Weell, I want to be praised. I'm the type that thrives on compliments. Still, being complimented directly is embarrassing, so I want them to praise me indirectly, like in the festival's shrine. It's obvious I won't allow other people to get the exclusive Lady Saintess treatment. Do you now understand this maiden's heart?”

“You've got some complicated frustrations, don't you? But there's no point telling me, I really can't do anything.”

“That’s right, stop bothering the Evil Dragon Lord.”

While saying in a threatening tone, for some reason, Reiko had embraced Lady Saintess. I was staring in wonderment at the downright unexpected action. I certainly couldn’t believe that a sign of friendship would sprout between them after they messed around trying to kill each other.

“Eh? Lady Reiko? I can’t believe... you wanted to cheer me up by hugging me? Lady Reiko, being the genuine Evil Dragon, that you would worry so much for me... I, as a puny demon, cannot help but feel pride——”

“What a drag. Stop spouting crap and go get praised as much as you like.”

Reiko lifted Lady Saintess’ body as though she was lifting a baby high up.

And then she threw her violently at the town’s heart, where the festival’s accompaniment echoed. The throw’s velocity showed Reiko’s absolute lack of moderation or mercy. So much so, that she couldn’t help but turn into a flashing star.

After a little while screams could be heard from the distance. It was obviously because a human-like figure abruptly came flying. She might even be treated as a new demon. It’d be great if Ariante’s followers didn’t subdue her.

“Well then, with this we finished the farewells.”

“I won’t be able to face Lady Saintess ever again.”

“At that time I will pin down her neck and turn her face towards you.”

“That’s the main cause I won’t be able to face her though.”

I let out a long sigh. Whatever the case, it didn’t seem like spending our time peacefully at this town was a viable option.

And so I embarked slowly to the plains, without any particular aim. Reiko had climbed on my back and clung to me with all of her body.

“Evil Dragon Lord, I hope I can continue as your dutiful servant, now and into the future.”

“Yeah, well, let’s both take it easy.”

Although Reiko will probably continue to run amok with all her power and this journey will be filled with hardships for me.

At the very least, all the way until we defeat that Demon King.

Chapter 47

Book I Epilogue: Survivor's Support Group

"Sheesh, those guys... it's almost like they don't listen to what I'm saying at all."

Ariante, who finally managed to slip out from the festival's crowd, was outside the town, whistling while going to meet up with her favourite horse. Even though she said the real Lady Saintess, totally separate from her, played an active role in the events, everyone seemed to not hear her. Actually, she felt the bunch of adventurers heard her, but deliberately blocked their ears. They probably just wanted all the glory directed at her, thinking they might get a piece of it.

Be that as it may, she wondered what the trigger to her escape— what that mysterious object which came flying from the sky was. That flying object wrecked the festival stage like a meteorite and created an opening for Ariante to escape. It didn't come across as evil and there didn't seem to be any injured, but still, considering the strangeness of the situation she was slightly worried. In the end, she decided that even if something happened, it should be fine with all the adventurers gathered there. Setting aside their character, their skills were all right.

"...So, why are you following me?"

Riding on her favourite horse, she looked up at the skies. There was the figure of the silver dragon with his wings covering the sky.

"It's not 'you'. Call me Doradora."

"Just what made you become so servile? No matter how I look at you, you don't seem like the adorable type."

"That so, you want to know. The reason why I call myself as Doradora..."

"No, not really."

Ariante ordered the horse to quicken the pace. Not wanting to lose, the self-proclaimed Doradora also sped up his flight. At the speed that the wind felt like a wall,

the silver dragon started flying within inches to the surface.

“I was defeated by that girl. Thoroughly, at that. Naturally, even I’ve known defeat before. However, it was the first time—losing so utterly to such a young child, with no ability to resist at all.”

“Shit, he started chattering even though I don’t care. Oi, run faster and shake him off.”

The horse sent a resigned look, as if he was saying “Racing against a dragon is a little...”. Ariante believed that it was possible to cross the barrier of human and horse relationship and communicate with a long-time partner of hers, at least to some extent.

“And then I was branded as Doradora. My feelings of that time are... an embodiment of disgrace. I, Dragon of the Fierce Winds, was denounced like a harmless pet, stuck with an indifferent, ill-natured nickname. Moreover, I haven’t felt any significant malice from her. Most likely, I was to her a being not even worthy of sarcasm or spite.”

“Stop lamenting just because of that. After all, there’s a more miserable dragon in this world.”

“I see... Was that dragon also done in by her?”

“In some sense, yes.”

“So he’s the same as me, huh. Somehow, I can’t think of it as someone else’s problem.”

Gliding through the air, Doradora closed his eyes in a silent prayer. And then he abruptly opened them,

“I swore. That I mustn’t forget the disgrace, in order to one day make her call me by my true name. Until the day I fulfil that vow, I decided to wear the name of Doradora.”

“Is that so, do your best. Well then, take care.”

“Wait.”

“No. You’re tiresome.”

The still chasing after Ariante silver dragon gave her nothing but a bad feeling.

“However, it won’t be easy. I saw the battle before in its entirety, but I’d never have thought that small dragon’s true identity— the one originally called as Doradora, would actually turn out to be that Evil Dragon Reivendia. Even though she beat me to the ground one-sidedly, he easily suppressed her berserk state. After seeing such dragon in close proximity, I was forced to deem treading a thorny path necessary...”

“Haa, your consciousness was hazy so you only saw the convenient part. If you really saw everything, you wouldn’t know how to express your feelings.”

Actually, that was exactly how Ariante felt. However, Doradora was completely immersed in his own world and didn’t hear a thing.

“Human warrior, you’re somewhat stronger than me. Surpassing me of the dragon kind, despite having a human body, you surely must have endured a harsh training. Alas, I was born with my strength, so I know nothing of the way how humans temper their strength. Therefore, could you please consider training me?”

“Why would I help out a demon?”

“As a matter of course, I won’t attack humans ever again. Rather I can help subjugate the evil ones. I can even substitute for that horse and act as your mount.”

“Stop it, he’ll pout.”

The favourite horse glared sharply at Doradora, so Ariante had to pat his mane in order to soothe him.

“It’s a rare chance to subdue a demon like me. Human warrior, are you going to waste it?”

“That’s not the problem...”

After letting out a deep, long sigh, she said,

“I’m not going to be your support group... one is already more than enough for me.”

And yet, the silver dragon stubbornly followed her.



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