

勇者の

セガシ

YU-SHA NO SEGARE

2

イラスト 029  
和ヶ原聡司



電撃文庫



勇者の

セガシ

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イラスト 029

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KHALIJA  
WELLEGER



けん ぎき のど か  
**剣崎和香**

康雄の妹の中学三年生。異世界からやってきたディアナに最初は戸惑いを感じていたが、いまでは姉のように思っている。

**ディアナ**  
(ディアネイズ・クローネ)

異世界アンテ・ランデから、救世の勇者ヒデオ・ケンザキ召喚の使者としてやってきた魔導機士の少女。

「まあ、今朝のお兄ちゃん妙に顔色悪かったけど、さほど期待せずに頑張ってる」

「いいお天気ですね！  
今日もヤスオの訓練、頑張りますよ！」

## Chapter 1 – A New Emissary

The doorway of the Kenzaki house was dyed in the deep color of sunset. A girl was bowing deeply to everyone present, while holding a slightly threadbare bag.

“Thank you so much for all that you’ve done for me.”

The tears in her eyes caught the light of the setting sun and gave off a radiance that looked like real gold. The girl who possessed such a level of beauty held a well-used bag in her hands, bit her lip, and once again faced all the members of the Kenzaki family who had gathered near the front door of their house.

“I’ve caused you nothing but trouble, and yet you’ve done so much for me that I can never hope to pay you back...”

“I’ve hardly done anything for you, Diana-chan.”

Diana’s hair was shining with a golden color. The person who called out to her was the central pillar of the Kenzaki family, Kenzaki Hideo.

“Please don’t say that. This was all caused by my lack of judgement.”

Diana closed her eyes with long eyelashes and shook her head in response to what Hideo said.

“No, it wasn’t your fault...!”

The eldest son of the Kenzaki family, Yasuo, couldn’t hold himself back and blurted that out.

However, his mother, Madoka, spoke up to restrain him.

“Don’t say things like that which will weaken Diana-chan’s resolve.”

“...Mom... I...”

“Onii-chan.”

Yasuo still looked unwilling to give up, and the person who stepped in to firmly scold him was his sister, Nodoka.

“If you detain Diana-san here any longer, she’s the one who will get hurt. Can’t you understand that? Diana-san has already made her decision.”

“God... dammit...”

Yasuo’s feelings of shame were condensed into the sound that leaked from his mouth as he ground his teeth.

After giving Yasuo a look filled with sadness, Diana spoke decisively.

“It’s time for me to leave.”

“...Yeah.”

Hideo accepted her words, then Diana raised her head slightly and spoke with lips the color of cherry blossoms.

“Yasuo.”

“Diana...”

“Yasuo, I believe that you are a splendid man who will not lose, no matter what kind of trouble comes your way. Please, harden your heart and face your trials.”

Yasuo’s voice lacked energy as he replied to Diana’s encouragement.

“Diana... I’m sorry, I...”

Yasuo was unable to lift his head.

However, Diana smiled and turned away, as if she had seen the anguish and determination that lay in the depths of Yasuo’s expression.

“Well then, I will take my leave.”

Diana didn't look back as she passed through the door that had been resurrected using the money from fire insurance. She took a step into the streets of Japan, which to her, was an alternate world.

Although it looked like she was reluctant to leave, her posture also showed her iron determination to part ways with the Kenzaki family. It was a complicated feeling.

And then.



Dianaze Krone, Magitech Knight of Ante Lande and ex-occupant of the house belonging to The Hero of Salvation, Hideo Kenzaki, walked over to the Marigold Hills Tokorozawa Apartment Building that was located diagonally to the right on the opposite side of the street, opened the door of Room Number 101, and disappeared inside.

“...Seriously.”

After Diana had left, Nodoka’s voice attacked Yasuo’s eardrums like spiked cudgels.

“Really, Onii-chan. What the hell are you doing?”

“I have no excuse...”

“Now, Nodoka. We’ve already talked about this a lot so why don’t you go easy on him.”

His father tried to block the spiked cudgels out of pity, but,

“Dad, you’re the one who should actually be scolding him proactively. You’re the parent, after all.”

“Well, about that...”

He retreated surprisingly quickly.

“Calm down, Nodoka. This was going to happen eventually in any case. We just had to do it a little sooner, that’s all. But it’s true, there’s no excuse for the mess Yasuo has created.”

“Ugh.”

His mother’s words struck Yasuo like an assassin’s dagger, and he let out a moan.

“I know, right? It should have been Onii-chan leaving the house, not Dianasan.”

“No, that would be pretty strange as well. And if that had happened, Diana-chan would have felt even worse.”

“Ah, dammit!”

Even though his sister’s verbal abuse had crossed the line a long time ago, Yasuo was unable to retaliate at all.

And then, Nodoka said those decisive words.

“Not being able to concentrate on your studies because of the Hero training and living with Diana-san and failing three subjects in your midterm exams, seriously, what the hell!? This is beyond the level of not having enough resolve as both a Hero and a student facing exams.”

“Aaaaargh!!”

Yasuo felt like someone was relentlessly pounding on his glass heart with a hammer, and he crumpled to the floor near the doorway.



Kenzaki Yasuo, who lived a 『very ordinary life』 with his 『typical Japanese family』, had just begun the spring of his third year as a high school student, when his life and the lives of his family members underwent a dramatic change due to the appearance of a visitor from another world.

A girl suddenly appeared in the middle of his peaceful family, and declared that she was Dianaze Krone, a Magitech Knight from a different world known as Ante Lande.

She revealed that Yasuo’s father, Hideo, and his mother, Madoka, were respectively the Hero and Great Magician who had saved Ante Lande during its crisis in the past, and explained that she had come to request their help once more in saving their world from a danger that had befallen it.

However, the children of that Hero and Great Magician, Yasuo and Nodoka, had not been told anything of their parents' past until Dianaze Krone had appeared.

Their father was a salaryman, and their mother was a housewife.

The siblings thought that it was enough for their parents to just retain those identities.

There was no way they would not be confused after hearing 『We used to fight with swords and magic in the past』 from their parents who were about to enter their 50s.

When his father said that he would quit his job in response to the summons for aid, Yasuo used the fact that he and his sister were at an important stage in life as an excuse, and tried to reject the existence of the 『different world, Ante Lande』 itself.

However, Yasuo was forced to reconsider his feelings after seeing the existence of Diana, who was a messenger from that world, the legendary sword that resided within his father's body, the magic used by his mother, and more than anything else, the appearance of dark monsters from the other world, which took the appearance of people who had already died.

His sister, Nodoka, began to accept their parents' strange past sooner than him, and even after understanding everything, she was still reluctant to send her father to his death, and so she gently rejected Diana and the other world as well.

Diana herself had reservations about the fact that her homeworld needed to cling to a hero who had saved them thirty years ago, and so she assumed that the negotiations would end in failure. However, they were attacked by a Shii that bore the appearance of Diana's dead father, Alexei Krone, and a mysterious man named 『William Bareig』, who had the ability to control the Shii.

William appeared to be targeting Yasuo and Nodoka, and so Diana attempted to fight against him. However, neither her sorcery nor her Techno Weapons had any effect on him, and she was about to suffer a complete defeat.

Luckily, Hideo arrived in the nick of time and drove William away, but neither the Kanzaki family nor Ante Lande could deny the new threat posed by the Shii any longer.

And so, Yasuo, who had realized his desire to 『protect the people important to me』 after the battles with Alexei=Shii and William, declared his intent to become the new Hero to replace his father who had become old.



Three days before Diana left the Kanzaki family house.

Yasuo was unable to rise from his seat in his classroom after receiving a ruthless verdict of three red cards.

In the first midterm exams of his third year, Yasuo received scores of 33 in English Reading, 34 in Classical Literature, and 34 in Social Studies. He received a failing score in English, Classical Literature, and Social Studies, which were the three main pillars of the humanities course to which he belonged.

Moreover, they were not just regular failing scores, all three were just on the border of failing, which made it all the more difficult to bear. The students of Takeoka High School were given grades out of ten, and anything less than or equal to three would be recorded as a failing grade.

Based on this system, a score of 34 would get grade 3, and 35 would get grade 4.

So basically, if Yasuo had answered even one more question correctly on these three exams, he could have avoided the worst case scenario.

If his rating for the whole year was less than 『4』, it would be considered a failing grade and he would have to repeat the year.

Of course, this was just the result of his first semester, and he had more than enough time to recover over the course of the year. However, failing three subjects was no small matter for a third year high school student who was aiming to go to college.

This unexpected situation even prompted a summons from his homeroom teacher, and Yasuo headed towards the staff room after school, feeling like a condemned criminal who was heading towards the gallows.

“Ah, Yasu. Are you okay?”

Upon returning to his classroom 30 minutes later with a haggard expression, Yasuo’s classmate, Aioi Aoto, greeted him with a serious expression on his face.

“Probably... not.”

“Well, you did get three failing grades at this point in time, so...”

Both the homeroom teacher and the teacher who was in charge of the curriculum could not ignore the fact that Yasuo, a third year student at a high-level private school, failed English, Classical Literature, and Social Studies, which were the main subjects that would determine his results in the final exams.

Thankfully, they didn’t summon him to reprimand him, but instead to decide on how to deal with his grades. However, that didn’t change how pathetic he felt about himself.

“Did they give you some kind of assignment?”

“I have to write a report for Social Studies. For English and Classical Literature, I need to take a make-up test sometime next week.”

To deal with his failing grades, Yasuo had to take make-up tests for English and Classical Literature, and write a report for Social Studies.

He was actually supposed to take a make-up test for Social Studies as well. However, Social Studies was relatively less important as an examination topic compared to the other subjects, and when the teacher in charge of the curriculum heard that he had to take make-up tests for English and Classical Literature as well, he said, 『Adding another test will be too much of a burden, so just think of it as practice for essay-writing and do your best』, and changed it to a report submission instead.

The theme of the report was, “Should the age of majority be reduced in accordance with the reduction in voting age? [\[1\]](#)”

“...Taking a make-up test sounds easier.”

“You think so too?”

He wasn't pressed for time, but writing a properly organized essay is no easy task. Moreover, he also had to do something about the English and Classical Literature make-up tests as well.

Aoto shot a concerned look at Yasuo, who had collapsed in his seat while hanging his head.

“So make-up tests for routine exams are actually a thing?”

“This is a first for me as well, so it feels weird on top of making me nervous.”

It wasn't strange for Aoto to say that.

If Yasuo kept on the other side of the 35-mark failing line for the remaining routine exams and managed to get a rating of 5 even once, that would be more than enough to cover for this one failure and he would be able to graduate.

Even if a student only studied hard on the night before for the remaining exams, it was definitely possible to achieve that. For that reason, students would not usually get called to the staff room and be forced to take make-up tests for just failing a routine exam. At the most, they would just feel bad when getting the results of the exam back and during the parent-teacher conference.

However, things were different this time.

Although Yasuo was never one of the top students in the school, he had never scored below average until now.

Neither his homeroom teacher nor the teacher in charge of the curriculum scolded him for not studying. Instead, they were worried if there was some major problem at home or at school which was the root cause.

To be fair, the teachers were not wrong.

Except that his problems lay in a different direction to what they were thinking of.

“Well, I understand why they’re anxious. Yasu, you’ve lost a lot of weight in the last half-month.”

“Huh?”

Yasuo was surprised at this unexpected comment from Aoto.

“Maybe you haven’t realized it yourself, but you have a terrible complexion as well.”

“It’s that bad?”

Yasuo hurriedly put his hands on his face, but of course he would not be able to tell how he looked by doing that.

“There were many days when you had dark circles underneath your eyes, and even during the exams, I thought you looked like you were going to faint on the first day.”

At this point, his classmates Igarashi and Hino also came over and started talking, perhaps because they had overheard the previous conversation.

“I understand what Aoto means. Kenzaki, you weren’t the kind of guy who’d sleep during class before.”

“Yeah.”

Igarashi said that while grinning.

“Yeah. I was wondering if you were ill or something. You were losing weight and your complexion was terrible, but you were still still scarfing down your lunch.”

“Eehh...”

Hino made a face and nodded along with Igarashi.

“It was pretty obvious that something was different. Although I don’t know if the teachers were watching you that closely.”

“S-Sorry, I seem to have made you guys worry about me. I didn’t mean for that to happen at all.”

It was quite rare for boys in high school to notice so much about the health of one of their peers. It just showed how much he had changed in recent times.

“Besides, you’ve started acting strangely recently. You asked me about my Dad’s work and stuff. That’s around when you started acting strangely, so I wondered if you had some issues like your father losing his job, or your parents getting divorced.... Ah... it’s nothing like that, right?”

Aoto meant to say that as a joke, but maybe he felt that it was not impossible halfway through, so he ended his sentence with a question while looking like he had brought up a touchy subject.

“N-No, it’s nothing like that. I was just, you know, a little depressed before exams started. I had the opportunity to hear about my Dad’s past from

someone else, and I began to seriously feel anxious about my own path in life, that's all."

Aoto looked relieved at having avoided touching upon a delicate topic, and Yasuo felt relieved as well.

"I-I see. Still, if you have something on your mind, you can talk to me, you know? I don't know if I'll be able to help, though. I've heard that just speaking your worries out loud to someone else can make you feel a lot better."

Aoto's selfless display of friendship was far too dazzling.

No, it wasn't just Aoto. Igarashi and Hino were the same, as were the teachers who noticed the change in him and were worried about him.

Yasuo realized that he was blessed with wonderful people around him and felt his eyes get hotter, but that was precisely the reason why he couldn't tell any of them about his issues.

He was so enthusiastic about Hero training that he wasn't able to concentrate on his studies.

Who on earth would accept that statement at face value?

The friendship and dedication he saw around him now might turn into twisted, forced smiles. Yasuo was well aware of that, so he had no choice but to insist that he had just become careless.

However, he was not able to hide the truth from the instructor of the Hero training herself.

The Hero training that Yasuo was undertaking under Diana's guidance was actually an emulation of the Magitech Knight training that Diana had undergone herself.

Theoretical classes, physical training, and sorcery training were the three main pillars of the course, and right now they were in the middle of a lesson on the most basic level of sorcery training, 『Foundations of Sorcery』 .

“Ouch!”

That magical energy that had been passing between his hands snapped back violently, causing his hands to turn red and throb as though they were frostbitten.

Foundations of Sorcery was a basic course that increased the amount of magical energy that a person could call upon. This was achieved by emitting the magical energy in the body from the hands and continuously passing it between both hands. It was similar to jogging.

In the ten minutes since the lesson started, Yasuo had allowed the magic to slip through his fingers three times, causing it to break apart.

This was like falling down thrice after just jogging for ten minutes.

“Yasuo, is there something you’re worried about?”

Dianaze Krone, the visitor from another world and a person similar to Yasuo in the sense that she too had parents who were counted as heroes in her country, quickly realized that Yasuo’s movements during training were even more lackluster than usual.

Even though Yasuo was a beginner at using sorcery, he hadn’t been this bad even on the day when he had first managed to release magical energy from his hands. Seeing this, Diana immediately interrupted Yasuo’s practice.

“Eh!? No! It’s nothing!”

Yasuo replied immediately while nursing his aching hands, but...

“...Yasuo?”

From Diana's glowering expression and pursed lips, it was easy to understand that rather than blaming him, she was feeling sad as if she was thinking "Why are you telling such a transparent lie?"

After being glared at, Yasuo yielded to the beautiful Magitech Knight's sullen expression and confessed the truth.

After seeing Diana's gorgeous and delicate features, anyone who didn't know her would assume that she was a sheltered, high-class young lady who would wear dresses and drink tea.

In fact, the high-class young lady part was undeniably true, but that was only because of the family she was born into. Both of her parents were full-time soldiers, and Diana herself was also a soldier.

What's more, with Diana's physical abilities and the mental strength that she had acquired during her training as a Magitech Knight in the other world, she would not lose even if she was up against a thousand opponents who were at Yasuo's current level.

In her eyes, Yasuo's hastily made-up lie probably appeared to to be more shallow than the lies told by a child.

"I received a failing grade on my midterm tests, so I have to take make-up tests."

Yasuo gave up on trying to hide it and confessed the shameful truth.

"Tests? Failing grade.... Make-up tests!?"

As she processed the unfamiliar Japanese words in her head, Diana's complexion went from bad to worse.

If anything, she looked even more worried than Yasuo himself, and leaned forward while sitting on her knees, putting her face close to Yasuo's own; he had been sitting cross-legged while attempting to meditate.

"Could that perhaps be something really, really bad!?"

Yasuo felt that the current distance between their faces was actually quite bad instead, but he managed to reply,

“Well, it’s just midterms, so I can resolve it with make-up tests and homework...”

He was trying to make light of the situation.

True, he had been quite shocked when he first found out about the failing grades, but he later started to feel that there was no point agonizing about it now, and it would be fine so long as he completed the homework and make-up tests properly.

“That’s wrong!”

However, Diana said that while almost screaming.

“Yasuo, you volunteered to become the new hero, but before that you’re still a student of Takeoka! That should be your highest priority right now!”

“Eeh!? Now, I mean—”

“I know that you’ve been staying awake late at night everyday to work on your sorcery training so that you can improve as fast as possible, Yasuo.”

“No, I wasn’t really...”

Yasuo had indeed been practicing the Foundations of Sorcery training in his room after the rest of his family had gone to bed. Part of the reason was that he wanted to become strong and improve quickly to become someone who was worthy of receiving training from Diana, but the main reason was that he simply found it to be very enjoyable.

It was magic, after all. Real magic. According to Diana, what he was currently learning was called “Sorcery,” but to be honest he really didn’t understand the difference between the two, and such trivial things really didn’t matter at this point.

In the current day, there were probably no boys of his age who had never imitated the techniques of characters from manga, anime, or games at least once in their lives. Everyone probably went through the age where they swung their wet umbrellas on their way back from school on rainy days, and pretended that the flying droplets of water were energy blasts from some deadly technique.

Of course, as they got older, the boys would be forced to accept that humans cannot fly through the air or fire explosive blasts from their hands. However the fact that there were things like 『Magic Shows』 and talk of 『Supernatural Abilities』 showed that people never really got over their yearning for the 『Paranormal』 even after becoming adults.

And then, Yasuo managed to find 『Real Magic』.

The series of events that led to him finding that magic were serious and very grave, but in spite of that, there was no way that he wouldn't be elated at the prospect of causing paranormal phenomena with his own powers.

And so it was that he ended up putting more effort into his Sorcery training that was not going well, and although he had not entirely neglected his test preparation, it could not be said that he had correctly prepared for them either.

As Yasuo was not in good shape, the Sorcery training drained his physical and mental strength to a great degree, and ended up reducing the amount of time he could put aside to prepare for his tests.

In short, Yasuo was entirely at fault because he had focused more on having fun, but apparently Diana didn't feel the same way.

“I'm so sorry! I was taking advantage of your strong spirit! The Hero Training should have been something you undertook in addition to correctly living your daily life, but I ended up forcing you into a state where you compromised your own position for the sake of Ante Lande...”

“Eh!? Ehh!? Ehhh!?”

“I’ve made my decision. I’ve been thinking for some time now that I cannot keep living like this while taking advantage of the Kenzaki family’s generosity. This is a good opportunity, so let me speak to Hideo about what we should do from now on once he comes back from work tonight! In any case, we’re done with training for today! Please work hard at your studies to recover from your current situation! Go on. Right now!!”

“Ehhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

And so, Diana convened a meeting of the Hero’s family that evening, and Yasuo felt like he was made to sit on a bed of nails.

Diana told everyone that Yasuo was unable to concentrate on the tests that should have originally been his main priority because of herself and Ante Lande.

However, unlike Diana, who saw every action of Yasuo’s in a positive light, his family immediately understood what had caused the issue and looked at him with cold gazes.

“So basically, you were on cloud nine about becoming capable of using magic, put all your energy into that, and ended up not studying for your tests, is that it?”

There is probably no younger sister on the planet who would hold back at a time like this.

“It’s not Diana-san’s fault at all, is it?”

Yasuo was perfectly aware of that. And his family should have been aware of the fact that Yasuo was aware of it.

“Yes, it’s all my fault.”

So the only thing he could do was meekly admit to the fact, but,

“No, it’s my fault for forcing him to do something of such a high level. If not for that, I don’t think Yasuo would have faced so much difficulty with his tests.”

“Stop spoiling him, Diana-san! Don’t take all that responsibility on yourself. Onii-chan is the one who acted all cool and declared that he would become a Hero! In that case, whether he fails his tests or has to repeat a grade, it’s all his fault!”

“Still, the root cause of the matter is the fact that we came here asking for help, so it’s our responsibility...!”

“Since he said that he would do it, it’s his own responsibility!”

Even though Yasuo fully understood that he was in the wrong, Diana and Nodoka continued to assault him from their completely opposite viewpoints, so Yasuo was gradually growing more and more depressed.

“Hmm. That’s enough, both of you.”

Unable to bear watching that anymore, Hideo interrupted their conversation.

“True, getting a failing grade is nothing to be proud about, but I understand why Yasuo felt the way he did. Besides, it’s not like those grades will make him repeat a year for sure, right?”

“O-Of course not.”

“Then it should be fine. Yasuo just has to properly repent for this actions this time and work hard for his next test.”

Yasuo also felt the same way, so it would have been good if the conversation ended there, but the situation took a turn for the worse because of the unnecessary things his father said after that.

“Even I did all sorts of crazy stuff right after I was sent to Ande Lande because I was suddenly given such incredible powers. So, I kind of

understand how Yasuo feels. Dear, do you remember that time when I caused an avalanche by blasting off too much wind magic.....”

He was probably just trying to lighten the atmosphere.

However, his wife didn't feel the same way about what he thought of as fond memories from the past.

“Dear, how is that related to the current situation?”

“Eh?”

“We're talking about Yasuo's lack of discipline right now, so why are you bringing up old stories?”

“Eh, umm... That is...”

“Besides, do you have any idea how many problems you caused for Erize and me with your wild stunts?”

“Uh, I mean... That is...”

Not to mention, the attack vector had changed to him at some point, so even Hideo was flustered.

After confirming that Hideo had fallen silent after understanding that he was unnecessarily bringing trouble upon himself, Madoka turned to face Diana.

“In any case, that's how it is. Diana-chan, you haven't done anything wrong.”

“That's right! If anything, Onii-chan is a failure because he's still stuck that the preparatory phase even after failing his tests, in spite of you staying in the same house and giving him constant attention.”

The attacks increased in intensity because of his father's unnecessary words, but Diana once again spoke up.

“Actually, about that 『Staying in the same house and giving him constant attention』 part...”

Nodoka even aimed her hostility at Diana, but even she was forced to take a sharp breath at Diana's next words.

"I would like to take this opportunity to temporarily leave the Kenzaki house."

Saying that, she looked at Yasuo with a slightly sorry gaze.

This is what Diana said.

Not only had she brought her own problems to the family, it was a fact that she was also completely relying on the Kenzaki family for the things she needed to live in Japan.

What's more, Madoka had lost access to her room because Diana was staying there, and Hideo and Yasuo gave her higher priority for things like using the shower and eating.

It was clear that she was causing many difficulties for the Kenzaki family, and relying too much on their goodwill.

Due to that, she would continue to do her job as a guard and Yasuo's Magitech Knight trainer, but she wanted to move out of the Kenzaki house.

"Saying that is one thing, but what are you going to do about money?"

"I am carrying several items that can be sold for a high value even in Japan. My mother also strictly told me that I must not become a burden to the Kenzaki family in case my stay in Japan is extended for a longer period of time. I might end up causing you trouble again with the process of obtaining a proof of identity, buying and selling the necessary items, and the rental contract, but please..."

"No, but that is..."

"Really, I don't think that will work..."

They understood why Diana felt that way, but Hideo and Madoka felt that Diana was just as important to them as their own children, so they thought

she didn't have to worry about it so much. In addition, they knew that there were unavoidable reasons why Diana was in this situation.

At that point, Nodoka spoke up.

“Isn't there that small apartment nearby?”

“Eh? The one next to Tayama-san's place?”

“Yeah, that's the place. It's very close to our house, it's in pretty decent condition, and the sign saying that it's up for rent has been there for so long that it is rusting, so the rent has probably come down quite a bit too.”

“No, but even so, Diana-chan is also a girl. It might be close by and cheap to rent, but it's been empty for so long that you don't know what kind of unpleasant things you might find there...”

Hideo stated his disapproval after remembering the apartment in question. However, Nodoka shook her head.

“What are you talking about? I was saying Onii-chan should move there, not Diana-san.”

““Huh!?””

At that statement, both Yasuo and Diana raised their voices at the same time.

“I understand why Diana-san feels bad for staying in our house for so long, but she has done nothing wrong, so if she leaves it's like we're kicking her out for no reason. On the other hand, Onii-chan caused this mess, so isn't it only right that he should be the one to leave the house?”

*Why are the existences called little sisters so bitter towards their older brothers in this world?*

“That's because you're completely useless, Onii-chan.”

Nodoka glared at Yasuo and said that as if reading his mind.

“Umm, Nodoka, I think that would be defeating the purpose...”

“I’m pretty serious about this, you know.”

“That’s true, she’s still a young lady of marriageable age who has spent her precious youth training this dunce from our family, kicking her out now would be too much.”

“Umm, I definitely didn’t mean to say anything of that sort!”

Although she had intended to be the one to leave, the topic of the conversation had turned towards Yasuo being kicked out of his own house, so Diana started to panic.

Even if Diana took back her words now, Nodoka would probably not agree.

Yasuo realized that since the current situation came about due to his own lack of effort, anything he said would just make matters worse, so he elected to sit quietly.

“Everyone, calm down. We’re getting off topic.”

Hideo once again spoke up because it looked like neither side would be willing to back down at this rate.

“Dear, the conversation is getting needlessly complicated because both you and Nodoka are talking about who should be kicked out and who should remain. Let’s look at the problems we face with the five of us living together and prioritize them.”

After confirming that he had the attention of all the people in the room, Hideo continued to speak.

“The highest priority is ensuring that Yasuo and Nodoka are safe until we get a response from Resteria regarding the case with William and Alex’s Shii. After that comes the matter of Diana-chan’s living space. Regarding the matter of Yasuo’s behavior, it will be fine as long as he reflects on his actions and takes the necessary steps. Remember what you you said to us the other day, and don’t make the people around you worry any more. Understood?”

“Yes... I’m sorry.”

As it had been some time since Yasuo spoke, his reply stuck in his throat.

“Next, it’s true that our house is a bit cramped, and we haven’t been able to properly accommodate Diana-chan.”

It is a fact that accommodating another adult in the house of a regular salaryman whose children are already grown up is very difficult.

“Even though she only uses it to sleep, staying in your mother’s room must be quite cramped. Both from the perspective of wanting to care for the daughter of my best friend, and from the perspective of allowing Diana-chan to carry out her mission properly, there is a need to improve her current living arrangements. For personal reasons, as well as for the sake of her mission, there will be times when she needs her space. So...”

Hideo looked at Diana and spoke.

“Let’s go look at the apartment Nodoka mentioned. If it’s not in too bad a condition, Diana-chan, you will be moving your base of operations over there.”

“Y-Yes, it would be very helpful if you let me do that.”

“Ehhhh?”

Diana looked relieved, and Nodoka looked like she was displeased, but the next sentence decided the issue.

“In any case, you will need a guarantor for getting a rental lease, so you won’t be able to enter into a contract alone, Diana-chan. So I’ll pay for the initial costs of moving into the apartment, furnishing it with the minimum required appliances and furniture, and half of the monthly rent, and you will pay for your food, items you need for your daily life, and the other half of the rent. This should allow us to keep the balance.”

※

And so, Diana moved out of the Kenzaki house today, three days after Yasuo received his failing grades.

Diana's new base of operations was Room Number 101 of the Marigold Hills Tokorozawa Apartment Building, which was located very close by and could be seen from the window of Yasuo's room.

Although it was surprising that she was able to move in just three days after they had thought of the idea, according to his father, the apartment was available immediately after they completed inspecting the premises. It was probably a stroke of good luck.

It was an ordinary apartment building, and you would probably find hundreds of similar-looking buildings even within Tokorozawa City. It had two floors, with a total of four western-style one-room apartments. This building with the exaggerated name of 『Marigold Hills』 was where Diana would be staying from now on.

On paper, the person who was renting the apartment was Kenzaki Hideo, and the rent, including administrative charges, was 50,000 Yen. The building was being managed by a nearby real estate agency and the floor plan of the building wasn't available on the internet, so Yasuo couldn't tell if this was cheap or expensive.

In any case, after going to purchase the minimum necessities that Diana would need for living alone, the four members of the Kenzaki family and Diana were planning to go out for dinner today to celebrate Diana's moving into a new apartment.

“My highest priority, huh?”

Yasuo looked at the three exam answer sheets marked with a failing grade that were on top of his desk and sighed.

He hadn't intended to take his studies lightly.

However, he couldn't deny that the Hero training had come to occupy a position of importance in his heart once he had decided to become a Hero, making the time when he had been fiercely opposed to Diana and his father's decision seem like a lie.

His feelings about the matter definitely did not come from just wanting to experience a fantasy world.

『 Just because a child can fire a gun, that doesn't mean he can defeat a trained soldier. 』

In his mind, he could still hear those humiliating words.

William Bareig.

Yasuo could only remember a few scattered details about his fight with that man, even though it had been an important event that changed his views about his life and the world he lived in.

The battle had just been that desperate and pushed him to his limits.

In spite of the the fact that William had been about to harm Nodoka and Diana, all Yasuo had been able to do against him was a clumsy response that was similar to a child tattling to his parents after throwing a temper tantrum.

He had apparently fired Diana's Techno Weapon, Pollux, several times.

However, he could not remember how he had ended up holding Pollux, and there were large gaps in his memory in the time between when he fired Pollux and the time his father appeared to save him.

However, he could clearly remember the confrontation with that creature called William, the terror his voice inspired, which almost made him pee his pants, and the humiliation that came along with it.

Even though Diana had done a great job at keeping the otherworld monsters, the Shii, away from them, she had been unable to land a single blow on William.

Yasuo had been the only person there who was able to hit William, although the damage was negligible. And then, William had told him that it could not even be considered a fight unless Yasuo could become at least as strong as Diana.

It was obvious that the differences between Diana, who had been raised by parents who were hailed as saviors in a world where Magitech Knights were considered common, and Yasuo, who didn't know anything about his parents' past until a few days ago, were more than just a difference in the time spent training.

Even Yasuo didn't think for a second that he'd be able to catch up to Diana by training for one year in addition to studying for university exams.

In the first place, Yasuo's proposed plan of taking a temporary break from studies and going to Resteria after passing university exams in a year's time was lacking feasibility and was overly optimistic.

However, because he had already stated his resolution, he had thought that he should become stronger even if only by a tiny amount.

“There's no point in making excuses to myself.”

In the end, the fact remained that Yasuo had thought that the Hero training was more important than his school studies.

And so, he had ended up not studying hard for his tests.

That was inexcusable.

“I need to get full marks on the make-up tests... and maintain a high score until I finish the final exams, or I can't say that I've completely recovered from this.”

Yasuo thought that this was in some ways more difficult for his current self than even the Hero training, but,

“I should do my best.... At least at getting my emotions in order.”

He never wanted to sit on such a bed of nails ever again.

Yasuo picked up the three answer sheets and took a roll of tape out of the drawer of his desk.

“Over here should be good.”

Instead of putting the sheets where he could see them when at his desk, he attached the sheets to the wall at a level where they would be clearly visible when he was sitting on his bed and practicing his beginner-level magic.

“I won’t mistake the order of importance again. This is to remind me of that.”

Yasuo let out a large sigh and tried to turn his thoughts to positive things, but,

“Hmm?”

Yasuo noticed that there was a mark on the wall where he had attached the sheet; it looked like something had been pinned there with a thumb tack at some point.

Looking at the three answer sheets attached to the wall, he also had a feeling that he had seen something similar before.

“Ah.”

He finally remembered something that was better off forgotten.

It had happened during his first year of middle school.

Contrary to elementary school where it was easy to score full marks without even studying, Yasuo had been exposed to a baptism of fire in the form of 『Regular Tests』 .

Yasuo scored in the 60s and 50s in many subjects, a disgraceful result that had never happened before. And so, Yasuo had taken the three worst scores, Home Economics, Social Studies, and Science, and pinned them to the wall so that he would see them before going to sleep, to remind him to do whatever it took to avoid repeating that experience.

He also remembered being scolded by his mother for damaging the wall by pinning the answer sheets to it with thick thumbtacks, and besides, the answer sheets had barely stayed up for a month before they fell off the wall and into the space between the wall and his bed, and had gotten all dusty.

“I haven’t improved at all!!”

He had intended to inspire himself to work harder, but ended up receiving an unexpected attack from his past. Yasuo held his head in his hands and seriously doubted if he would be able to become a hero in just a year’s time.

Even so, Yasuo had to deal with the reality of make-up tests being just around the corner, so he peeled two of the three answer sheets off the wall and started reviewing their contents.

The teachers didn’t have that much free time, after all. He had been informed in advance that the questions for Classical Literature and English Reading would be variations of the questions that appeared on the original tests.

Especially for reading comprehension, the exact same passage would appear on the test again. So long as he reviewed the contents properly, there was no reason why he should not be able to score good marks.

Incidentally, he would need a score of 80 or above out of 100 to pass. If he managed to pass, his grade would be increased from 3 (failing) to 4 (passing).

“Dammit... I need to read such a long sentence from end....”

One of the questions for English Reading was to decipher a long paragraph of text using an English-Japanese dictionary. The text in question was a speech called 『The Various Experiences of a Japanese High School Student on His First Trip Abroad』 .

It would have made sense for a high school student to go some place like New Zealand for language studies, but for some reason, the subject of the text, “Hiroshi,” had gone to Hawaii.

He had apparently discovered many wonders of Hawaii that he previously only saw as a major tourist destination.

Apparently, what he found especially surprising was that there was an increase in the number of Japanese tourists; Japanese companies had advanced further into the Hawaiian market, which meant that there were many places where people understood Japanese, and that the tour guides were available for Japanese.

“Why the heck are you talking about this stuff in English even after returning to Japan, Hiroshi!?”

Ignoring his own shortcomings, Yasuo slandered Hiroshi instead.

However, there could be no comparison between Hiroshi, who was capable of giving a speech in English, and Yasuo, who had failed his test. For this reason, the only thing he achieved by slandering Hiroshi was making him feel worse about himself.

After getting an overall idea of what Hiroshi’s speech was about, Yasuo wondered.

“If I’m going to Ante Lande, do I need to learn the language used there?”

Diana spoke perfect Japanese. Thinking back, William had been speaking Japanese as well, and even Alex’s Shii had spoken Japanese, even if the only thing he said was “Hideo the Hero.”

“Maybe Japanese is used quite a bit there because of the influence of Dad and Mom? No, maybe it’s just Diana’s family who are fluent... but William doesn’t have anything to do with them, right? What’s that about?”

Even foreign talent stars who had lived in Japan for over a decade and who could make jokes with Japanese celebrities on TV would have a manner of speech influenced by their mother tongue, and many of them still had the so-called 『Foreigner’s Accent』 . Considering this, it was quite miraculous that

Diana, who was from a different world, spoke Japanese that was indistinguishable from that of a native.

“Speaking of which, it seems like Dad and Mom were immediately able to communicate with the people there after being sent to Ante Lande, was there some convenient magical phenomenon where they could just speak in Japanese and the people there would understand... or is it that the people of Ante Lande also spoke Japanese...?”

“What are you muttering to yourself over there? It’s time to go.”

“Uwaaah!?”

“I could hear you from even outside your room. Weren’t you supposed to be studying?”

At some point, his Mother had opened the door of his room and was standing there with a dumbfounded expression.

“I was!! Also, at least knock before opening the door!”

“I did. Maybe you just didn’t hear it. Didn’t we already talk this morning about going out for dinner after buying Diana-chan’s daily necessities? It’s time to go. The restaurant will be crowded if we go any later.”

“Eeh? Ah, it’s already this late. Got it, I’ll be down in a minute.”

Looking at the clock on his Slimphone, Yasuo saw that it was already a little past five in the evening.

“Looks like you’ve been working hard, Yasuo.”

Yasuo was not at all surprised to see Diana waiting in the living room after heading downstairs with his mother. He had already become used to seeing Diana there as a part of his daily life.

He thought that there was no reason for her to leave their house, but he was not insensitive enough to say that out loud.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

After he just said that, Hideo and Nodoka started preparing to leave as well.



The area around the western exit of Tokorozawa Station was a compact and yet typical shopping district.

The bus terminal in front of the station was surrounded by banks and department stores, and the SEIYU store adjacent to the station was an indispensable part of the shopping infrastructure for the people who commuted to and from Tokorozawa Station.

Prope Street, which would be on your right hand side after exiting the station, had a variety of shops that served food and drink, ranging from chain cafes that even students would feel comfortable entering, to shops that served Japanese cuisine that catered to more specific tastes. In addition, there were game centers, pachinko shops, and karaoke centers, making the street a place where people of all genders and ages could have fun.

After exiting Prope Street, you would find the Ozone Tokorozawa Shopping Center.

The Magitech Knight from another world, Diana, stood in a daze before that magnificent edifice.

“S-So this is one of the legendary department stores that I have heard about!”

“Diana-san, calm down. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Diana was overwhelmed by the giant commercial establishment that they arrived at after exiting Prope Street, which was still lively and crowded at night.

It had been a while since Diana had come to Japan, but her activities so far had been restricted to the area immediately around the Kenzaki residence, and the places near Nodoka and Yasuo’s schools.

Yasuo's prep school was also near the western exit of Tokorozawa Station, but as it was on the other side of the station from Prope Street, Diana had never come this way before even though she had been curious.

Diana drank in the sights that both Yasuo and Nodoka had gotten used to as they had lived here since their early childhood.

And apparently, this Ozone Tokorozawa Shopping Center was the best sight of them all.

"I've heard about this from my mother. She told me that Japan has three-dimensional markets that are ensconced in buildings the size of castles. This is one of those, isn't it!? A department store!"

"Three-dimensional markets... If you're talking about size, that high-rise apartment building over there is much taller, and besides, Ozone is not a department store, is it? Come to think of it, what's the difference between a shopping center and a department store?"

"It's the price range of the products sold and the targeted customer demographic. The difference between shopping centers and department stores has blurred in recent times, but speaking frankly, department stores sell high-class products, and the other stores sell products for the masses. Ante Lande doesn't have any multi-level commercial establishments like this, so it's only natural that Diana-chan finds it so interesting."

"Oh, really? Why doesn't Ante Lande have any?"

After hearing her father's explanation, Nodoka, who was keeping a firm grip on Diana's clothes to keep her from running off, turned back and asked another question.

"Why? Let's see, this is just a guess, but I think it's because of problems with taxes, and they have a distance limit when attracting customers. It's not that they can't build them, I just think no one would want to."

"Distance limit in attracting customers?"

“Yeah. For example, do you think we would have come here today if our car hadn’t been destroyed in the fighting that happened back then?”

“Ah. We might have gone to the Ozone near the suburbs. We would have probably gone to a different store further away for buying the electrical appliances as well.”

“In a world without trains and cars, such places would actually be too far away. For example, there’s an outlet park in Iruma, right?”

Their father took the example of an outlet park in the outskirts of the neighboring Iruma City, alongside Route 16 of the national highway.

The outlet park was adjacent to an American-funded, membership-only supermarket<sup>[2]</sup>, and it was a well known shopping spot close to Tokorozawa City. Yasuo and Nodoka had gone there several times.

“How many people do you think live within walking distance of that outlet park?”

“Within walking distance? I don’t think there would be many people living that close.”

“No, considering that location, it’s safe to say the number is close to nil.”

Yasuo joined the conversation as well.

“Right? Even for this place, we don’t have a problem coming here because we live in Tokorozawa, but if we lived in, say, Kotesashi, you wouldn’t think of just walking over here on a whim.”

Kotesashi is one of the terminus stations on the Seibu Ikebukuro Line that lies in the direction of Hannou City, two stops down from Tokorozawa Station.

There might be a few people willing to walk the distance between two stations, but it is certainly not common.

“Well, Kotesashi has a SEIYU as well.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about.”

Their father gave a bitter smile, but both Yasuo and Nodoka understood what their father was trying to say. Ante Lande did not have any readily available means of long-distance transport like trains, automobiles, and bicycles.

A natural result of that was that shops could only attract customers from a fairly confined area, and if the total number of customers was small, building a large commercial center would be pointless as it would soon go out of business.

The very idea of taking a quick hop by train or car to go shopping did not exist in Ante Lande.

“Hang on, Diana can fly, right? Does the distance really matter if you are capable of flying?”

“I can fly, but my baggage can’t fly with me.”

Diana, who had started listening to the conversation halfway through, nodded in affirmation.

“We do have magic that is used to transport large cargo by air, but the amount of money and magical energy needed for that is so high that it is far more cost effective to transport the cargo by land in a cart, and even that is not so cheap that you would consider using it for a long distance shopping trip. Even Magitech Knights can’t fly for very long distances, and besides, you need to pay a toll when entering another city. All the important cities in the world have soldiers stationed on the city walls who are tasked with surveillance of the skies, so you can’t really fly around on a whim to go on a sightseeing trip.”

“You need to pay a toll even though you’re flying?”

Although it sounded like a joke, it was only natural that there would be such measures put in place to maintain social order in a society where the ability of flight was commonplace.

“But flying in the sky is not like following a road or a waterway, right? Shouldn’t it be relatively simple to escape by flying?”

Diana made a stern expression at Nodoka’s question and shook her head.

“Crossing over into the territory of a city by air without permission is a serious crime. In any part of the world, the soldiers who are given the task of guarding the skies are all elites, and their Sorcery Divisions receive a large budget. A couple of Magitech Knights attempting to sneak in would be detected right away, and the large countries have large scale Techo Weapon turrets mounted on the walls that automatically shoot down any flying object infringing on their territorial airspace.”

“Oh yeah, I remember those things that looked like anti-aircraft guns.”

Their father spoke some dangerous-sounding words while walking onto the first floor of the shopping center where the fancy shops were located.

“They have anti-aircraft guns, but no department stores?”

Yasuo felt that the other world was quite strange.

“Leave that for another time, Diana-chan’s shopping is more important now.”

At Madoka’s urging, the group of people went up to the upper levels of the Ozone shopping center.

As they went from shop to shop, they used the escalators to get around. It was then that Yasuo remembered that Diana had used escalators before, but hadn’t been fazed by them one bit.

They had gone through the Tokorozawa Station building on the way back home from prep school, and he seemed to remember Diana smoothly getting on and off the escalator as if she was used to it.

“Hey, Diana. Do you have escalators in Resteria?”

“Yes, we do.”

He received a very unexpected response.

“They are not as prevalent as in Japan, but they are present in the royal palace, cathedrals, and the mansions of aristocrats. There are also similar mechanisms called magic stairs in cities that have a large social welfare budget.”

“Oh?”

Of course, it was improbable that even this was caused by the influence of his father and mother, but Yasuo realized that he knew barely anything about Resteria.

He was able to understand why Diana was so fascinated by department stores.

Once his make-up tests were done, he would have to study more about the lifestyle of people in Resteria, their cultures and customs, and most importantly, he had to do something about the language barrier.

“Say, Dad. When you went to Ante Lande...”

He started to talk to his father when they stepped off the escalator, but,

“Alright, Nodoka, I’ll leave that area to you. The two of us will go and look at the household appliances.”

“Sure.”

“Thank you, I will leave that to you.”

“Yasuo, you can at least carry their bags, right? Anyways, I’ll contact you about an hour.”

“Eh? Eh? Eh?”

His mother and father went up on the escalator to the floor where household appliances were sold, and Nodoka and Diana went down towards the general merchandise section.

“Ah, hey, wait for me!”

His instinct as a third year male high school student caused him to chase after the two girls instead of his parents... but looking at the end result, it could only be said that it was a mistake in more ways than one.

Diana looked like she was having a lot of fun as she went around shopping with Nodoka, and they seemed to be enjoying their conversation as well.

Yasuo couldn't hear what they were saying as he was sitting on a bench near the escalator, which was a little distance away from the shop.

On one side of him, there was a pile of things Diana had bought per Nodoka's advice.

There were no items that were so large that they would need to use the home delivery service, but the cups and dishware had to be carried carefully, on top of being heavy. Towelkets and sheets weren't heavy, but they were bulky, and he hadn't thought that cosmetics would be this heavy either.

Diana had originally refused point blank to relegate Yasuo to the role of carrying her bags, but Yasuo had been the one who convinced her to let him do it.

It wasn't because he felt responsible for Diana starting to live alone. He was just blown away by how long it took for girls to finish their shopping, and he realized that he would be better off working as a push cart with hands and legs.

To go into detail of what exactly blew him away, first they took ages to select the items to consider, then took even longer to eliminate the ones they didn't want to buy. They would ask for his opinion but showed no signs of taking it

into consideration, and finally, they would leave the shop without buying anything. This sort of thing happened several times.

Looking at Nodoka and Diana, Yasuo thought that this trait was shared by all girls, irrespective of the world and dimension they came from.

After seeing Nodoka and Diana spend over ten minutes scrutinizing indoor slippers and finally not buying any of them, Yasuo, who typically had no such problems shopping for himself, inadvertently blurted out “They’re just slippers, won’t anything do?” This earned him a glare from Nodoka and an apologetic look from Diana, and since then, he had decided to maintain silence.

There were many times when he thought, “I’d just pick any random one,” but then he realized that comparing his shopping method to that of the girls was as pointless as comparing the hunting methods of a lion and an anglerfish and trying to decide which one was better.

Their mother had said that they should meet up after an hour, but it had taken them nearly that much time to just buy the tableware, sheets, and cosmetics.

The three of them were currently on the floor that sold clothing, but Yasuo had no idea on how to judge girls’ clothing, and since they had to buy underwear as well, he was ordered to wait here on the bench.

Yasuo could see the cashiers from where he was sitting, but couldn’t see Nodoka or Diana anywhere near them, so he assumed they were still somewhere inside the shop.

Yasuo opened up the free messaging application, ROPE, on his smartphone and was about to send the message 「It looks like we’ll need some more time」 in his family’s group chat, when a shadow fell across him.

Yasuo lifted his head to see who was there, and received a shock.



“Tatewaki-san!?”

“Hey there, Yasu-kun. Why are you acting so surprised?”

Yasuo’s classmate in middle school and current fellow student at prep school, Tatewaki Shouko, was standing there with a shopping bag hanging from her arm.

“Are you here for shopping?”

“Eh? Ah, yeah. I’m not the one shopping, though.”

“I can see that. I can see tableware from a fancy shop, and those look like cosmetics.”

Yasuo tried to make an excuse, but Shouko just looked at the mountain of shopping bags on the bench next to Yasuo and gave a bitter smile.

“So you’re in charge of carrying the bags?”

“Well, something like that. What about you, Tatewaki-san?”

“I have to go to prep school, but there was some stuff I wanted to buy before going there.”

Looking at Shouko’s bag, Yasuo saw that it was from a bookstore that was located inside the Ozone Shopping Center.

Maybe because she noticed Yasuo’s gaze, Shouko held out the bag for him to see.

“A new volume of a manga I am reading was released, so I bought it for myself as a gift for working hard all this week.”

“You’re pretty open about this.”

“It’s a gift for my hard work, after all. Ah—by the way, Yasu-kun.”

“Hmm?”

Shouko had been talking to him normally until now, but she suddenly started fidgeting and once again looked at the shopping bags next to Yasuo.

“Umm, are you... with family?”

“Hmm? What about my family?”

“I mean, the shopping... Are you here with your family?”

“Eh? Ah... Yeah, I am. What about it?”

“Nothing, you just looked very surprised when I called out to you, so I was wondering if you didn’t want to be seen here. This place is a clothing store for women, and the things you’ve bought look they’re meant for girls too.”

“Ah....”

Looking around, it was true that there were many things around him that had no relation to his daily life.

Another thing that he realized was that he was in a precarious position right now.

Yasuo had assumed so far that Shouko had already gotten over that issue, but back when Diana was still new to Japan, she had threatened Shouko in a back alley at night.

That had happened due to certain unavoidable circumstances, and Shouko had not pressed Yasuo for more details after that. However, Diana had not apologized to Shouko directly.

Yasuo didn’t think that Shouko would make an issue out of it at prep school after all this time, but since it was “his side” that had behaved inappropriately, he wanted to avoid having Shouko and Diana meet again accidentally. This was both for the purpose of avoiding problems with interpersonal relationships in the future, as well as avoiding the spread of information related to Ante Lande any further.

However, the myriad deities residing in the land of Japan did not fulfill Yasuo's wish.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Yasuo. We've finished buying everything we need for now, so let's meet up... oh?”

She had probably felt sorry for keeping him waiting.

Diana had walked over to him quickly while holding a large bag in her hands. It would have been better if she had taken the time to observe the situation before coming over.

However, it was already too late to be thinking about things like that.

If only Nodoka had also come back along with her. What was that sister of his doing? She's not at the cashiers either, where on earth did she disappear to?

Diana had a blank expression upon seeing Shouko who was talking to Yasuo, and Shouko in turn was looking at Diana with a shocked expression.

Yasuo decided to stop thinking of unnecessary things.

There was no choice but to get out of this situation using his extremely low ability to ad-lib while talking to the opposite sex.

“Umm, is she a friend of yours, Yasuo?”

Diana's question seemed to timidly pass through the space in between Yasuo and Shouko.

This was a very Japanese way of calling out to someone. Yasuo thought that it would have been better if she was less talented at the nuances of using Japanese, as he now had no choice but to answer.

“Ah, yes. This is Tatewaki Shouko-san. She's a friend from prep school. Tatewaki-san, as I mentioned to you before, this is Dianaze Krone. She's an acquaintance of my Dad's.”

This was undoubtedly the first time in Yasuo's life that he had found himself caught between two women and forced to make introductions.

Since he had already been nervous to begin with, it couldn't be denied that he was speaking very quickly.

After Yasuo finished speaking, neither Diana nor Shouko replied for a few seconds and instead observed each other's faces. And then,

““Ah.””

They both let out a small shout at the same time.

“You're that person who was saying stuff about Yasu-kun's enemies or whatever the other day!”

“I'm really so sorry for what happened back then!”

Shouko slightly changed her posture, and Diana bowed down with so much force that it was surprising her upper body was still attached.

“Umm, I was really lacking knowledge about many things related to Japan back then. I had no idea that you were a friend of Yasuo's from school. I have been thinking for a long time that I should apologize for being rude to you. I'm really very sorry.”

The fight went out of Shouko and she scratched her head as she watched Diana bob her head up and down several times while apologizing.

“Ah, well... I was surprised, but I've already heard about your circumstances, so it's okay. You don't have to apologize so much, please raise your head.”

“Thank you so much!”

Diana straightened her posture with a bright red face, but still bowed down one last time to Shouko.

“H-Hey, Diana, you're spilling stuff out of your bag.”

“A-Ah, Yasuo! I’m so sorry!”

Looking at the relieved expression on Diana’s face, it could be seen that the matter had been weighing heavily on her heart.

Because of her non-stop bowing, the seal on her bag that was stuffed with clothes came loose, and Diana once again apologized to Yasuo as he picked up the various items that had fallen out.

Seeing this, Shouko let out a sigh.

“Well, there’s nothing I can do about this.”

“Eh?”

Did the atmosphere around Shouko change slightly, or was that just Yasuo’s imagination?

Shouko turned towards Diana and introduced herself again in a soft tone.

“My name is Tatewaki Shouko. I graduated from the same middle school as Kenzaki-kun. As he said earlier, we are currently attending the same prep school, although we only found out about that recently. I just happened to run into him here earlier, so I called out to him.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Yes. Umm, Krone-san? Are you here shopping with Kenzaki-kun?”

“With Yasuo? I don’t know if I can call it that, as he has regrettably just been carrying the bags.”

“I see.”

Shouko smiled, but it was a smile that was strangely devoid of emotion.

“Well, I have a lesson now, so I should be going. I don’t want to get in your way.”

“Hmm? Ah... Hmm?”

Didn't Shouko say something strange just now?

“Hey, Kenzaki-kun. I understand how you feel, but you should at least walk around with her and help her pick out the clothes. Make sure you do that next time.”

“Yeah... Hmm?”

As he thought, something was strange.

“Umm, Tatewaki-san—”

“Goodbye, Kenzaki-kun. Let's talk again if we meet in prep school.”

“Ah... okay. See you later.”

Shouko left right away without letting Yasuo say anything meaningful.

Diana saw her off while bowing her head once again, but Yasuo, assailed by an indescribable sense of unease, could do nothing but awkwardly wave his hand.

“Looks like she's got the completely wrong idea.”

“Uwaaah!?”

“Nodoka!?”

Nodoka had appeared beside Diana at some point without either of them noticing, and had her arms crossed with a smug expression on her face.

“Onii-chan, that person was calling you 『Yasu-kun』 in the beginning but suddenly switched to calling you 『Kenzaki-kun』. Didn't you notice that?”

“Now that you mention it... More importantly, how long have you been listening!? Where were you!?”

“I did say ‘In the beginning,’ didn't I? I went to the restroom after we finished shopping.”

“So you were just eavesdropping like it was the natural thing to do...”

“Well, that aside, that person definitely has the wrong idea.”

“Huh? About what?”

“Huh? Onii-chan, are you seriously asking me that?”

Nodoka looked between her brother’s and Diana’s faces, but both of them had a blank expression.

“Haaaaaa..... What’s wrong with these two people, they’re supposed to be older than me...”

Nodoka, the younger sister, let her shoulders droop forcefully.

✂

Part 6

“N-N-N-N-No way, she thought I and Yasuo were g-g-g-g-going out!?”

They were on their way back home after finishing dinner in celebration of Diana moving into a new house. Diana had once again asked Nodoka what her exchange with Shouko earlier meant.

“Eh? You really don’t know? That person called Tatewaki-san, she thinks you and Onii-chan are going out.”

Diana got back such an unbelievable answer.

“Eh!? Seriously!?”

Seeing her brother looking honestly shocked as well, Nodoka made an expression like she was giving up and shook her head.

“That’s why she suddenly changed the way she called you and became all polite. Moreover, she’s the person that Diana-san called an enemy once before, right?”

“B-But... I didn’t mean it in that way...”

“No, but still, would it make her think like that?”

“Of course. Even I would try and put my guard up if I saw something like that without knowing the circumstances.”

“What do you mean by ‘something like that?’ And ‘putting your guard up?’”

“Diana-san is partially to blame for saying stuff that could easily be misconstrued. Onii-chan, make sure you don’t get any strange ideas as well, okay?”

“W-What do you mean, strange ideas...!”

“Ah... Don’t you think the taste of that curry place has changed from before?”

“It looks like they got a new cook. The naans were larger than before, though.”

Looking at the children talking from behind, their mother and father pretended not to hear as they discussed the food from the Indian restaurant that they had eaten at earlier.

“W-What do you think I should do? Assuming she really does have the wrong idea?”

“Eh? I don’t think there’s anything you can do about it.”

“N-No way...”

“I mean, if Tatewaki-san doesn’t really care who you go out with, bringing up the topic again and saying that Diana-san is not your girlfriend will just make you look overly self-conscious. Although it’s different if you’re interested in Tatewaki-san, Onii-chan.”

“You really haven’t been holding anything back since earlier...!”

“I’m just telling you the truth. Also, in the one in a million chance that Tatewaki-san likes you, it might be a good idea clear up the misunderstanding, but you only met her recently after not seeing her for a

long time, right? So that idea is pretty much impossible, so the only thing you can do is to let it be.”

“L-Let it be... but...”

“I mean, what other choice do you have? I mean, even elementary school kids are talking about dating these days, how can you be so flustered even though you’re in the third year of high school?”

The eighteen-year-old boy had no response to this far too casual opinion of the fourteen-year-old girl.

Nodoka glanced back at Diana, who was looking downwards and blushing to the tips of her ears.

“Well, if it’s really bothering you, why not just tell her that she has the wrong idea the next time you meet, or send her a message on ROPE? I don’t know what sort of impression Tatewaki-san has about you, Onii-chan, but I’m pretty sure doing that will make the atmosphere really uncomfortable, though.”

“That’s not helpful at all...”

Yasuo regretted his own lack of experience as he could do nothing to refute his little sister’s words.

“Umm, I’m sorry. Because of my thoughtlessness, people are seeing you in such a light with someone like me.....”

Yasuo felt his blood pressure fall again after hearing Diana apologize in a depressed voice.

Depending on the viewpoint, Yasuo realized that his words so far could be construed as Diana getting in the way of his interpersonal relationships.

“N-No, I didn’t mean it like that. How do I put it, I just want people to properly understand my circumstances, it’s not like I don’t think you’re

attractive or that I don't see you as a girl... Ah, but I don't mean this in a weird way either, umm... I don't know how to explain it..."

"Digging. Yourself. Deeper."

Nodoka said as she watched her brother try and come up with excuses, while looking like she was enjoying it.

"Mom, Dad, what's wrong?"

Yasuo suddenly realized that his parents had stopped walking and were standing still.

Before they could reply,

"Yasuo, Nodoka, please bend down a little."

Diana had been blushing a deep red until just earlier, but she suddenly looked like a different person as she looked at his parents with a strong gaze.

They were already close to their house. It was a dark residential district where the only things they could see were the streetlights and the lights from the houses.

The Kenzaki house was within sight, just on the other side of the road.

"Madoka, take care of the kids. Diana-chan, I'll leave the rear to you."

"Okay."

"There are three of them. Please leave this area to me."

Diana dropped her shopping bags at her feet and formed a sword of light in her left hand from the otherworld Techno Weapon, Pollux, that she had pulled out from somewhere.

It was originally a weapon that was supposed to be used along with Castor that was wielded in the right hand, but that particular weapon had been broken in the fight during the incident with William and was left at home.

"D-Don't tell me..."

Nodoka went pale and looked around at the surroundings. Yasuo realized that his heart rate had increased due to nervousness, but somehow managed to withstand it and tried to get a handle on the situation.

There were three in the direction his father was facing. Similarly, there were three more in the direction Diana was facing.

They were the monsters from the other world, Shii.

They were wrapped in dark flames that looked like the darkness of the night itself had been condensed, and from within glowed ominous red eyes.

“There are still people on the streets at this time. Let’s finish it quickly.”

“Yes.”

“Yasuo, Nodoka, don’t move from that spot.”

An orange-colored light was released from Madoka’s hand, and it formed a dome around Yasuo, Nodoka, and the shopping bags that Madoka and Diana had dropped.

There was no need to confirm it. It was definitely a magical defence that their mother had erected, a barrier of sorts.

Nodoka slightly relaxed under the slightly warm light of the barrier, but Yasuo had his sight fixed on Diana’s and his father’s fights.

His father was up against three Shii that stood across the road as if to block their way.

They appeared to be fairly large, but his father, who was dressed like an ordinary salaryman on his day off, did not hesitate at all as he faced them.

Something appeared to have been emitted from his fist as he stuck it out, as the pressure of his punch instantly decapitated the Shii. One of the Shii had lightning run throughout its body, and another Shii was blasted into the sky by a whirlwind, black flames and all.

All of this happened in a mere ten seconds.

His father had not even used his Holy Sword, and he looked like it was no big deal.

Looking over at Diana.

This time, there were three Shii that had appeared separately, one each on a different rooftop.

All three of them jumped towards Diana at the same time, but Diana shot one of them down with a magic bullet from Pollux.

The attacks of the other two faltered as they landed and Diana calmly avoided them. As they turned around, Diana stabbed one of them right in the middle of its chest with the blade of light.

Seeing her empty handed, the remaining Shii pulled out something that looked like a sword wrapped in dark flames and jumped at her from behind, but Diana didn't even bother looking back.

“Wheel of flame that sleeps beneath the earth, open the door to wisdom with the furrows of your passing!”

Along with that short incantation, she stamped upon the ground strongly with her right foot.

In the next instant, the Shii that had been closing in on Diana from behind was trapped in a number of flame pillars that rose from the asphalt surface of the street, and after the flames disappeared, they could see that the Shii had lost its strength and was crumbling from the feet upwards.

“Haa... I-Is it over...?”

“Probably. Are you okay, Nodoka?”

“Y-Yeah I am.”

In terms of time, it hadn't taken even 30 seconds overall. Thankfully, no one had seen them.

Nodoka was sitting down on the ground and patting herself on the chest, but Yasuo had a complicated expression on his face after seeing his father's overpowering strength and Diana's superhuman actions.

This was the first time that Shii had appeared around them since the incident with William.

Maybe because of that, Yasuo was not able to relax even though all the enemies had been put down.

The appearance of the Shii was definitely not a coincidence.

At the very least, two of the previous attacks had been caused by William's influence, and targeted Hideo the Hero and his family.

That is why, Yasuo was convinced: the Shii that appeared in Japan were not like random mobs that were encountered in a game field, instead they were sent here by someone with malicious intent.

Also, there was no 『Leader-type』 Shii among these six, similar to Alexei's Shii.

“Diana! On the roof!”

Everyone looked up in shock after hearing Yasuo shout, and saw that a new Shii was just about to jump on top of Diana.

It was a small-sized Shii.

Compared to the Shii from earlier, it was definitely one size smaller.

However, it moved so fast that Diana had no choice but to evade.

The small Shii landed on all fours, stretched its twisted joints, and leaped straight at Diana.

“Wha—!”

Diana was taken by surprise and managed to block the attack with Pollux, but her stance was broken by the Shii's full-body tackle.

Diana's physical strength was superhuman, partly due to her magical abilities.

No matter how heavy that last attack was physically, was it really enough to destroy to her stance to that extent with just a tackle?

“Are you okay?”

Hideo rushed in to support Diana, and the small Shii stopped attacking after noticing that.

“So this guy is the leader this time.”

“Yes, that's probably the case. Its attack was strangely heavy. Please be careful.”

As Diana urged Hideo to be careful, Yasuo suddenly looked backwards.

The three Shii that his father had defeated were lying on the ground. However the black flames were still smoldering and giving off soot.

“That's right, we need to send them off or they'll just come back. Hmm....”

This was the only thing that he knew that even he was capable of, having already done it once before.

The requiem from Ante Lande.

Yasuo had already memorized the song that soothed the flames of the Shii and send them to Heaven.

『Oh, wide sky, please welcome him. Oh, wide ocean, please welcome him.』

Yasuo's song reached them even through the barrier that his mother had set up, and the flames of the three Shii that his father had defeated came undone.

The remnants of the Shii were swept into the air like the ashes of a wood fire, and they disappeared without a trace.

“Good thing last time wasn’t a fluke.”

Nodoka teased Yasuo after seeing the Shii vanish.

“Shut up. Alright, now for the ones over...”

He still had to deal with the three Shii that Diana had defeated.

Looking around, Yasuo saw something strange.

“...What?”

The small Shii was standing on its hind legs.

It had been dashing around at high speed and overpowered Diana with a powerful attack earlier, but now it was standing still, and even Yasuo could tell that it was full of openings to attack.

“W-What’s wrong? Both of you, hurry up and kill it—”

“But...”

“I mean...”

Both Hideo and Diana looked like they had lost interest in taking it down for some reason, but Yasuo couldn’t tell why they were waiting.

“Well, I’ll send off the three over there as well for now. So hurry up and take it down, okay?”

It may have been making some strange movements, but that was no reason to not take down a Shii.

He was sure that it would be okay to leave it to his father and Diana, and tried to sing the requiem again to send off the remaining three Shii, but,

『Aa.....Aa.....Aa.....』

For some reason, even the small Shii seemed to be affected by the requiem and its flames started to disappear.

The effect was not as strong as it was against the three that had already been defeated.

However, the phenomenon was similar to when the Shii were sent off, the flames of the small Shii were slowly being wiped away.

“This is...?”

Diana’s eyes were wide in surprise as she looked at that situation. The three defeated Shii disappeared into the sky, and the small Shii was backing away as if overwhelmed by the song.

Was it possible that the Shii could be purified just with this?

Yasuo had almost reached the end of the requiem and prepared to start it from the beginning again. In the next instant,

『Gaaar!?!』

The Shii suddenly gave a ferocious roar and jumped up high.

A loud sound was released from the area where the Shii had been until an instant ago, and both Diana and Hideo suddenly tensed their bodies.

As if someone was sniping at it from afar, a strong sound reverberated from the street and chased the Shii that was attempting to escape.

“This attack is...!”

As Diana looked around, attempting to identify the position of the sniper, the source of the attack suddenly descended in between Diana and the Shii.

“What are you waiting for!?! Major Krone!”

A strict, female voice chased after the small Shii.

“What kind of fool hesitates to attack when faced with a Shii!?!”

The hair that was illuminated by the street lights was silver in color.

The figure landed without a sound and immediately closed the distance with the small Shii in a single, fluid jump. Looking at her from behind, her clothing appeared to be the uniform of Resteria's Magitech Knights.

“Seeeeeaaah!”

Brandishing the long, staff-like weapon in her hands, she attempted to deliver the final strike on the small Shii, but,

“Kuh!”

The attack missed by a hair.

That was because the Shii's body rapidly withered, turned into a pillar of dark flame, and disappeared into the ground.

So that's how Shii escaped if they were not sent off properly.

Even if you thought a Shii was defeated, if it was not sent off properly with the requiem, it would escape into the ground like that and appear again elsewhere.

“It escaped.”

The new Magitech Knight clicked her tongue at not being able to deliver the final strike to the Shii, but immediately recovered her poise and rested the staff-shaped weapon against the ground.

After separating the staff into two segments at the middle, the Magitech Knight put them into holsters at her waist like a pair of pistols and finally turned around to face Yasuo and the others.

Silver hair and blue eyes.

She gave off a cold impression, but her clothing was the same as what Diana was wearing when Yasuo saw her for the first time, light armor worn by the Magitech Knights of Resteria.

The cross-shaped decoration on her chest was gold-colored unlike Diana's, which was deep blue, and there were bangles shaped like snakes around both of her wrists. On her forehead was a circlet with a deep-orange colored stone embedded in it.

Seeing the face of the person who had appeared under the streetlights, Diana corrected her posture and raised her right hand.

After seeing the new Magitech Knight do the same, Yasuo understood that it was a salute.

“Good work on your mission, Major Krone.”

“Thank you, Colonel Welleger.”

As he had thought, it was a Magitech Knight from Resteria. What's more, she was Diana's superior.

Perhaps it was to be expected, but she was speaking fluent Japanese as well.

Both his father and mother had not yet let down their guard and were watching the new person, but the person whom Diana had called Colonel Welleger unhesitatingly turned towards Hideo.

“I assume you are the Hero, Hideo Kenzaki.”

“...It's been a very long time since I was known by that title.”

“It is an honor to meet you.”

After confirming the identity of his father, she saluted once again and introduced herself.

“I am Colonel Khalija Welleger of Resteria Kingdom's Magitech Knights. I have been deployed here by the orders of His Majesty, Borad IX. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”



## Chapter 2 – What People Look For in a Hero

“Damn you... Hiroshi...”

Yasuo was in the middle of taking his English Reading make-up test in the reception area in a corner of the staff room at school, and silently cursed Hiroshi, the high schooler in the speech who he was not sure really existed.

Thanks to the fact that he had learned the contents of Hiroshi’s speech perfectly, Yasuo was able to easily answer even the new questions that showed up on the test.

The time limit for the exam was fifty minutes, the same as the original test, but Yasuo still had some time left even after answering all the questions and reviewing them, so he leaned back into the slightly threadbare sofa and let out a large breath.

At this rate, it looked like there would be no major problems with the Classical Literature make-up test either.

That just left the essay for Social Studies, but he had no choice but to fumble his way through this one while looking at reference books and other data.

“It’s been a while since I’ve been to the club room, maybe I’ll stop by on the way back.”

His Classical Literature test would be held three days from now, depending on his teacher’s availability.

Yasuo, who should have originally cleared this test back during the midterm exams, looked down at his right hand.

Yesterday, Yasuo found out about an important truth related to Diana which he should have found out about much earlier, and he was now standing at a crossroads.



“Allow me to speak frankly. The governing body of Resteria understands all the details about the man called William and the circumstances of the Kenzaki family, which were contained in Major Krone’s report. However.”

The new Magitech Knight from Resteria, Colonel Khalija Welleger, looked directly at Yasuo through the gentle steam rising from her tea cup.

“The idea of sending your esteemed son, Yasuo, is not welcome.”

“Colonel!?”

Diana raised her voice in surprise, but Khalija, a person who had earned the rank of Colonel in the military, had a look in her eyes that did not allow Diana to say another word.

“Well, I guess that’s obvious.”

On the other hand, Hideo didn’t look surprised at all as he nodded.

“This may sound harsh, but if the situation was at the level where it could be settled by the 『Second Generation』, Diana-chan probably wouldn’t have come here in the first place.”

“...Ah.”

After hearing that, Diana let out a groan as though she understood her own position for the first time.

“It’s just as you said. What Resteria wants is Hideo the Hero, himself. To clarify, Resteria is looking for 『The Second Coming of a Legendary Being』, not a successor to inherit the legend.”

Khalija didn’t even glance at Diana, who was standing at attention next to her.

Khalija’s words may have sounded harsh, but Diana was also the daughter of heroes who had saved the world.

Also, unlike Yasuo, she had undergone several years of training as a Magitech Knight, so her skills were unquestionable. It would have been far easier to present her as a Hero compared to Yasuo.

However, the mission she was given was not to find a successor to the legend, but to act as an envoy to bring back the legend himself.

“Major Krone is an excellent Magitech Knight, but as she has lived her entire life in Resteria, she does not evoke any feelings of awe from the populace. While she’s a highly skilled warrior, she cannot become something more than that, a symbolic existence.”

“.....”

She has the strength, but not the charisma.

That was Khalija’s current assessment of Diana, and the people of Resteria probably felt the same way as well.

“What’s more, she had been assigned as a surveying officer to the campaign during which General Alexei was killed in action. Even though that was a time when the countermeasures against the Shii were not yet known, it is a fact that she could do nothing to prevent the death of her father who was a comrade of the Legendary Hero. While that may evoke feelings of pity and compassion, it is of no use to raise the fighting spirit of the people.”

“Umm, don’t you think that’s going a bit too far...”

Basically, Khalija was saying that Diana was completely useless in the battle where her father died, and what’s more, the whole world also saw her that way.

Yasuo tried to protest against those words that were far too cruel to Diana, but Khalija easily rejected his shallow protest.

“Yasuo Kenzaki. As a person who volunteered to become a Hero and replace your father, you must also face this reality. To the commoners and the young knights, the existence of 『Hideo the Hero』 is close to that of 『God』 .”

“God? You can’t be serious...”

“That’s how legends work. Just how much embellishment do you think was added on to his name and his legend in thirty years? You don’t need to live up to all the embellishments, but if you don’t at least possess the level of ability he had according to the country’s official records, there will be people who become disillusioned and they will easily become your enemies.”

Khalija’s explanation was now more similar to a lecture on Social Science rather than a critique of the details pertaining to Hideo the Hero.

“Just out of curiosity, just how far have these embellishments gone?”

Seeing that Yasuo and Diana had gone silent with pale faces, Hideo asked that question.

“Let’s see. For example, the Legend of the Holy Sword Liutberga is particularly remarkable.”

“Legend of the Holy Sword, huh? I see.”

“If we were to collect and unify all the 『Fragments of the Holy Sword』 that are in the possession of rulers and churches around the world, it is estimated that the length of the resulting blade would be somewhere in the range of twenty meters.”

“.....That’s more ordinary than I thought. Although any parts of Liutberga that are chipped off or broken will just disappear.”

Hideo smiled bitterly upon hearing that, but even he could not avoid widening his eyes in astonishment at the next example.

“Also, there’s a river called 『The Hideo Holy Sword River』 in the current Gaz Commonwealth.”

“Wait, hang on, what kind of name is that?”

“Didn’t anyone object to giving it such a stupid name?”

Even Nodoka, who had stayed silent up to this point, was amazed.

“There’s a rumor in the Gaz Commonwealth that during the defensive battle to protect the refugees, a single swing of Liutberga created the river and protected the people from the attacking hordes of the Demon King Army...”

“So it’s from back then!? It was the demons’ magic that triggered a flash flood of the valley, I wasn’t the one who changed the terrain!!”

“Regardless of what really happened, a river was created there after a battle in which Hideo the Hero participated. A church was constructed on the riverbank, and the water of that river is considered holy and is highly prized. Another famous anecdote is regarding the battle to capture the Ancient Clock Tower in the Baskelgarde Federation.”

“I have a bad feeling about this, but are you referring to that ancient clock tower? The one which was supposed to have a sealed magic that would allow a person to see the future, but just ended up having a calendar created by people who lived there in ancient times based on the movement of the stars...”

“It has become a story of how Hideo used the the magic of the clock tower and created a new star in the heavens.”

“How does one get from 『Using Magic』 to 『Creating a Star』 ?”

At this rate, it would not be surprising if all the supernatural occurrences in the world were attributed to Hideo the Hero.

“However, the most talked about story is about the time when you slew an entire troupe of demons under the command of a demon general, right after you first appeared in Resteria. The one where you repulsed an army of a hundred thousand demons all by yourself.”

“No, there were only about thirty thousand. Besides, I ones I defeated didn’t amount to even ten percent of that number.”

Hideo had a faraway look, but Khalija was serious.

“However, the problem is that such tales are believed to be the truth. Even if you return to our world and your achievements now match the actual results from the past, it would be more than enough of an achievement. You may plainly state that you didn’t even defeat ten percent of an army numbering thirty thousand, but everyone who had experienced that battle in the past says that if a person who was capable of such a thing had not appeared, Resteria would have been inevitably destroyed.”

“Ten percent... Three thousand demons...”

Yasuo had only heard about the battle with the demons from Diana and his parents, and he hadn’t even seen one of those creatures called demons so far.

However, he could understand just how ridiculously high a number three thousand was.

Most likely, that battle was the one his father was involved in right after being summoned to Ante Lande, and the one where he had first met Diana’s parents.

Putting it in terms related to his own surroundings, the entire student body of Takeoka High School numbered fewer than seven hundred.

If four times that number were to attack him at once with murderous intent, there was no way that he could repulse them.

The same would be true even if he was armed.

Non-fantasy weapons have limits such as ammunition, durability, and the amount of times they can be used at maximum effect.

It is common knowledge that the number of people who can be killed with a single swing of a Japanese sword is by no means large. Similarly, the more

ammunition you carry, the heavier you get and your ability to move is restricted.

The imitation sword that Aoto had bought for his juniors in the Drama Club to use was so heavy that Yasuo couldn't imagine carrying it into battle with his current level of strength.

On the other hand, the Holy Sword Liutberga was light as a feather, so the strain on the body from swinging it was far lesser when compared to swinging a regular sword made of iron, and his father also had the power to use magic. However, even without considering those advantages, Yasuo wondered if he would have the stamina to defeat three thousand demons in the first place.

The enemy would also be attacking, so it would be necessary to run, dodge, and jump around.

Even if you consider the extreme case where the weapon weighed nothing and every successful hit would definitely kill an enemy, you would still need to swing the sword a minimum of three thousand times while shuttle running.

It is possible for a boxer to shadow box while jogging, but that is only possible because they have trained their bodies to the limit.

Throwing three thousand full-power punches while shuttle running.

This was not something normal people could do, and people would not normally try to do something like that either.

Yasuo unconsciously clenched his own fist.

“.....Of course, the Shii are different from Demon King Kaul. Based on the things I've said so far, it might sound like I'm being arrogant, but I was also born after the war ended. Like I said, it's not necessary to replicate the feats described in the stories that the people believe in. However, you are still young. And so is she.”

Khalija looked at Yasuo and Diana.

“Both General Alexei and Hideo the Hero have aged considerably since the war, so the people will accept that they are unable to wield the same level of power that they did back then. However, if you take the place of your father, you must understand that the people will expect you to be just as strong, if not stronger than your father. Do you understand that?”

After Khalija asked that,

“No, I was not aware.”

That was the only response Yasuo could give.

In the first place, Yasuo had not even been able to satisfactorily perform his duties as a student. There was no way that he was prepared to become strong enough to carry the hopes of an entire nation after just a year of training.

“It is good that you are honest. Besides, there are still some strong voices in Resteria that are opposed to soliciting the services of Hideo the Hero. If I had to make my position clear, even I am against it.”

“Huh!?! What’s with that attitude!?”

Nodoka raised her anger at this seemingly thoughtless statement, but Hideo restrained her.

“That’s only natural, seeing as the situation right now is still nowhere near as tragic as it was during the war against Kaul. There will be some people who want to rely on others to resolve the issue before things pass the point of no return, but there will also be people who want to resolve the issue by themselves while it’s still not too late. Looking at it from the viewpoint of the Knights, it’s like they are being told that the people have no faith in them, after all.”

Hideo said that to calm Nodoka down as much as to show that he understood what Khalija was getting at.

“Well, I understand that... but hearing her say that after all the trouble they’ve caused...”

Nodoka backed down, but it was clear to see that she was not happy about it.

“Thank you for understanding.”

“Also, if you intend to push forward, you should be prepared to face such strong opposition.”

“.....”

Yasuo understood that those words were directed at him.

He would be compared against the Hero of Salvation, Hideo. And also the combined might of Resteria’s Knights.

After using a ridiculous amount of money from the national budget to operate the Gate Tower, if the person who arrived was a kid who failed his tests and could not even complete the Foundations of Sorcery training properly, it might very well spark off a coup d’état.

Yasuo felt his heart grow heavy at the thought that not only had his thinking been shallow; he had barely even scratched the surface.

Ante Lande was not some ideal world where the people would be willing to accept everything about him. It was a world that was home to a large number of people with different thoughts, a place with established human societies.

As long as there were different human societies, there was not even a one in a million chance that everyone would be willing to help him.

After seeing Yasuo’s expression darken from the corner of her eyes, Khalija spoke as if she remembered something.

“By the way, I haven’t explained why I came to Japan.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

“My mission is to act as an assistant to Major Krone and help protect the people of the Kenzaki family.”

“Eehh!?”

The person who was most surprised by this statement was Diana.

“W-What do you mean, you’ll be acting as my assistant, Colonel? Besides, you just said that you were against soliciting Hideo’s services...”

“My private feelings and my orders from the King are different.”

However, Khalija lightly sidestepped Diana’s question and looked at Yasuo.

“The reason for the appearance of the man called William Bareig and the Shii in Japan is currently under investigation by the Magitech Knights in charge of the Gate Tower, under the directions of Her Excellency, Erijina. However, ensuring the safety of the Kenzaki family is of the highest priority. I apologize for the delay in coming here even after receiving Major Krone’s report, but even without being aware of the circumstances, I have seen that there are incidents like the one earlier, caused due to the appearance of the Shii. I will be joining the mission to protect the Kenzaki family from today.”

“I’m sorry if this sounds skeptical, but how strong are you at fighting? Back when I was in Resteria, I saw that the higher-ranking officers of the Knights were more like bureaucrats than warriors. Not to be rude, but you look fairly young as well.”

Yasuo broke into a sweat seeing his father stating his doubts about Khalija’s abilities to her face, but she nodded as if it was only natural.

“Your suspicion is warranted. There’s no point in stating my ability through words, but I can’t very well cross swords with you either. Were my actions during the fight with the Shii earlier not a sufficient display of my ability?”

It was true that Khalija had demonstrated a superhuman level of combat ability, different from Diana’s, during the fight with the small Shii earlier.

“Umm... Sorry to intrude on your conversation, but...”

Diana spoke up hesitantly.

“Colonel Welleger is the very embodiment of the Knights’ 『Elite』 . She enlisted at the age of fifteen and showed a level of ability that made her stand out right away, and was designated a Technical Lieutenant at the age of sixteen after submitting a treatise on combat techniques and Techno Weapons. She has performed many great deeds in the battle against the Shii after my father passed away, and...”

Diana said that in a very timid manner.

“As a Magitech Knight, she stands one or two levels over the rest of us who are of the same age group, and is also an object of our aspirations.”

Khalija, who had looked stern until that point, averted her eyes as if she was feeling awkward after hearing that.

“...Major Krone. From the viewpoint of the Kenzaki family, the two of us are members of the same organization. It’s hardly convincing even if a colleague says such grandiose things about me. Saying things like that is, umm, troubling for me.”

Her cheeks were slightly red, was she perhaps feeling bashful?

“Well, I guess it should be fine if Diana-chan says that much. Now, about you joining the guard mission...”

“Y-Yes. Ahem.”

Khalija gave a small cough and recovered her poise.

“I’ve heard that the plan is to protect Yasuo and Nodoka from any attacks by the Shii during their daily lives. With me joining the guard detail, we will be able to reduce the burden on Madoka and Major Krone, and if possible, I also plan to look into the details about the man called William and the appearance of the Shii.”

“I see. Where do you plan to stay during this time?”

“I heard earlier that Major Krone has acquired lodgings in a housing complex nearby. If the Major finds it agreeable, I would like to stay there with her and share a part of the burden as well.”

“I have no problem with that at all... but if I remember correctly, the rental agreement was only for a single occupant, will that cause any problems?”

That last question was aimed at Hideo, and he nodded after thinking about it a little.

“Well, I’ll make sure to check with the agency just in case, but I don’t think it should be a problem as both of you are girls. There weren’t any other people interested in renting the apartment anyways, so I don’t think they’ll be so strict.”

“Thank you. Sorry about this, Major Krone. It feels like I’m causing trouble for you on top of arriving late.”

“No, not at all...”

“Well, it looks like things have worked out, timing-wise. I’m simply thankful that the number of guards has increased. We will be counting on you for some time to come.”

“Understood.”

There was no reason for Diana or the other members of the Kenzaki family to object once she obtained Hideo’s approval.

Khalija stood up and gave a Resteria-style salute to the legendary Hero.

“Sorry to ask this at such a late hour, but Yasuo, can I have some of your time right now?”

“Eh?”

“I’ve heard that Major Krone has been giving you Magitech Knight training. I would like to take a look at your aptitude.”

““Eh.””

Diana and Yasuo both froze at that instant.

“What’s wrong?”

“Umm... Right now?”

It was already past ten pm. However, Khalija was not hesitant in the slightest.

“Of course. I will need to adjust the guard plan based on your aptitude and ability. I might be guarding you, but it would be pointless if I got in the way of your daily life. If there are areas that you are able to handle by yourself, there is nothing wrong with using that.”

Yasuo understood what she was trying to say, but he was too scared to turn around and face his family.

That was because his actions were what caused Diana to “acquire lodgings in a housing complex nearby” in the first place.

Yasuo couldn’t tell if she had noticed his frozen expression, but she gave him a large smile.

“I’ve heard that you only recently found out about your parents’ past, but you are still the son of Hideo the Hero, and The Rainbow Sage, Madoka. I have great expectations for your talent.”

It was obvious that she didn’t really think that, but she still said that slowly as if trying to imply something.

Yasuo found out the reason behind it about ten minutes later.

“.....This is terrible.”

Astounded. If he had to describe it in one word, that was the word he would use.

Yasuo was collapsed in front of Khalija, in a state of complete exhaustion.

Beside him was Diana, with her shoulders slumped as though she was the one who was being reprimanded.

They were in the backyard of the Kenzaki house, and Khalija had given him some tasks to check his aptitude for basic-level sorcery, but Yasuo hadn't been able to complete even a single one. He had not even completed the foundation level of sorcery yet, so that was only natural.

Perhaps Khalija hadn't thought that Yasuo would be incapable of doing even this much, her expression gradually hardened.

“Major Krone. Just what have you been doing for the past month?”

“T-That is...”

“I never imagined for an instant that he would still be stuck at the foundation-level. Where does the root of the problem lie?”

Basically, she was asking if it was a problem with the teacher, or a problem with the student.

“Haah... Haah... Me...”

Yasuo raised his hand while struggling to catch his breath. He could not allow Diana to take the blame for this.

“Obviously.”

Khalija crossed her arms and nodded as if she understood.

“Do you remember what I said earlier?”

“Haah... Haah... Eh?”

“You are the son of The Hero, Hideo and The Rainbow Sage, Madoka. I said that I had great expectations for you talent, didn't I? It appears that you have no idea about how big the shoes you were trying to fill are.”

Saying that, Khalija looked at Diana who was cowering next to Yasuo.

“Major Krone has been compared to her parents, the Swordmaster Alexei Krone, and the Great Magician Erijina Radagast all her life. No matter how hard she works to achieve results, people say that it is only natural given her parentage, and if she fails, people will scold her saying she brings shame to her parents. Nobody tries to acknowledge her own power. It is a fact that her current position is due to her parentage, no matter how small the influence may be, and hence it is actually quite unfair to ask strangers to treat her fairly. And since you volunteered to become the new Hero, you would not be compared against General Alexei or Her Excellency, Erijina.”

“.....”

“The stories of battle are always distorted while they are told, and the achievements of people are gradually exaggerated over time. There are cities, streets, mountains, and rivers named after Hideo all over our world. If the son of such a legendary existence was to appear in such a world, what do you think would happen? If it’s just at the level of disappointing the people, that’s still fine. The way you are now, I don’t think you will be able to do much, even if you focus entirely on training for a year. If someone like that shows up and calls himself the Son of The Hero, the most likely outcome is that you will be treated as an impostor, and might even be charged with trying to mislead the people and summarily executed.”

“E-Executed...”

“We already have no shortage of fools who claim to be relatives of Hideo the Hero and carry out scams and acts of violence. If the country brings forward a person whose identity is suspicious at such a time, that could very well lead to an increase in such crimes.”

Yasuo felt so pathetic that he couldn’t even say anything in return.

He had volunteered to be a Hero who would save the world, why was he being talked about as if he was nothing but a source of inspiration to con-artists?

However, Yasuo understood that this was his current reality, and he had nothing in his arsenal to fight back against her.

Yasuo gritted his teeth in frustration, but what Khalija said next was completely unexpected.

“Still, isn’t it fine for you to be the way you are?”

““Eh?””

“As I said earlier, I am personally against the idea of requesting help from the Hero. Major Krone, you weren’t seriously thinking of bringing a man like this to our world either, correct? At this rate, the plan to summon the Hero will be judged to be impractical, and before long, people will reconsider the idea.”

“.....”

“Also, the fact that you can do nothing makes it more convenient to guard you. I don’t need to worry about the person I’m guarding making any unexpected moves, after all. Making any half-baked moves during combat will just increase the risk, so I would like you to stay the way you are right now, Yasuo.”

She wasn’t holding back at all.

“Do you feel frustrated?”

“.....Yes, I do.”

There’s no way anyone would not feel frustrated after having such things said about them.

“However, this is your reality. If you come to Resteria, you will not even be able to remain standing on your feet with your power. A person who cannot remain standing will only die on the battlefield.”

“Colonel!?”

Diana shouted out before she could stop herself, and in the next instant, Khalija's staff-shaped weapon took the shape of a thin dagger and rushed towards Yasuo's throat.

"If I just lower my arm a little, you will easily die."

"...!"

The killing intent he felt was definitely real.

He understood it precisely because he had already felt the killing intent of William and the Shii. A metaphorical cold hand that was ready to take his life.

Yasuo's eyes that were opened wide in fear met the gaze of Khalija's blue eyes that were like the uncharted depths of the ocean. For a moment, he felt like he saw a strange flicker in those eyes.

"Fufufu."

The next instant, the killing intent and pressure vanished, and Khalija's face took on a teasing expression.

"That's a pretty cute expression on your face."

"Huh!? Ouch!"

When he raised his voice, he felt the tip of the dagger prick the skin of his throat.

"It's the expression of a child who tries their best to act brave when being scolded by an adult."

"I-I'm not—!"

"You are not suited to being a Hero."

Khalija brought her lips closer to him and delivered that ruthless verdict.

"You don't know what you should be doing, right? Are you unable to back down because of the declaration to made to Major Krone? If that is the case,

then be at ease. Saying that you can do something you cannot is the greater sin compared to admitting that you cannot do something that you know you are incapable of. If you abandon the idea of making rash moves during combat and focus on doing things apart from fighting, you might still be useful as a supporter. The requiem you sang earlier to send off the Shii was fine piece of work.”

“But I cannot protect anyone with just that.”

“If you insist on acting tough like a child, forget about other people, you will be unable to protect even yourself and die. Just do the things that you are capable of doing. Hnn.”

“Eh... Hii!?”

“C-Colonel!?”

Before Yasuo could fully comprehend that Khalija’s face was getting closer, he felt a warm and moist sensation on his neck and let out a scream.

He felt something moist caress the area on his neck where Khalija’s Techno Weapon had grazed him earlier, and felt a slight tingle of pain.

“You were bleeding.”

Seeing Khalija’s charming smile, Yasuo finally understood what had happened, and he felt dizzy as if he had been exposed to a brilliant flash of light.

“W-W-W-W-W-Wha—!?”

“What are you getting so excited about over something like this? You’re eighteen-years-old, don’t let out such a silly scream.”

“C-C-C-Colonel, you just l-l-licked Yasuo’s neck...”

“What, you too?”

Seeing Diana's bright red face, Khalija's expression changed to one of boredom and she moved her face and Techno Weapon away from Yasuo. After that, she extended a finger towards Yasuo's neck.

The next moment, a pale light shone from beneath Yasuo's chin, and after the light went out, he realized that the pain on his neck had also stopped.

"It was still bleeding, so I closed the wound."

"...Hey."

This must be what was known as healing magic.

After touching his neck, he saw a little blood on his fingers but there was no sensation of a wound.

"I will also be protecting you from tomorrow onwards. Let's get along, Children of Heroes."

Khalija raised her hand in farewell and left the backyard, and Yasuo, still lying on the ground, and Diana, with her face still red, blankly watched her leave.

"Major Krone. I can't get into the room without the keys!"

Diana stood up like she had been electrified upon hearing the voice that came from the other side of the fence.

"Y-Yes! Well then, I will be taking my leave now, Yasuo. Umm, I'll see you again tomorrow..."

Diana briefly bowed to Yasuo, who was still sitting on the ground, and ran off after Khalija and he watched her leave.

"Once again... A troublesome person has arrived..."

Yasuo sat there with his hands over his eyes, looking like he was releasing all his resentment into the night sky. He was unable to stand up for quite a while after that.



Yasuo received a score of 95 on his make-up test for English Reading, and successfully managed to clear the first hurdle. He was currently in the First Music Room of the old school building of Takeoka High School, which was illuminated by the light from the setting sun.

This room was supposed to be off-limits to him since the Choral Club had been shut down, but strangely enough, there was a key to this room that the school did not know about, which had been passed down from seniors to their juniors in the club for many generations.

Yasuo had also received the key from a senior one year older than him. He had copies of the key made at a locksmith's shop and carried one of them on his keyring.

It was still a music room belonging to the school, and he was supposed to get permission from the teachers before using it. However, there was nothing of value in this room, so that rule was in name only.

On the other hand, Yasuo could not use the room when the Chamber Music Group or Light Music Group had their practice sessions here, but since their practice schedule had basically stayed the same since the times the Choral Club was active, Yasuo's forays into the club room were hardly ever interrupted.

And so, Yasuo stood alone in the middle of the room as he had done several times before and took a deep breath. He put his palms together, focused on his breathing and the power that flowed through his body, and then passed the magical energy between his palms without moving his body.

A small point of light, the size of the tip of his little finger, illuminated his palms as it passed between his hands that were held apart at a distance the size of a rugby ball. Even doing only this much gradually caused Yasuo's breathing to become ragged.

And soon, before even ten minutes had passed,

“Buuuaah!”

Yasuo was not able to endure it anymore and broke his stance. The light dispersed and Yasuo’s forehead was beaded with sweat.

“It’s no good. I only went without doing this for three or four days and I’ve already lost the knack.”

It may have just looked like he was moving a firefly-sized amount of light between his palms, but in reality, the stress on his body was equivalent to holding up a ten kilogram weight in each hand.

“Aah, my wrists.”

Even the fatigue he felt afterwards was exactly the same as working out with dumbbells.

It had been four days since Diana had heard about his make-up tests and put his sorcery training on hold. Today’s foundation-level practice was his first in four days, the first since the day Diana had moved into the Marigold Tokorozawa Apartment, and this was the result.

At this rate...

“That’s why I told you to focus on doing what you can do. Do not attempt things that you are incapable of.”

“Uwaaaaaah!?”

Yasuo jumped at hearing the voice of someone apart from himself in the room all of a sudden.

He quickly looked around to see where the voice came from, and saw that Khalija was looking into the room from outside the window, of all places. The problem was that this room was on the fourth floor, the uppermost floor of the old school building, and there was no balcony or any sort of place to stand outside the window.



“W-What do you think you’re doing? What if someone outside the building sees you!?”

“I could ask you the same question. Practising foundation-level sorcery in an enclosed space like this, what if you lose control? I sensed that you suddenly started raising the level of magical energy in your body and rushed over thinking that there was some sort of emergency. I’d appreciate it if you stopped doing things like that... there we go.”

What’s more, Khalija entered the room through the window and Yasuo was stunned upon seeing what she was wearing.

“Hey...”

Khalija was wearing a tracksuit that belonged to Takeoka High School.

Diana also often wore a tracksuit during their Magitech Knight training, was there something about tracksuits that caught their fancy?

At any rate, the school-provided tracksuit definitely looked odd on the silver-haired Khalija, and it wasn’t much of a disguise either.

At the very least, she should remove the circlet that she was wearing on her head. The tracksuits used by the students of Takeoka High School were a subdued blue, and it was the same color for students of all years. Khalija’s looks were already very striking, wearing a glittering, black circlet with an orange jewel embedded in it made Yasuo seriously question if she had any intention of disguising herself in the first place.

“...By the way, where did you get that tracksuit? Did you steal it from someone?”

Hearing that, Khalija replied without any trace of guilt on her face.

“I thought that the Magitech Knight uniform would stand out too much, so when I asked Nodoka, she let me borrow this saying that it was used by

students of this school. I slept in Major Krone's room last night, but I failed to consider the matter of clothing."

"Wait, so that's mine? That idiot Nodoka, doing whatever she wants! Why didn't you just borrow some clothing from Diana!?"

"It couldn't be helped. I can't very well steal something from strangers who know nothing about our situation, and I can just wash these clothes and return them to you later. Also, Major Krone's sizes are different from mine in many ways and I can't use her clothing. My apologies."

In spite of her apology, Yasuo could see from her expression that she didn't particularly feel bad about it.

Even last night, she sounded like she was talking about serious things but ended up just teasing him. She acted like a perfect soldier in front of his father, so he had no idea what to make of her current attitude.

Was she putting on an act for Hideo the Hero? Or was she just taking Yasuo lightly because he was unskilled and younger than her? Judging from what Diana said about Khalija's military experience yesterday, Yasuo couldn't help but think that it was the latter.

After thinking about that, Yasuo suddenly remembered what she had done to his neck the previous night and he felt his cheeks grow warm. He hurriedly put some distance between them to get away from Khalija's teasing face.

"E-Even so, please don't use my school clothes! I might need them as well."

"I will acquire some inconspicuous clothing when I have some free time. Please put up with it for the time being. I'll make sure to wash them properly before returning them... Or maybe you'd prefer it if I didn't wash them?"

Even Yasuo was capable of calmly dealing with someone who spoke so frankly.

“Please wash, dry, and iron them before returning them. Also, there’s no getting around the fact that you’re fairly conspicuous, Khalija-san, so please think over the guard plan a little more carefully.”

Seeing that Yasuo had calmed down, Khalija just said “Boring,” and finally dropped her teasing expression.

“If you’re saying that I should stop guarding you from a close distance, then that is rejected. There’s no assurance that the Shii that escaped yesterday won’t attack you again today. Major Krone should also be staying close to Nodoka today. You will be going to some place called a prep school after this without returning home, correct? According to the schedule that I received in advance, you are already thirty minutes late in leaving here. Please keep unexpected activities to a minimum.”

“U-Unexpected activities...”

Although her words were exaggerated, Khalija’s expression was serious.

“In the military, deviating from the schedule for no good reason is grounds for severe punishment. If you come to Resteria as the Hero, you will undoubtedly be assigned to the Knights Division. If that happens, you won’t get away with such a light rebuke.”

Saying that, Khalija looked at the clock that was mounted on a wall.

“It’s time to move. Madoka has asked me to use something called a taxi on the way back. Understood?”

“Yes, that’s fine... Say, Khalija-san, I have a question for you. Also, please don’t walk inside the school looking like that. At the very least, leave the way you came and try not to let anyone see you.”

“Hmm?”

Yasuo stopped Khalija who was about to calmly head into the school corridors while dressed in a tracksuit that made her stand out, and then asked her a question.

“The military rank of 『Major』 … How hard is it to reach that?”

Khalija thought about the meaning of that question for a little while, and then suddenly gave him one of her inscrutable smiles and came closer to him.

“You’re not interested in knowing about 『Colonel』 ? If you’d like, we can go to some quiet place where nobody will disturb us and I can give you a detailed explanation.”

“No, I’m not interested, thank you.”

Khalija looked a little unhappy upon seeing Yasuo reject her idea while sighing deeply, as if he found her truly annoying.

“Despite being a naive kid, you’re no fun at all. I’ve heard that your father was also quite straight-laced in his youth despite looking frivolous, maybe that’s the only thing you’ve inherited from him?”

“That sounds very interesting, but for now, I would appreciate it if you answered my question.”

“Well, that’s fine. But you should know, I’m not saying things like that just to tease you. If you want to become a Hero, you should get used to things like that quickly.”

Yasuo felt astounded as Khalija had pretty much said that she liked to tease him, however Khalija obediently stopped trying to leave the room through the door and went towards the window instead.

“The title of 『Hero』 is unimaginably heavy, in more ways than one. I’ll tell you what that means, as well as many other things which Dianaze Krone, that pure girl who is even more naive than you, has probably not talked about. Let’s meet in front of the main gate in ten minutes. Don’t be late.”

“Y-Yes...”

Khalija’s mood now was a complete change from her teasing attitude earlier, and Yasuo agreed right away.

Yasuo carefully hurried out of the school while making sure that he didn’t catch the attention of his friends or classmates. By the time he reached the main gates, he saw that a taxi was already waiting outside the gate and Khalija was waiting next to it in an imposing pose.

“You’re late. It’s one minute over the agreed time.”

“I-I’m sorry. It took some time to make sure that I wasn’t seen leaving...”

“That’s well and good, but pointless because someone already saw you.”

“Eh?”

Yasuo looked back to see what Khalija was looking at.

“Ah, Yasu. Are you done with your make-up test? Leaving already? Want to go to the station together?”

“Ugh! Aoto!”

By some freak coincidence, Aioi Aoto was walking towards him while dragging a trunk packed full of Theatre Club props.

“Hmm? A taxi? ...Who’s that?”

Of course, he saw the taxi, and Khalija wearing the tracksuit with the name “Kenzaki” stitched on it.

“Uh, this is...”

“Are you one of his classmates? I’m sorry, but he has a prior engagement with me today. Please ask him again from tomorrow onwards, if you have the time.”

Saying that, Khalija wrapped her arms around Yasuo’s arm, fully aware of the fact that Aoto was looking at them.

“Uwaaaaah!?”

Yasuo panicked when he felt a sensation on his arm that must not be felt, and tried to pull away. However, he could not break Khalija’s grip even though she didn’t look like she was putting any strength into it.

Yasuo could not go against Khalija as the difference in his strength from a Magitech Knight was made apparent at even a time like this.

“Time to go, Yasuo.”

“Eh? Prior engagement? What? Eh?”

“Ah, sorry, Aoto. Today is...”

Even Yasuo didn’t know how to complete that sentence, but in any case, Yasuo was dragged into the taxi after only being able to say something vague to Aoto.

“Well then, we should be going.... Take us to the Western Exit of the Tokorozawa Station, please.”

After saying some unnecessary parting words to Aoto, Khalija spoke to the taxi driver as if she was used to it.

“...Please let go. I need to fasten my seatbelt.”

“What, are you embarrassed?”

Freed from Khalija’s grip, Yasuo turned around inside the moving taxi and saw the figure of Aoto getting smaller as they left him behind, looking towards them with a dumbfounded expression.

Yasuo hung his head while feeling a sense of despair, but he heard Khalija say something unexpected beside him.

“You’re probably blaming me for doing something so conspicuous.”

“Eh?”

“I did that on purpose. Right now, I need to be vigilant when you are approached by people, no matter who they may be. No, it’s not just you. The same holds true for Nodoka as well.”

“.....What do you mean?”

Yasuo guardedly asked her that, and Khalija looked at the view outside her window after glancing at Yasuo once.

“This is also related to how difficult it was for Dianaze Krone to achieve the rank of Major.”



“Putting it this way might sound rude, but neither your parents nor the rest of your family live in a particularly special environment in this world, correct? ”

“Well, that’s true. To be frank, there must be a ton of similar families living all over Japan.”

The husband is a salaryman, and his wife is a housewife. Their son is in high school, and their daughter is in middle school.

Looking at their life in the past, they were a completely unremarkable family.

“But General Alexei and Her Excellency, Erijina, couldn’t live that kind of life. They were both from distinguished families, and were leaders of the country. What’s more, they were Heroes on par with Hideo, and their names were known throughout the world. Also, they had a single child, the beautiful Major Krone, no, Dianaze. What do you think? Can you imagine what kind of things she had to put up with, just because of this?”

Yasuo used his meager imagination to the fullest, and stated the answer that he arrived at.

“Jealousy, resentment... And maybe receiving marriage proposals for political reasons?”

“Exactly. I heard that it was quite terrible.”

Anyone who married the one and only daughter of the Heroes would become the center of gossip in the public eye.

“This is just a rumor, but I heard that she had nearly a hundred suitors as soon as she reached the age of twelve.”

“A hundred suitors at the age of twelve!?”

This statement caused Yasuo to doubt his hearing.

What kind of people would propose marriage to a girl who is only twelve years old?

“Of course, most of them were men she had never met before. As a woman, even thinking about that makes me feel disgusted.”

Khalija spat out those words while looking seriously disgusted.

“Of course, her parents threw such proposals straight into the fireplace, keeping only the name of the sender so that they could send a letter of rejection. From the perspective of their national interests, there would be major international problems if their only daughter ended up being married to nobility or royalty from a different country, so the applicants were selected very carefully. Even with that, there were still a hundred people. I feel like telling those people to at least try and hide their intentions a little.”

Receiving marriage proposals from people she had never seen, even as a child, Diana had been aware from the beginning that people had been only interested in her background and not herself.

“Unlike Japan, Resteria does not have an official age of majority that is determined by the law. However, by custom, the age is set to fifteen years.”

“I see.”

Fifteen years of age is still very early.

Yasuo had heard that the age of attaining manhood was around the same back when the Samurai were in control of the government. He remembered that

the essay he had to write for Social Studies in place of taking a make-up test was on the topic of 『Reduction of the Age of Majority』, and he decided to pay close attention as he might be able to use this as a reference.

“By the time Dianaze reached the age of majority, it became nearly impossible to repel the pressure from the people surrounding them. There were many people within the country who came to General Alexei with proposals for a political marriage. And so, she enlisted into the Knights Division almost as if she was desperately running away.”

“Running away?”

“That’s right. If she joined the Knights, she would be a soldier. As soldiers pledge allegiance to their country, for obvious reasons they cannot easily enter into marriage with nobles of foreign countries, at least on paper. By doing that, she made sure that the people who were after her were limited to only those within her own country. Once that was done, as long as her parents were vigilant, she could avoid receiving any more annoying marriage proposals, barring any from people who fell in love with her at first sight.”

“So when you said that Diana received preferential treatment to get promoted, was it to protect her from people like that?”

“No. This is an administrative matter, but in our country a person needs to be a field grade officer or higher in order to use the Gate Tower. Her special promotion was due to the decision to simplify matters by forcefully promoting her, even if it meant twisting the law. She was only a First Lieutenant until three months ago, after all. Her promotions up to that point were due to her own talent and hard work. The combat and magical abilities she inherited from her parents were on a different level compared to the others in her age group. Although she lacks experience, should you only look at her fighting ability she is even comparable to me.”

Khalija had explicitly declared that she was stronger than Diana, but that was not important right now.

“However, if she just wanted to avoid getting married, couldn’t she have just become a nun or something similar?”

“Are you talking about the Church of the Divine King?”

Even though she asked him that, Yasuo had never heard of the religion before. From the way she said it, he assumed it was one of the major religions on their world.

Khalija grimaced and shook her head.

“The Church is a den of wicked people that even makes the Knight Division look attractive in comparison. The church’s borders are not as strong as that of the country, and if a child from a noble family joined them, it would be obvious to everyone that it’s only temporary measure. It would be like hiding in a cage full of flaws while trying to escape from wolves. There’s no point in doing that at all.”

After hearing that, Yasuo was forced to agree that it made sense.

Yasuo remembered that there were questions on his Classical Literature test about tales written by writers in the Heian Period, about women who had become nuns and yet sang songs of love about how they wanted to return to their lives someday. He remembered wondering if people really took holy vows so irresponsibly.

“The same thing applies to you, as well.”

“What?”

However, Yasuo was surprised because she suddenly shifted the topic of conversation to him.

“Let’s set aside your actual ability for now. Let’s assume you were taken to Resteria by Major Krone, and were accepted as a Hero by the people. What do you think would happen then?”

“What would....”

“You’re a healthy, eighteen-year-old young man. The son of a Hero who wielded overwhelming strength and saved the world in the past.”

“Eh, don’t tell me...”

“The number of people who would like to get closer to you are probably more numerous than the Shii. Depending on which faction you join, the country might be thrown into chaos. There will be people who will offer you their daughters’ hands in marriage. There might even be good-for-nothing daughters of nobility trying to woo you among that number. There will be rulers who bring you large tributes and petition you to give priority to saving their own populace. Do you think that you will be able to deal with people like that?”

“N-No, but still... Won’t Diana’s mother and the King do something about that?”

“Of course, they will protect you in the beginning. However, His Majesty, Borad IX is very old, and after the death of General Alexei, the workload of Her Excellency, Erijina, has increased greatly. Resteria is currently full of people who are looking askance at the influence of the Krone Family and the life of the King, and it is being wracked by power struggles between people who will resort to any means necessary. It’s basically a warzone. In such a situation, the country still needs to come up with countermeasures against the Shii. Of course, there will be a fair number of people who will be there to help you, but most likely it will be different from your father’s time when they went on a tour of several foreign countries and managed to save the world in the end. With things as they are right now, even if you manage to

become as strong as your father, you will just be seen as a 『Weapon』 with the convenient label of 『Hero』 .”

In other words, he would be a tool, used at will and whim by those in power.

“But that’s not all I wanted to say. What I’m going to say now concerns the Shii that appeared the other day, and the reason why I went out of my way to show myself to your classmate.”

“Eh?”

“I just explained what would happen to you in Resteria if you went there as you are now. However, this is not restricted to only Resteria.”

“Not restricted to only Resteria...?”

“Don’t you understand? It’s not just Resteria that wants the power of 『The Hero』 .”

“!!”

At that moment, Yasuo suddenly understood what she was trying to say.

Resteria was not the only country in the world of Ante Lande. There were places like the Grand Duchy of Torjesso, which was the first place to be destroyed by the Demon King Kaul, and even yesterday Khalija had mentioned some place called the Gaz Commonwealth.

“During the war with Demon King Kaul, the situation was so dire that Hideo the Hero was welcomed all over the world, and every country supported him during his travels. However, the situation right now is different. Nobody has come up with any permanent solution to the Shii problem yet, but the situation hasn’t deteriorated to the point that it affects the stability of countries. There are also other major world powers with access to their own Gate Towers.”

Yasuo finally understood why Khalija had purposely called attention to herself today.

“So there might be other countries who are targeting Dad, Nodoka, and me?”

“Almost certainly, if they have managed to catch wind of the fact that you intend to become a Hero. No, you should assume that they already know about that.”

Khalija moved her eyes alone and glanced at Yasuo.

“Hideo will certainly side with Resteria, and there are few people idiotic enough to try anything unlawful against such a legendary existence. However, you and Nodoka are different. If they manage to acquire the two of you, they might be able to win an advantageous position among all the nations in Ante Lande. You might be used as leverage against Resteria during negotiations on completely unrelated matters. As the two of you currently have no backing, you have such immense value that any country that manages to gain control of you will be able to completely overturn the current status of the world.”

“S-So you’re saying that other countries might make a move with the intention of kidnapping Nodoka and me?”

“It might not necessarily be kidnapping. There are many ways to bait you. Money, prestige, women, and especially the safety of your city and family, which is of value to you right now, might be used as material for negotiation. Even we are doing the same thing, after all.”

True, there were many areas in which the daily life of the Kenzaki Family was being greatly supported by the Resteria Kingdom.

Also, because of the attack by the Shii the other night, the Kenzaki family could not afford to reject the assistance of Diana and Khalija.

“I think that the man mentioned in Major Krone’s report, William Bareig, is one such person. That might also be the reason why he was after you and Nodoka.”

“You... You really think so?”

Sure, people might think that way if they found out about William's words and the outcome of the battle from a second hand report.

However, because of his experience, Yasuo could not bring himself to believe that William was human.

It would be difficult to put into words if he was asked to explain why he felt that way. It might have just been the dormant wild genes present in humans since ancient times that made him feel that way, but Khalija would probably not understand it even if he explained that to her now.

It was something similar to the Shii; you would not understand it unless you actually encountered it yourself.

Besides, Yasuo had no basis to say that just because William was not human, he was not related to any nation or organization from Ante Lande.

Khalija continued to speak.

“Because of that, both Major Krone and I have to stand out. We, Resteria, have called dibs on Hideo the Hero and his family. We will not forgive anyone who ignores that and attempts to get close to you. Well, it's something like that.”

“Eeh... Hey, what are—!”

Before he realized it, Khalija had once again nestled close to Yasuo, causing his blood pressure to rise rapidly, and he tried his best to escape to the corner of the seat.

However, as if to tease Yasuo for his lack of experience, Khalija put her lips close to Yasuo's ear and breathed out on purpose.

“Even the driver of this taxi might be a person from Ante Lande, you know? Wouldn't it be a problem if he's a spy sent here to investigate the lives of you, Nodoka, and Major Krone? That's why I'm here to protect you like this.”

“Ah, fine! I understand! I understand, so please move away! Aaaaah!”

At this rate, he would fail to protect something else. If it was possible, he wanted to escape through the window.

He could feel an unfamiliar sensation against his arm, through the cloth of his own tracksuit.

Perhaps she was satisfied after seeing Yasuo who looked ready to burst into tears, Khalija let out a small laugh and moved away from him as if nothing had happened.

“Haa... Haa...”

Yasuo took a deep breath to calm his rapidly beating heart and glanced at the driver’s reflection in the rear-view mirror.

The elderly driver showed no signs of having heard any of their conversation, as if he was wearing earplugs, and was driving the car safely. Yasuo actually found it troubling that he did not appear to be paying attention to them at all.

“That’s right, I though of a good idea. There’s a way to minimize the stress caused by all the various problems I just explained to you. Do you want to know how?”

“...You’re going to tell me anyways, right? What is it?”

After silently rebuking her in his heart, Yasuo asked her that, and Khalija raised her finger, looking like she had completely reverted to her teasing mood.

“Things will become so much simpler if you and Major Krone get married. I mean, you’re both the children of Heroes, after all. The eyes of the entire world will be on you, and you will have the overwhelming support of the kingdom and the Krone family, so you won’t have to worry about being taken for a ride by any strange people...”

Yasuo truly wished that he hadn’t heard that.

It looked like even Khalija didn't expect such a reaction from him, so she wrinkled her eyebrows as if she was dissatisfied.

“Major Krone is a beautiful girl even by the standards of this world, isn't she? What are you so unhappy about?”

“I'm seriously starting to wonder if you're really in the same age group as Diana. You completely sound like someone's aunt! More importantly, please stop saying things like that!”

“How rude. It was a serious idea, you know? Also, what do you mean by 'things like that?' What exactly do you want me to stop doing? Hmm?”

*Even though you know exactly what I mean!*

Yasuo gritted his teeth out of anger and held back that scream.

“What part of that sounds like a serious idea? Why is everyone trying to pair up me and Diana?”

“Everyone?”

“Uh, it's nothing, just something on my side... More importantly, what are you trying to do!? You've just been saying all these things that make me not want to go to Ante Lande. Aren't you supposed to be Diana's assistant, Khalija-san!?”

“As I said earlier, I am against the idea of summoning the Hero to Ante Lande.”

Khalija was enjoying herself seeing Yasuo argue with her with a red face, but she once again glanced out of the window and gave a somewhat lonely laugh.

“You have a point. I don't want you to become disillusioned with how Ante Lande is right now. The same goes for Hideo the Hero as well.”

“...Become disillusioned?”

“The Ante Lande that your father travelled through and the current Ante Lande are completely different. I don’t see any reason why you should leave this bountiful and peaceful country behind and risk your life to come to our world, but if you do end up going there, I just want to do my best to make sure you don’t have any bad memories. Lately I’ve felt that...”

The view outside the window indicated that Tokorozawa Station was near, and Khalija for some reason whispered only the next words in a quiet voice.

“...the Shii are a punishment from the Gods for forgetting about the calamity caused by the Demon King Kaul and being consumed by fighting amongst ourselves.”

“Right then, it looks like we’ve arrived. Don’t worry, I won’t try to enter such a small building to keep an eye on you.”

“Please spare me.”

After getting down from the taxi, Yasuo looked back at Khalija, who was still sitting inside, and frowned.

“However, like I said earlier, I plan to stay somewhere close. I might end up switching with Major Krone at some point, but you should just assume that one of us is nearby even if you can’t see us. I would also be thankful if you carefully think about those other matters as well.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Replying once is enough. Aah, one more thing. Wa... you.”

Khalija made a serious expression and lowered her voice.

“Excuse me?”

However, he wasn’t able to properly hear her over the noises outside and the sound of the engine.

“I said, watch... behind...”

“What is it? I can’t hear you.”

Yasuo furrowed his eyebrows and leaned closer to her through the open door. Khalija gave a smug smile as if she had achieved something, and Yasuo had a bad premonition, but it was already too late.

Khalija once again brought her face close to his ear.

“Watch out behind you. There’s a girl glaring at you with an incredibly angry expression.”

And said that with a hint of sarcasm.

“!!! Ouch!”

Yasuo tried to turn around suddenly and banged his head hard against the roof of the taxi, and while he crouched down in pain, the taxi carrying Khalija sped away.

Yasuo didn’t even have the time to glare at the tail lamps before he timidly turned around, and...

“Hello, Kenzaki-kun.”

Shouko was glaring down at him with such intensity that he felt like she would shoot ice magic from her eyes.

She was obviously extremely angry with him, and Yasuo could only act flustered, as he didn’t know the reason.

“H-Hey there, Tatewaki-san.”

“I think there’s something I should apologize to you about.”

“Eh?”

“Remember the joke I made back then? It was back when you didn’t recognize me right away, Yasu-kun... no, Kenzaki-kun.”

From the way she changed the way she called him, he could guess the degree of Shouko’s inexplicable anger.

“I said that you were probably friends with a lot of girls, so it couldn’t be helped if you didn’t remember someone like me, right? I’m sorry.”

“S-Sorry for what...?”

“I just thought that you were actually quite popular. You’re with two different girls in a matter of a single day, and what’s more, both of them are foreigners. You even kissed her after getting out of the taxi, it’s so incredible that I can’t keep up at all. I guess people who go to a private school in the city are made of different stuff after all. Is this what they call making progress?”

“Ki...!? No, it wasn’t like that!!”

Yasuo wanted to deny it, but he was flustered upon hearing the word “kiss” and turned red after remembering what had happened the previous night in the backyard.

He knew that it would completely support what Shouko was thinking, but he couldn’t stop his emotions.

He had been on his guard, but he still got conned by Khalija in the end.

She had indeed planned things out so that people who saw him from afar would think of something like that.

Khalija had probably noticed Shouko the moment he stepped out of the taxi. She had purposely taken the kind of action that would ensure that Shouko would remember her.

However, no matter how important it was to be conspicuous, there were other ways to do it!! Though, even if he wanted to say that, Khalija was nowhere in sight, and it didn’t look like Shouko would believe him either.

Besides, what kind of place did she think private schools in a city were like?

If they were talking about cities, then the neighboring Higashimurayama Station that was in no way different from Tokorozawa was already part of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area.

Besides, the only places that students could go to that were near the train station closest to Takeoka High School were convenience stores, a McDonald's, and unmanned stalls selling vegetables.

It was a student life completely devoid of any sort of city-like charm, so it was troubling when people just used the term "private school in the city" to draw their own conclusions!

"Something like this is on an entirely different level from going to buy manga, so you should consider the TPO, okay? Goodbye."

"A-Ah, wait a minute, Tatewaki-san! It's not what you think!"

"What? What exactly is different? I don't particularly care about who you go out with, Kenzaki-kun."

The expression on Shouko's face when she turned around was not the expression that someone who didn't care would have.

"Like I said, I'm not going out with her or anything..."

"Oh, so you were just playing around by kissing someone you're not even going out with?"

"No, it's just a misunderstanding!"

"Ah, sorry, I have a test during my lesson today. Goodbye."

Shouko spoke quickly to shut out what Yasuo was trying to say, and quickly walked into a lecture booth. This must be what was meant by being unapproachable.

Not only was he unable to resolve the misunderstanding, he actually made it worse. Yasuo fell down on his knees while thinking about that, and,

"H-Hey, what's wrong? You look really pale, are you okay?"

He felt like he was about to faint, but after hearing the voice of Kobayashi, the teacher in charge of him, he managed to regain his senses.



“Hahaha!! That’s what happened after I left!?”

Khalija’s amused laughter echoed in the living room of the Kenzaki house, and Yasuo glared at her resentfully.

She was still wearing Yasuo’s tracksuit, and paid no attention to Yasuo’s glare as she continued to work on something with several metallic parts spread out on the table before her. Nodoka, who had given the tracksuit to her without permission, was sitting beside her and watching her work with an interested expression.

“It’s not something to laugh about...”

Yasuo said that as he sat down in front of Khalija.

“Colonel! What are you doing!? Why are you causing problems for Yasuo?”

Diana, who was standing next to Yasuo with a red face, began to chew out Khalija fiercely.

“Uwaaah... Onii-chan, that’s really something.”

Nodoka was provoking him her brother by giving him a disgusted smile, so his only ally was Diana.

“Look, even Nodoka’s doing that! Why do I have to be seen by other people in such a way? I didn’t even do anything!!”

It was past nine pm when Yasuo left prep school.

He didn’t see Shouko anywhere on his way out, and when he instead saw Diana waiting by the roadside a little distance away, he felt like crying for more than one reason.

“Yasuo! What’s wrong!?”

Diana panicked upon seeing Yasuo with a pale face and tears in his eyes, but Yasuo had been unable to say anything until they got back home.

After he finally spoke about what happened, this was the result.

“The girl called Shouko Tatewaki was looking very hard at us, so I assumed she was a spy from a different country. I see, so she’s someone from this world.”

*Stop lying, you obviously knew that wasn’t true!*

Almost as if she had read Yasuo’s mind,

“I was half-serious, you know?”

Khalija shamelessly said that.

“Then what was the other half for!?”

Khalija was being so relaxed that Yasuo felt stupid for taking any of the things she said in the taxi seriously.

“In the first place, no one from our world would try and make contact in such a way because it would make Hideo angry! We are already in a position where we are causing problems for everyone from the Kenzaki family, so please try to restrain yourself! H-How could you do something like k-kissing Yasuo!?”

“Diana-san, calm down. She definitely didn’t kiss him. If she did, Onii-chan wouldn’t be this calm.”

Even though Nodoka hadn’t been present at the time, she spoke as if she had seen what happened and attempted to pacify Diana, whose face was red with indignation.

Nodoka was right, but no matter how Yasuo looked at it, she was just making fun of her brother for his lack of experience, so he had a complicated feeling about it.

True, they hadn’t kissed, but thinking back, he thought that having his neck licked by a woman he had just met was also pretty abnormal.

“Well, calm down, Major Krone.”

“How can I stay calm at a time like this!?”

“Don’t hit the table. You’re going to knock the parts off.”

“Here, Khalija-san. One of the screws fell down.”

“Ah, thank you, Nodoka. Please put it near that one of the same size which goes on the right.”

“Okay.”

“...What have you been doing since earlier?”

Yasuo felt like he’d seen the mechanism that Khalija was working on somewhere before...

“It’s Major Krone’s Castor. I thought I should at least make some temporary repairs.”

“...She’s fixing it for me!”

Diana’s embarrassment and anger had not yet faded entirely, so she said that still fuming slightly.

“Castor... Is that the one that broke back then...?”

It was a Techno Weapon which was meant to be used right-handed, and was broken in the battle against Alexei’s Shii when she had been defending Nodoka.

“It gave out to high voltage and the Sorcery Circuits inside were fried. Thankfully, the circuit board itself seems to be fine, so while I can’t repair it completely, I should at least be able to make it usable. Want to take a look?”

Yasuo was scared to approach Khalija once again, but he was still interested to see what the insides of a Techno Weapon looked like, so he kept his guard up and looked at it from over her shoulder.

“What, what’s this?”

His gaze was immediately captured by its internal structure.

The insides of Castor, which looked like a pistol grip, appeared to a mysterious mechanism with what looked like gears from a mechanical watch laid over something which looked like a computer's motherboard.

There were jewels of beautiful colors embedded at the shaft of each of the gears, and the gears were connected to each other by thin wires. However, even Yasuo could tell that they had been badly damaged in several areas.

“The basic operation of a Techo Weapon depends on a combination of this structure that is laid over the circuit board, and the technique formula that resides in the circuit board itself.”

“So these parts that look like they are burnt are where it has been damaged?”

“That's right. They are called Sorcery Circuits. They are circuits meant to efficiently transmit the magical energy of the user. It looks like they were damaged because they weren't able to handle the pure electricity released by the Regulus of 『Lightning』 .”

“Pure electricity?”

“Come on, these are the basics of Sorcery. Didn't Major Krone already teach you about this?”

Yasuo looked towards Diana after Khalija said that, and suddenly remembered.

“Ah, that's right. The phenomena caused by Magic and Sorcery are partially comprised of magical energy itself.”

“That's right. The use of Techno Weapons, Sorcery, and Magic are greatly dependent on using as little magical energy as possible to bring out the greatest possible effect.”

Diana smiled, as if praising a student who got the right answer.

“My father’s Regulus is a specially made weapon in which every single component was selected carefully by my mother to have the greatest possible affinity with my father. My father never really had a large capacity for magical energy, but the efficiency with which his weapon generated the phenomena was far greater than that of regular Techno Weapons. The ratio of magical energy to generated phenomena was probably somewhere around 1:8.”

“A frightening Techno Weapon, indeed. The fact that he hadn’t forgotten how to use that weapon even after becoming a Shii is equally frightening.”

“Is it really that amazing?”

“For Magic that doesn’t use Techno Weapons, the ratio of magical energy to the generated phenomenon is pretty much always 1:1. A Techno Weapon that can increase that to 1:3 is already considered to be of exceptional quality. However, speaking of that...”

Khalija suddenly looked at Yasuo.

“You’re something of a mystery. Using the requiem to send off the Shii is dependant on the amount of magical energy you possess. Your level of magical energy is hardly worth talking about, but you managed to send off three of them at the same time back then, right?”

“Oh, you’re talking about that?”

Khalija was probably talking about the fight with the Shii during which they met her.

“Doing something so excessive, doesn’t it put strain on your body?”

“I don’t particularly feel any strain... I’m just singing, after all.”

“That’s pretty incredible in its own way, you know.”

“That’s right...”

Diana nodded as if she just realized it.

“An ordinary Magitech Knight can only send off one at a time, maybe two if they try really hard. Sending off three or more of them at the same time, I think only high-ranking clerics from the Church of the Divine King would be able to do something like that...”

“Oh, really?”

Yasuo didn't really understand what that meant, but since nothing good had happened to him recently, being praised was not a bad feeling.

“Well, having an aptitude for magic is pretty straightforward, after all. Not to boast about my own abilities, but my affinity with different kinds of Techno Weapons is pretty high. However, my overall aptitude for Magic is quite low. The flames and lightning that I can create are like child's play. Even when it comes to healing, doing something like closing a scratch on your neck is my limit. When it comes to sending off the Shii with the requiem, sending one at a time is the best I can do. Thinking that way, I guess it's something you can be proud about.”

“It's better not to praise him too much. Onii-chan easily gets overconfident.”

At this point, even his sister's abuse failed to anger Yasuo.

However, Khalija smiled and said that she would be careful, and ended the conversation. After that, she went back to repairing Castor, and pulled out something completely unexpected.

What Khalija pulled out of a plastic bag was a completely ordinary spool of iron wire. There was the seal of a nearby home-improvement center near the barcode on the label.

“You're going to use that as a replacement?”

“I asked Madoka to buy it this afternoon. It's the closest substitute for Sorcery Circuits that can be found in this world. I should be able to make it work somehow.”

“Is it okay if it’s not a copper wire? Won’t passing electricity through an iron wire just cause it to burn up?”

“Iron is the best metallic conductor of magical energy. Besides, iron that has been processed for the manufacturing industry has the optimal amount of carbon in it, so it’s easy to use as a substitute. To tell you the truth, it would have been better if I could have brought another Castor along with me, but annoyingly enough, we are only allowed to carry a limited number of weapons when traveling here. Since I was already carrying my own weapons, I wasn’t able to carry another Castor with me.”

Saying that, Khalija lightly tapped the staff-shaped Techno Weapon in the holster on her waist.

“However, what you said is correct. The iron used to make Sorcery Circuits in our world is made strong enough to handle most magic, but you can just say it was a bad match against Regulus. If the opponent is a regular Shii, then even this wire should be good enough. You should probably step away for a bit. If this releases any shrapnel by some chance, it might be dangerous.”

After making sure that Yasuo and Nodoka moved away, she stretched out the iron wire and placed it on Castor’s circuit board. She then released the light of magical energy from the tip of her bare finger, and used it like a soldering iron to attach the wire in place on top of the circuit board. Although it looked like she cut the wire using heat, there was no smell of burning metal at all, and the iron on the circuit board glowed and spread across the circuit board as if it had a will of its own.

Once the iron stopped spreading and settled down, to their inexperienced eyes it looked like it had been built that way to begin with, and didn’t look like a temporary repair at all.

“Wow, so beautiful.”

“Are you talking about me?”

Her ability to tease Yasuo even when she was focusing on work was almost praiseworthy. However, maybe because she was focusing, the joke was not very good and it was easily avoided.

“I’m talking about the circuit board.”

“How boring.”

Khalija spoke without looking up from the circuit board, but her tone suddenly turned serious.

“ 『Beauty is power.』 ”

“Eh?”

“It’s something my father, who taught me how to handle Techno Weapons, used to say. Not just Techno Weapons, there are various kinds of beauty possessed by all objects. Beauty in the external appearance, beauty on the inside, beauty in the design, beauty in utilization, beauty in the manufacturing process, and even beauty in the maintenance process. I think he meant that striving to make something as beautiful as the circumstances allowed during the manufacturing process would make a better product for a larger number of people. In that respect, Castor and Pollux are truly well made. I can see why they are the most commonly used Techno Weapons.”

“Do Magitech Knights build and maintain their own Techno Weapons?”

Even the Regulus that had come up in the conversation earlier had been handmade by Diana’s mother.

It made sense to periodically maintain your own weapons, but Yasuo was surprised that they could even create the weapons by themselves.

“It is usually at the level of lubricating the moving parts, and making a safety inspection before using them. The Colonel is a special case.”

Diana shook her head and made a comment.

“I already told you earlier about how she was promoted to a Technical Lieutenant, but at the time she enlisted in the army, her skill and knowledge regarding Techno Weapons was already equivalent to that of a professional Techno Weapons craftsman. It was enough to make the Head of the Techno Weapons Research Division groan in despair. She’s a professional who understands the characteristics of many different types of Techno Weapons and develops an optimal fighting style that matches those characteristics perfectly.”

“Hot!!”

While Diana was carrying out her explanation, Khalija suddenly let out a loud shout and the smell of burning metal spread through the living room.

“Major Krone... Please stop saying things like that. It makes me lose my focus.”

“Eh? Ah, I’m sorry.”

Khalija’s cheeks were slightly red as she spoke brusquely to Diana, but Diana continued to speak after apologizing.

“The Colonel’s Techno Weapon, Marfik the 『Snakebone』, is particularly impressive as its form can be changed freely. It can take any shape depending on the user’s magical energy, but that apparently makes it extremely difficult to use. It’s said that there are only a handful of people in the whole world who can use it, and I’ve heard that the Colonel’s maintenance skills make her an expert who is the most proficient at using it...”

“Hot!!”

Once again, they smelled burning metal and heard Khalija’s shout.

“.....Major Krone!”

“Y-Yes!”

“I can’t focus with you talking here, so please leave the room for a bit. Yasuo and Nodoka as well!”

“Eh? Ah, Y-Yes!”

“Okay, got it.”

Forced by the pressure Khalija emitted while red in the face, the three of them ended up leaving the living room.

“I wonder what happened to her all of a sudden.”

“I-I don’t know... But we should probably leave her alone until she’s done with her work.”

Yasuo tilted his head in confusion, and Diana also looked flustered.

“Hmm. This is just an assumption, but...”

“What is it, Nodoka?”

“I’m not sure, but maybe Khalija-san doesn’t deal well with praise?”

“Eeh?”

“Remember when she first came to our house, she looked pretty embarrassed when Diana-san was praising her. Skilled people like her who are capable of doing anything often receive little praise because people think that’s only natural, so singing her praises like Diana-san does in front of other people probably makes her embarrassed.”

“.....I wonder if her character is actually that admirable.”

Yasuo thought that, if anything, she would be type of person who asks for more praise when people praise her.

“No, I’m pretty sure it’s like I said. She doesn’t like feeling embarrassed when she’s praised, so she puts on a strong front like that.”

“Don’t you think you’re reading too much into it?”

“Then we just have to test that idea again sometime.”

Nodoka looked very confident.

“I understand what you’re saying, though. Although being praised is not a bad feeling, it is also strangely embarrassing in a way.”

It looks like Diana also found Nodoka’s proposal valid, so she was nodding while looking like she understood.

“Yasuo? Are you home? The bathroom is free right now, so go take your bath.”

At that moment, Yasuo heard his mother’s voice coming from the direction of the bathroom.

“Ah, okay. Well then Diana, I’ll see you around.”

“Yes. Umm, I’m sorry... for all the things...”

“Hmm?”

“Not just me, but the Colonel... caused all those strange misunderstandings... Had I known that she would do that, I would have stopped her in advance.”

“Y-Yeah, it’s okay.”

Yasuo felt shaken upon seeing Diana’s blushing, downturned face.

Right now, Yasuo wasn’t facing much trouble by outsiders misunderstanding his relationship with Diana. However, he hadn’t given any thought as to how Diana felt about the whole thing.

He wasn’t arrogant enough to believe that Diana had interest in him as a member of the opposite sex, but as a man, he couldn’t reject that possibility entirely.

Moreover, as it would also affect Diana’s dignity, he could not afford to answer her casually, as that would be the very definition of digging his own

grave. In such situations, staying silent is the worst thing one can do, but Yasuo's thought process had completely locked up and he wasn't able to say a single word.

“Well then, I should be going... I'll see you again... tomorrow...”

Diana headed towards the main door with a sad smile, and Yasuo could only see her off with some vague words.

Diana left the house, and the only sound that could be heard was the sound of his mother's hair dryer coming from the direction of the bathroom.

“Useless.”

His sister's wholehearted attack scored a perfect hit on his mind from the flank, and Yasuo could only hang his head while being depressed.

“You can say that, but what was I supposed to do...”

“Diana-san is cute, you should just go out with her already.”

“You say that like it's so simple!! Deciding whether to go out with someone or not isn't such a simple matter!”

Taking Diana's history that he had heard from Khalija into account, he could not rashly hit on her, and besides, Yasuo could not use such a skill at his current level of experience. That's why he had strongly rejected what Nodoka said, but she just laughed at him.

“Huh? What are you talking about? If you really didn't see her that way, then you could have just said that you didn't mind it, or said something like ‘Isn't it annoying how people misunderstand this?’ and left it at that. The fact that you couldn't say it means that, at the very least, you are conscious of Diana-san in a special way.”

“Eeh... No, but—”

“And then there’s Tatewaki-san, and maybe even Khalija-san? Feeling self-conscious about all the girls who you get even a little close to, just how bad were your relations with girls until now?”

“I-It’s not that I’ve never spoken to girls before. I have spoken to them during club practice and in class, it’s just that I’ve never spent any time with them in a more casual setting...”

Yasuo felt truly pathetic for trying to explain this kind of thing to his younger sister who would not stop kicking him when he was down.

“You know... Diana-san has faced a lot of bad experiences with people for a while now.”

“Nodoka?”

What did she mean by bad experiences?

Had Nodoka perhaps heard about Diana’s past from the person herself?

“In all that time, the only emotional support she had was 『The Hero from thirty years ago, Hideo』 . She was talking about that sort of thing on our way back from school today.”

So it was as he had thought. He wasn’t sure what steered their conversation in that direction, but it wasn’t hard to imagine that the root cause was almost certainly Shouko’s misunderstanding from when they met at the Ozone Shopping Center.

“Try and be aware of that, okay? Even though you’re the kind of person who takes his life for granted and fails his tests, you are still an important existence to her right now.”

“Haa!? What!?”

Seeing her brother act so openly shocked, Nodoka frowned and decided not to give him any more hints.

“Hey, go take your bath already. The gas for heating doesn’t come cheap.”

“Eh, yeah. Nodoka, what do you mean...”

“I don’t know. Just go away, already!”

“Hey, what are you two fighting about? Did Diana-chan leave already? ”

Their mother appeared at that point, and Yasuo wasn’t able to question Nodoka any further because he didn’t want to talk about going out with girls in front of his mother.

“Hmm, I was just talking about how utterly hopeless Onii-chan is.”

“Hey.”

“Yes, but he’s been this way for ages.”

“Hey!!”

His protests against his sister and mother’s abuse were completely ignored.

“By the way, Khalija-san is working on fixing Diana-san’s Techno Weapon in the living room.”

“Ah, that’s right, she mentioned that to me earlier. Maybe I should make some tea? ...Yasuo, your father will be home soon, so go take your bath quickly.”

“Fine...!”

Nodoka listened to her brother take out his resentment on the bathroom door by slamming it shut, and let her shoulders droop.

It was back when Diana was still new to Japan, and her brother was still fiercely against her and everything pertaining to Ante Lande.

She had heard Diana talk about 『Hideo the Hero, who looked exactly like the current Yasuo』 .

Nodoka didn’t know how those feelings of Diana’s were affecting her current relationship with her brother, but no matter how you looked at it, Diana was too soft on Yasuo in many ways.

It wasn't that she was clinging to him, but she definitely saw his every action in a favorable light.

And then, considering Diana's past as a 『Daughter of Nobility』 that she had heard about on their way back from school, and the tales about the various marriage proposals she had received, her brother, who was like a life size replica of 『Hideo the Hero』, must have been a special existence to Diana.

And then, that brother of hers had gone on to say that he wanted to protect Diana and the world that she wanted to protect too.

The problem was that Diana's feelings caused her to accept everything about Yasuo even though they were not romantically involved.

As a member of his family, Nodoka knew that her brother was not such a special existence by any means, and looking at him from the perspective of a modern Japanese person, he had more bad points than good.

“I guess this is what it means to love a good for nothing man?”

“Did you say something, Nodoka?”

“Uh, no, it's nothing.”

“Ah, Madoka. I'm sorry, I made a slight mistake while working and there's a smell in the room...”

“Oh, don't worry about it, it's not that bad. Nodoka, can you turn on the exhaust fan?”

“Sure.”

While turning on the exhaust fan in the kitchen, Nodoka worried if her brother was going to be alright, in more ways than one.

“Seriously, what the hell! Gaaah!”

Yasuo entered the bathroom and turned the faucet, but shouted after receiving a cold water shower at full blast because he didn't notice that the valve was turned towards the shower side.

“Aaaaaaargh!”

Yasuo sat down on the seat and poured some hot water from the bathtub over himself. While waiting for the water from the faucet to warm up, Yasuo started thinking about the things his sister had said, and accompanying those thoughts, several scenes started to play out in his head.

Shouko, Diana, and Khalija.

He had gotten close to a number of women within a short period of time, it was completely unprecedented in his life so far. When he thought back to the times he had spent with them, he remembered the feeling of Shouko's hand as she pulled him to his feet when he was sitting on the ground, the softness of Diana's body when he had carried her during the fight with Alexei's Shii, and the feeling of Khalija's breath on his ear in the taxi.

“Ugaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

He kept thinking of unnecessary things because of what Nodoka said.

Yasuo stuck his head into the wash basin filled with water and shouted, and he heard his mother's fed-up voice coming from the other side of the door.

“Why are you shouting like that in the bathroom? The window is open, you know.”

“Blub blub blub blub!”

*Shut up!!* Yasuo, the eighteen-year-old high school male student shouted that with his face still under water, but he still had enough presence of mind to realize that people in the neighboring houses might hear his voice, so he stood up and went to close the window while he was still dripping wet.

Thankfully, there were no lights switched on in the neighboring houses, so it didn't look like anyone had heard him shout.

Actually, it was pitch dark outside. Even considering that it was night, there was no light outside the window at all.

No, it wasn't a matter of there being no light, there was something black in the place where the window pane should have been...

“Eh.”

Yasuo's mind froze when he saw the two points of red light that suddenly appeared outside the window frame.

His hand was still on the window, without understanding what exactly it was that he was seeing.

“Ah.”

『Grrr...』

When he heard it growling, his mind that had locked up finally began to work again.

“Aaaaaaargh!”

“What!?”

“Yasuo, I've had it up to here with you!”

“Onii-chan is making a racket again... Hey!! What the hell are you doing!?”

Right after they heard his scream, Yasuo came running into the living room, still dripping wet and covering his front with just a towel. Seeing that, the three ladies in the room, Khalija, Madoka, and Nodoka, were obviously shocked.

However, Yasuo didn't have time to waste on explanations.

“Sh-Sh-Sh...”

“What are you shushing us for? We should be shushing you! What are doing, running out of the bathroom naked!?”

“There’s a Shii in the bathroom!!”

In that instant, Madoka and Khalija reacted instantly.

Khalija jumped over the table and ran out of the room, with Madoka following closely behind.

However, the few moments Yasuo had wasted were apparently the deciding factor.

“W-What!?”

He heard the sound of something heavy breaking, and by the time he followed the two of them into the hallway, things had already turned into a horrible state.

“This time it’s the bathroom...”

Madoka couldn’t be blamed for blanking out.

The door that separated the dressing room from the bathroom was broken, revealing the broken wall of the bathroom that was letting in cold air from outside, while water gushed out of the broken faucet with a pathetic sound.

And then, there was the Shii that stood in the middle of such a background.

“Peeking at Yasuo while he’s in the bath, such poor taste!”

A flame appeared above Madoka’s hand.

“I completely agree.”

Khalija also made a stance with the strange Techno Weapon, Marfik, that she unlimbered from her waist.

“It’s quite small. It’s probably the one I allowed to escape last night. We should put it down right away.”

“You’re right. But out of consideration for the neighbors, I don’t want to cause any more disturbance.”

“That depends on the opponent, but you’re right.”

At the very least, it had enough power to tear down a wood-frame wall with its bare hands, so they couldn’t their guard down.

“.....o...”

“Hmm?”

“...o.....”

“Is it trying to say something...?”

“Perhaps it’s another one moaning about Hideo the Hero? Seriously, why are they so attracted to an old man like him?”

The small Shii that destroyed the bathroom ignored Madoka and Khalija, and instead appeared to be searching for something.

At that moment, Diana, who was supposed to have gone home already, came rushing in through the front door again, probably because she heard the noise.

“What was that incredibly loud sound just now!?”

“Diana!? Sorry, but please look after Nodoka...!”

Upon seeing her, Yasuo stuck his head out of the living room and said that. In retrospect, it was a mistake.

“Yasuo!? Why aren’t you dressed!?”

Diana, who turned red and looked like she was about to blow steam like a kettle, was looking at Yasuo whose only equipment was a single towel.

“N-Now’s not the time to be talking about that...”

『Grrrr.....?』

“Ah! It’s a Shii!”

“You’re late! Don’t lose your cool over something as trivial as a naked man! If there was more than one enemy, you would have been killed!”

Diana finally came back to her senses after hearing the Shii growling and Khalija’s scolding. She pulled Pollux out of the pocket of her sweatshirt and took a stance while stealing glances at Yasuo.

Khalija’s reprimand actually sounded more like a joke, but Diana was aware that she could lose her life if she underestimated a Shii.

However, something strange happened in the next instant.

『Grrrrrrr...!』

The Shii spun around and ran away through the hole in the wall.

“Wha—!”

“Eh?”

So it chose to run away again?

Khalija immediately dashed off in pursuit, and Madoka decided to stay and protect the house. Diana was hesitating because of the anti-climactic outcome, and as for Nodoka,

“Put something on, for heaven’s sake!”

She pulled out a bath towel from the pile of folded laundry in the living room, and threw it at her brother.

※

“Just what was it trying to do...”

Khalija clucked her tongue as if annoyed and pursued the Shii that was running away.

There were a few cases of Shii running away when they realized that the odds were against them, but this was the first time she saw one that ran away before the fighting even started.

Moreover, there was only a single Shii, and it had appeared in this other world in a country called Japan. It was strange in many ways.

There was currently no way to pursue a Shii that disappeared into the ground because of a mistake or a delay in sending it off, but even in that respect, this Shii was strange.

It was running a little ahead of Khalija, leaping from one rooftop to the next.

“Where is it going.....”

In any case, she had to find out as much information as possible about the actions of the Shii.

Khalija decided to keep following the Shii for as long as possible and observe its actions. She took care to not be noticed by the Shii as she continued pursuit.

“Nnn!”

After some time, the Shii visibly slowed down and stopped moving on top of one of the houses.

Looking closely, Khalija saw that it was a building that was used both as a house and a restaurant.

Light was spilling out of the front of the building from behind the short curtain, and she could hear the lively sound of drunk people talking.

Did it change its target to a place that had a lot of people?

It had jumped over a large number of buildings on its way here, so that sounded fairly strange, but she couldn't think of any other explanation.

If the Shii was going to do something dangerous, she had to eliminate it right away.

Just when Khalija decided to make a move, the Shii started doing something even more strange.

Instead of heading towards the restaurant, it jumped in through a window on the second floor where the lights were out.

“Oh no! It’s going to attack the residents!”

Khalija hurried towards the same window, but once there she saw something unbelievable.

The Shii from earlier was standing quietly in the middle of the Japanese-style room with six tatami mats spread on the floor.

There was no one else in the room, and the Shii did not pay attention to the faint sounds of the drunks that could be heard from below. It even failed to pay attention to Khalija, who was sitting in the window frame, and just closed its glowing red eyes as if it was going to sleep.

In the next instant,

“Wha—”

Khalija was shocked speechless. The black flames that covered the Shii from head to toe slowly receded, and the body of a human could be seen coming out from within.

The flames vanished in a matter of moments as if they were being sucked into the person’s eyes, and the person, now fully visible, crumpled to the tatami floor.

“.....!”

For an instant, Khalija thought that the person had died, but then she heard them breathing loudly enough to hear even from where she was sitting, and they even tossed over in their sleep.

“Fuaah... Aaah...”

Perhaps they were talking in their sleep? Khalija couldn’t sense any trace of maliciousness or ferocity from the voice that leaked out along with the breathing.

However, there was no mistaking the fact that a human came out of a Shii's body right in front of her eyes.

What surprised Khalija the most was the identity of the person.

“If I remember correctly... Her name is Shouko Tatewaki...”

It was certainly that girl who was supposed to be Yasuo's friend from prep school.

The girl was someone she had been looking into herself, after she found out that she was an acquaintance of Yasuo's.

“A Shii possessing a living human.....?”

Khalija hadn't felt any strange magical energy or suspicious behavior from her when she saw her outside the prep school.

From Diana's report and the way Nodoka spoke about her, it was clear that she was a person from Japan with no connection to Ante Lande whatsoever.

Her clothes were the same that Khalija had seen her wearing earlier that evening. A plain jacket and trousers.

What had happened to this girl who looked like she had nothing to do with the Shii?

“Is this really happening...? Can Shii really possess humans.....?”

Khalija unconsciously touched the circlet on her forehead.

The jewel that she touched with her fingertips was as cold as ice.

“.....Goddamnit!”

Khalija ground her teeth out of frustration, but she couldn't take her eyes off Shouko for a while.



Yasuo, who had finally managed to put on some clothes after being yelled at by Nodoka, and Diana, who was trying her best not to look at Yasuo even though he was finally dressed, welcomed Khalija back to the house.

Khalija heard Hideo's groans coming from near the bathroom inside the house, but he was probably just holding his head after seeing the state of the bathroom right after coming home.

“Colonel. I'm glad that you're alright.”

“What happened to the Shii from earlier?”

Khalija shook her head while standing in front of Diana and Yasuo who had rushed towards her.

“Unfortunately, it managed to escape again.”

Seeing the disappointed looks on their faces, Khalija once again shook her head at how badly she had handled the situation.

### Chapter 3 – The Grass looks Greener

A group of people assembled around Yasuo's seat as soon as lunch break started.

He could tell who had come even without having to raise his head and look.

“Alright, time for lunch.”

“Sorry, I'll be borrowing this chair.”

“Yasu, you brought lunch from home today, right?”

It was Igarashi, Hino, and Aoto.

Yasuo had already predicted that this would happen when Aoto saw him getting into the taxi with Khalija yesterday. If anything, he wanted to praise them for being able to wait until lunch break.

“If you want to ask about what happened yesterday when I was heading back from school, I'm sorry but it's not that interesting a story.”

Yasuo started off by saying that, but the curiosity-filled expressions of the three partners-in-crime didn't change at all.

“That's okay. Just the fact that you got into a taxi with a beauty who was clinging to your arm is pretty funny, Kenzaki. It's a good joke.”

“No, you just find pretty much everything funny.”

Although it hurt to hear that, he had to admit that it was a fair observation.

Actually, if a conversation came up about one of these three getting a girlfriend, he would want to find out more details about it as well.

“So? Who was the girl from yesterday, and what happened after that?”

However, it was rare for Aoto look so obviously curious and ask for information so straightforwardly.

When Yasuo mentioned that to him,

“I won’t let you say that you’ve forgotten about how the two of us discussed how hard it is to get a girlfriend. It hasn’t been all that long since we talked about that.”

Now that he mentioned it, Yasuo remembered talking to Aoto about something like that back when Diana had newly come to Japan.

“Just to be clear, she’s not my girlfriend or anything.”

“Then what is she to you? Having her cling to your arm like you were trying to show off.”

“That wasn’t my doing. She was just teasing me.”

“Hey, hang on, Aoto. First, tell us what kind of girl she was.”

It looked like Igarashi was also just as curious as Aoto.

“You’re getting too excited.”

On the other hand, it looked like Hino was trying to maintain a polite distance.

“Oh, that’s right. Rasshi, Hinocchi, listen to this. She was probably older than us. Also, a foreigner. A real beauty.”

“A beautiful, older foreigner!?”

“I think whether she’s beautiful or not is a matter of subjectivity.”

“If she can’t be considered to be beautiful, then no one can. I’ve never seen hair that color.”

“You were in an enclosed space with a beauty like that!?”

“Enclosed space... It was just a taxi, you know.”

“I bet she smelled great!”

“The only smell in there was from the taxi’s seats.”

“Igarashi, that’s disgusting.”

Hino said to Igarashi who was half-screaming.

“If she’s not your girlfriend, then who is she? Someone from a different school?”

“No. Out of your speculations, Aoto, only the part about her being older was correct. She’s a friend of my Dad’s.”

This was a lie that Yasuo had prepared in advance, and was exactly the same thing he had told Shouko about Diana.

Unlike Diana, Khalija had no connection with his father until she came to Japan. However, Yasuo had already decided beforehand that he would use the same explanation for anyone who came from Ante Lande. It was partly the truth, anyways, and Yasuo was not skilled enough to make up different lies for each individual.

“A friend of your Dad’s? I know it’s hard to estimate the age of a foreigner, but she didn’t look that old.”

“I didn’t mean that’s she from the same generation as him. To put it more clearly, she’s currently working in a place where my father used to work in the past. I’m not sure, but it looks like she feels really indebted to him.”

“A foreign office lady... sounds nice.”

“Igarashi, that’s disgusting.”

“So why did she come all the way to school to meet you? Thinking about it, her appearance was really strange for an office lady. She was wearing a tracksuit that looked a lot like the one issued by our school, and was wearing some flashy accessory on her forehead.”

As he thought, that circlet was too conspicuous. However, Yasuo had a response ready for that as well.

“Apparently, she met me once when I was very young. So she kinda treats me like relative or a cousin. Besides, she doesn’t think that linking arms is

anything special. As for the thing on her forehead, I asked her what it was, but it seems to be something personal to her. That thing really is quite weird, right?”

This was the first outright lie that he told.

The number of lies was slowly increasing, but this was still within the tolerable limit. Besides, he had also mixed some of his truthful opinions in there, so he was able to say it without sounding awkward.

Khalija was respectful towards his father and mother, but was a lot more candid with Yasuo and Nodoka. It was also somewhat weird that she never took that circlet off.

As for the part about linking arms... that was actually the most important part, but as long as he kept his will strong it shouldn't be a problem.

“Uwaah, Kenzaki, you're kind of...”

“What is it?”

“I'm so envious of that sort of situation.”

“I agree with Hino, what's wrong with you? It's kinda disgusting.”

“That's right. Besides, Igarashi, you already have a girlfriend.”

“Eh?”

“Why haven't I heard of this before!?”

Yasuo and Aoto were surprised by the words that Hino spoke casually.

“Oh? Didn't I already tell you?”

Seeing that, Igarashi also said that while looking like it was no big deal, which angered Yasuo and Aoto.

“I-In spite of already having a girlfriend, you said all those disgusting things just because I was with a woman?”

“Rasshi has a girlfriend... No, that can't be, something is definitely wrong here...”

“Hey, Aoto. Is it really that weird that I have a girlfriend?”

“““It's definitely weird.”””

“You guys!”

Yasuo, Hino, and Aoto's replies coincided perfectly.

“Actually, how long have you known about that, Hino?”

“Since middle school. You know that Igarashi and I went to the same middle school, right?”

“““Since middle school!?”””

Yasuo and Aoto were shocked once again.

“Their houses are pretty close, so he and his girlfriend have known each other since kindergarten. I guess you could call them childhood friends?”

“““Haaaaa!?”””

“What, is it really that surprising?”

“““Not at all!”””

In spite of the situation, Yasuo couldn't help that his friendship with Aoto was getting stronger.

“Eh? Don't tell me, she's in the same high school as well? Do we know her?”

“No, she goes to a different high school.”

“By the way, she goes to a school with a better track record.”

“Hey, don't tell them stuff like that.”

“Y-Y-You bastard, you were betraying us right from the start...”

“Aoto, are you really the kind of guy who's so desperate to meet a woman?”

“I just can’t forgive your betrayal, that’s all!”

They didn’t know how serious the relationship was, but just the fact that Igarashi had a girlfriend was enough to give Aoto and Yasuo a big shock.

“Besides, whether I have a girlfriend or not isn’t what’s important right now. The important question is if Kenzaki is about to enter the springtime of his youth!”

“Hang on, there’s no chance of me ever getting into that kind of relationship with that person. No matter how many times you ask, I can only tell you that she’s an acquaintance of my Dad’s. Besides, I want to hear about your situation, Igarashi.”

“Eeeeh, that’s so boring. I want to hear about other couples, why can’t you just tell me about things like that?”

“This is the laid-back attitude of someone who has already won! Did you hear that, Kenzaki-san!?”

“Aoto, now you’re the one being kind of disgusting.”

“Shut up! Wait, don’t tell me you have a girl that you get along with as well, Hinocchi!?”

“Like I said, I don’t particularly get along well with that person or anything —”

“Be quiet, Yasu. Well, Hinocchi? Am I the only odd man out here?”

Hino thought for a while after hearing Aoto’s desperate question.

“There probably isn’t anyone. I think.”

“Why did you just think about that for a while!? What do you mean, you think!?”

“No, it’s just that a number of girls from the lower classes that I’m friendly with gave me chocolates this year, so I was wondering if I should count them.”

“He’s a winner too!!”

Aoto was knocked out completely.

Hino was a member of the track and field club, and was one of the regulars on the team for short distance running.

“Aoto, you have a lot of younger girls in your club as well, right?”

“Getting into relationships with people in the club will affect our acting! Or at least, that’s what I thought!”

It appeared the enthusiastic Drama Club members had complicated situations.

“Rasshi, let me see.”

“Eh? See what?”

“A photo! Of your girlfriend! You must have at least one, right?”

“Eeh? I don’t wanna, why do I have to show you something like that?”

“Come on, Igarashi, you should have seen this coming.”

“Hino, you’ve already seen her, so isn’t that good enough?”

“Even if it’s okay for me, I don’t think Yasuo and Aoto will have any closure until they see it.”

Yasuo and Aoto nodded strongly.

“Wait a minute. She gets really angry if I casually show her pictures to other people. Let me find one that looks okay...”

Even though he looked unhappy, Igarashi still pulled his slimphone out and started going through his photo albums.

“If I knew this was going to happen, I wouldn’t have thought about teasing Yasu...!”

“This is why they say that when you curse someone, you should dig two graves.”

Hearing Aoto’s strangled complaint, Yasuo felt like he was able to get back at him just a little.

“Ah, here we go. It’s from a little while ago, though.”

“.....”

Staring at the phone screen, Aoto looked like he was steadily getting more depressed.

“W-What’s wrong?”

Saying that, Yasuo also peeked at the screen, and immediately found out the reason why Aoto reacted that way.

“A girl this cute is your childhood friend and girlfriend? You’ve probably used up your luck for all eternity.”

“I agree wholeheartedly with Kenzaki.”

Hino also nodded as if he understood.

Igarashi’s girlfriend was just that beautiful, a perfect example of a Japanese beauty. Igarashi was standing beside her in the picture with his usual careless grin. It was the very definition of a face that you would want to punch.

“Don’t judge people based on context like that. To me, the term ‘childhood friend’ doesn’t hold any special meaning at all.”

“Aoto’s getting mad. Aoto’s getting mad.”

Aoto’s eyes were overflowing with so much resentment and killing intent that Yasuo was worried for a moment if he would turn into a Shii.

“What year of middle school did you start going out with her?”

“We officially started dating towards the end of our second year. So, it’s been like four years in total, I guess? Well, I already knew her for more than ten years before that, though.”

“Gaah!!”

Aoto’s struggled to stay rational while making an expression like that of a Buddhist priest who was exorcising a demon from someone’s body.

“But we ended up in different high schools because of an oversight, and she’s constantly nagging me asking if I’m cheating on her with another girl. She gets really scary if she’s even a little upset.”

“Gaaaaaah!!”

“So if that foreigner was really Kenzaki’s girlfriend, I wanted some tips on what other couples do when they get into a fight.”

“Like I said, we are not a couple or anything. Besides, if she’s getting upset about whether you’re cheating on her, I guess it just proves that she loves you.”

“Yeah... But I have to agree with Igarashi here. She’s really very scary. It’s easy to tell when Seina-chan is in a bad mood. She usually calls him ‘Iga-chan,’ but when she’s mad she calls him ‘Igarashi-kun’ in this incredibly cold voice.”

“...Oh?”

“Even her cuteness is at a level of being a sin, and she also has a beautiful name like 『Seina』 ? I can’t tell you how angry I feel right now, but hearing that she calls you ‘Iga-chan’ makes me feel a little better.”

Aoto got even more depressed after hearing what Hino said, but Yasuo was taken off guard.

“So if girls change from calling you by a nickname to your last name, it means they are angry?”

Yasuo remembered that Nodoka had told him the exact same thing the other day as well.

“I guess it’s one of the comparatively easier signs to spot. There are other things you’ll notice as well, if you’re watching from the sidelines. Like how she definitely won’t make eye contact, and not listen to what Igarashi is saying even if she appears to be paying attention.”

“I need to be especially careful when talking about school. Talking about girls Seina doesn’t know is definitely taboo. Seina is attending a municipal school near her house, so she has this weird image in her head that private schools are more classy than municipal school.”

“Roger that, she really loves you, huh!!?”

“Aioi, calm down. Your personality is changing. Besides, at her level it can also be taken as getting easily jealous or being restrictive, so it’s not something to be so jealous about.”

Hino saw that Aoto was on the verge of flipping the table holding his unfinished lunch, so he put his hand on Aoto’s shoulder to calm him down. However, Yasuo was in no state to observe that.

“.....Calling me by a nickname... Talking about other girls... her image of a private school...”

These were all things that had happened to him as well, so he felt like his blood pressure was dropping.

“Kenzaki? What’s wrong?”

Igarashi put his slimphone away and noticed that Yasuo had gone pale, but Yasuo was in no condition to listen to him.

Was he just overthinking it?

“No, I mean, surely not.”

『 Onii-chan, make sure you don’t get any strange ideas as well, okay? 』

His sister's warning flashed through his mind.

But still.

The circumstances were far too similar.

But still.

Isn't it being rash to assume that?

But still.

If he's wrong, the damage would be incalculable.

But still.

There was no way for him to know for sure.

Even so, he couldn't stop his imagination. About how Shouko felt.

『Also, in the one in a million chance that Tatewaki-san likes you, it might be a good idea clear up the misunderstanding.』

“Tch!”

His cheeks were getting red in spite of himself. Thinking like that was the height of stupidity.

He had thought about something outrageous because of what Igarashi had said. If he carelessly asked Shouko something like this, Nodoka wouldn't let him forget about it for the rest of his life.

Firstly, he had nothing that would make him attractive to a girl.

He couldn't even properly complete his duty as a student, couldn't keep his promise, and his physical ability, intelligence, and looks were all only average.

The premise itself is flawed.

So there's no way it was possible.

But since the idea was already in his head...

“How should I interact with her from now on... things are already complicated enough right now.”

He had no confidence that he would manage to stay calm the next time he saw Shouko.

“Ah, geez, both Aioi and Kenzaki are in a strange mood because you had to go and brag, Igarashi.”

“Eh? It’s my fault!? When did I brag about anything? By the way, wasn’t teasing Kenzaki the original plan?”

Igarashi, who was incapable of reading the mood, looked confused as looked in turn at Yasuo and Aoto who were deep in thought for different reasons.

At that moment, the slimphone in Yasuo’s pocket vibrated.

Taking it out, he saw that he had a notification from an unknown number in the standard messaging application provided by his carrier, a service that was hardly ever used these days.

“What is this?”

Yasuo had antivirus software installed on his slimphone, so he opened the message without thinking too deeply about it. What he saw written there was something completely unexpected.

“Greetings it feels strange to send you such a message after all this time. This is Dianaz. Madoka bought a slimphone for me so please save the number if you would like. i will be coming to pick you up after school today, so please do not worry.”

Seeing the missing 『e』 in her name and the use of the lowercase 『i』 to refer to herself, Yasuo smiled wryly as he imagined Diana’s face scrunched up in concentration as she struggled to input the unfamiliar text into a digital device.

The reason why she used so few kanji characters in her text was probably either because she was not familiar with the device yet, or she hadn't learned to read that many kanji in spite of being able to speak the language.

In any case, it was a good idea to be able to connect with Diana via slimphone for safety purposes.

Not to mention, increasing the number of girls in his phone address book who are not family members was more than enough reason to be happy.

"...? She's going to come to pick me up?"

However, Yasuo immediately thought of something that made him go pale.

He immediately replied,

"No, it's fine. You can keep guarding me from far away as usual."

However, no matter how long he waited, he didn't receive a reply. And then,

"Ah, Yasuo! Did you have a good day? I've been waiting for you."

In plain view of Aoto, Igarashi, and Hino, Diana was standing at the main gate next to a taxi.

Yasuo felt dizzy and was too scared to turn around to look at his friends.

"I'm sorry. I saw your message, but since I only just started using the phone, I didn't know how to reply."

Aoto was probably turning into a true demon at this point.

"W-Well then, I'll see you guys tomorrow."

"Please excuse us."

"Y-You don't need to talk to these guys!"

"Eh? Ah, my apologies—!"

Yasuo pushed Diana, who kept talking to Aoto and the others, into the taxi, and closed the automatic door by hand.

“Excuse me, please take us to the Western Exit of Tokorozawa Station!”

Yasuo’s voice rose to a near scream as he told the driver his destination and asked him to start moving.

Aoto and the others watched the reality unfolding in front of them as if it was a waking dream, but eventually, Hino asked Aoto,

“Is that the girl?”

“No. It’s a different girl. Completely different. It’s a different girl from yesterday!!”

“Oh? But going home two days in a row by taxi, I’m more curious as to the reason behind that.”

“Damn, she was totally cute! Woah!”

“I now understand exactly why he failed his tests. Yasu, you’re no longer my friend! I hope you fail all your make-up tests!”

“Remember what we spoke about earlier regarding curses and graves, Aioi. You shouldn’t think about it so hard, just go make a girlfriend.”

“I hate the phrase ‘make a girlfriend’ more than anything! Are they sold as a model kit somewhere!? Goddammit!”

“Having a girl like that asking about how his day went, and saying she waited for him...”

“If you say that again, Seina-chan is going to get mad, Igarashi.”

Of course, none of the complaints from his friends reached Yasuo.

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“I think I can hear something that I shouldn’t be hearing...”

“D-Did I do something wrong!?”

“N-No, there’s no point worrying about it now. It’s just that going home by taxi is unusual for high school students, so if you want to come and pick me up, I’d appreciate it if you waited somewhere less conspicuous.”

“I-I see. I’m sorry...”

Diana looked depressed, but Yasuo was so worried about going to school tomorrow that he didn’t have the energy to cheer her up.

“B-But, we didn’t manage to find that Shii yesterday, and judging by what happened, it is clear that the Shii is after you, Yasuo. This is currently the best way to reduce the danger to you, even if only a little...”

He knew what she was trying to say.

The Kenzaki family currently did not have a car.

The front door was fixed faster than expected, but they were having a lot more trouble with the matter of the car.

Yasuo hadn’t heard the details, but apparently, the owner of the car that Madoka had caused an accident in during the incident with William had been identified by the police despite his parents’ best efforts to hide the evidence.

Fortunately, Madoka had barely managed to avoid being charged with negligent driving because of the fact that his parents had filed a report in advance that the car had been stolen, and because all the members of the Kenzaki family were uninjured in spite of the severity of the accident.

However, there were still many complicated procedures to complete that Yasuo did not understand, so it looked like getting a new car would still take some time.

“B-But, you know...”

After remembering that, Yasuo lowered his voice a little.

“What are you going to do if a Shii attacks us while we’re in a taxi? We will definitely end up getting other people involved. Remember what happened when Mom crashed our car?”

“That’s true, but there is a greater chance of getting people involved if we’re attacked while walking. The only Shii we currently need to worry about is the one that managed to run away, and if you’re worried about others, then just you going to school and prep school increases the chances of danger, you know?”

“W-Well yeah... But you know, the Shii so far have only appeared during nighttime. Shouldn’t we be fine during the day?”

As far as Yasuo could remember, the Shii only ever appeared during the night.

They were apparently formed from corpses, and the black flames that surrounded them made it easy for them to blend into the darkness. He thought that they were incapable of moving around while the sun was still up, but,

“That’s just a coincidence. In Ante Lande, there have been Shii that appeared during the day as well. Judging from the records, it’s true that they appear far more frequently at night, however, there are records of people fighting Shii during the day under a clear, cloudless sky.”

“...Seriously?”

Yasuo felt a sense of despair.

It was true that Yasuo felt that he had gotten mixed up in many things he did not understand back during the incident with William and Alexei’s Shii, but even then, William had been a clearly identifiable cause behind the incident.

However, this time, the Shii seemed to appear suddenly and disappear just as quickly, and they had no idea where they were lurking.

If the Shii were completely wild creatures like mob monsters that you could find in games, then there was a possibility that they were even right now causing a mess somewhere else, completely unrelated to the Kenzaki family.

Originally, there would have been no reason for Yasuo to feel responsible for such a thing. However, as the son of a Hero, and as a person who had volunteered to be a Hero, the thought of people outside his reach falling prey to some unidentifiable power was definitely not something he was comfortable with.

“I don’t want to jinx it, but I feel like it would be a lot easier if easily identifiable bosses like that William show up and the matter ends once they are defeated. Not knowing what you’re up against is definitely a lot worse.”

This feeling of being stuck in a maze was somewhat similar to being stuck at a particular point in the middle of studying.

Unlike his recent failed exams where Yasuo had gotten stuck on every single question, in the current situation he didn’t even know what knowledge he was lacking, so he had no way to shore up his weak points or understand what he should be doing. It was that kind of feeling.

In such a situation, the only option was to return to square one and carefully go over all the available information once again.

“But even if I want to go back to square one...”

In the first place he didn’t even know where that Shii had come from. During the battle with Alexei’s Shii, only a total of eight Shii had appeared during the entire course of the incident, including Alexei whom Yasuo sent off with the requiem.

Even though his father and Diana had defeated them easily and they had already been sent off, Yasuo realized once again that the incident where six of them had appeared simultaneously was actually quite dangerous.

“Sent them off... Hmm?”

“Is something the matter, Yasuo?”

“No... I just thought that it was a little strange.”

A slight feeling of discomfort that tugged at his memories.

The car. The Shii. The requiem. Sending off the Shii. Resurrection.

“Ah!!”

“W-What is it?”

Yasuo suddenly yelled out loud, causing the driver to be surprised and ask that question.

“I-I’m sorry, it’s nothing.”

“I-I see.”

“Yasuo?”

Diana was looking at him with a questioning expression, so Yasuo once again faced her and told her the terrifying truth that he had realized.

“Diana. Even if you defeat the Shii, they’ll just reappear somewhere else if you don’t send them off with the requiem, right?”

“Yes... That should be the case.”

“That small-sized Shii... I think it was already in Japan by the time William came here.”

“Eh?”

“The only Shii we didn’t send off back then was the one that caused the car accident. Both my mother and I didn’t know about that back then...”

“Ah.”

It looked like Diana also understood what Yasuo was attempting to say.

“E-Even so, the fact that it must be defeated does not change, and I don’t see how it can help out in our current situation...”

“I’m not done. There’s something else that I remembered. I just realized it, but the car accident was something William didn’t expect either.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you remember how he said something about not having any intention of putting the people around us in danger? At that time, I told him to stop messing around because a Shii that he had sent had already caused a car crash. After hearing that, he looked really surprised.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“I’m sure. Just for that second, I saw the power in that scary red eye of his waver. That’s right, after hearing that, he said that he had to hurry... So I think that William had someone working against him, someone apart from us. And so, if we assume that William knew nothing about that Shii, and it was after me all along when it attacked the car...”

“It probably hasn’t run too far away?”

“Yeah. Also,”

Yasuo had a stern expression on his face.

“Even if that small Shii was William’s enemy, the person who sent it here is probably no friend of ours. So at the end of it...”

It was a deduction that was not particularly welcome.

“The six Shii that attacked us back then were also probably the same. There is someone who is controlling the Shii that have appeared even after Khalijasan arrived here. And that person is probably somewhere close by.”

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“I see. So you think there’s someone who behind the appearance of those six Shii, and the one that escaped?”

“Yes. This is only Yasuo’s conjecture, but if we take what William said into consideration, it might just be possible.”

“If that is true, then that raises other issues as well. If the attacks by the Shii are deliberately being instigated by some agency, then the strategies being used to combat the Shii back in Ante Lande will need to be rebuilt from scratch as well.”

“...Yes, you’re right.”

“However, at the very least, you did not see any Shii between the time after that William was defeated and through the time I arrived here, correct?”

“That’s right.”

“The true nature of the Shii is still unclear. They seem to be ignoring the law of conservation of mass, both when they appear and when they vanish. Saying this might worsen the impression of Ante Lande and us, but there is a possibility that General Alexei and William came to this world along with you when the Gate Tower was activated, and the seven Shii from earlier entered this world in a similar fashion along with me. Mass is an important consideration when using the Gate Tower, but we don’t know if the concept of ‘mass’ applies to the Shii. Although it sounds impossible, if the Shii really have no mass, it is possible that they could have hitched a ride along with us without anyone being the wiser.”

“However, this is all still just conjecture. It doesn’t change the fact that we are pinned down by the enemy and unable to take action”

“At the end of it, our countermeasures against the Shii can only go so far. By the way, why is Yasuo lying around looking like a wet log?”

Diana and Khalija were talking in the living room of the Kenzaki family house as usual, in a manner that made him wonder if there was any point in them moving their base of operations to a different house. Beside them, Yasuo was lying on the floor as if he was completely out of energy.

“Ah... About that...”

Diana’s face became red.

“He tried to fix the misunderstanding with that person called Shouko-san at his prep school, but not only was he unable to meet with her, she’s also ignoring his messages on that communication medium called rope...”

“And so he wore himself thin and ended up in this state, huh?”

“Also, he’s apparently receiving a lot of messages from his friends at school about the identity of the person who came to pick him up from school today.....”

“So after telling me arrogantly that I shouldn’t cause issues for Yasuo, you went and titillated his friends as well, Major?”

“T-Titillated? No, it’s not like that! I just didn’t want anyone to think that I was a suspicious person, so I properly greeted them, that’s all!”

“No, I think that just made it worse.”

It was hardly something Khalija should be saying, but she was right.

“Still, isn’t this nice and peaceful?”

“We don’t share the same concept of peace...”

The wet log seemed to be emitting some resentful curses, but Khalija ignored it.

“Even if they misunderstand something, it’s not the end of the world. Maybe if you tell your friends at school outright that Major Krone is your girlfriend, they might find it anticlimactic and back off.”

“C-C-Colonel!! What are you saying!?! That kind of lie is not good! It’s indecent!”

“If saying that could fix my issues, I would, but it won’t make any difference...”

“You too, Yasuo!? You don’t need to say something like that!!”

“Indecent... No, you’ve always been this way, Major, it’s part of what makes you so frightening.”

Seeing Diana protest so strongly, even Khalija seemed a little taken aback.

“Well, you might find it to be a serious issue, but to me it looks like nothing more than an amusing problem. Worry about it all you like. Once you grow up, you will realize that being able to have worries like this means that you are leading a blessed life.”

After saying that, she got up from the sofa.

“Colonel?”

“...It’s a little early, but I’m going back to the apartment. I spent the whole day today with Nodoka, and I’m tired because she’s a lot more mature than Yasuo and therefore more difficult to tease. I’m going to take a bath.”

Saying that she was tired out from trying to tease Nodoka was a little exaggerated, but it could also be interpreted to mean that Yasuo was a good target for teasing.

“Ah, yes... I think Madoka is probably using the bath right now, so please check with her before you go in.”

As the bath in the Kenzaki house had been destroyed by a Shii, the temporary plan was for everyone to use the unit bath in Diana’s room, and so Yasuo’s mother was over there right now.

His father was watching TV in his own room, and Nodoka was probably studying in her room. Yasuo tended to forget because he was so busy dealing with his own issues, but his sister would also be taking exams soon.

“Understood. See you around.”

After saying that, Khalija left right away without even looking at the wet log.

“When I grow up... I mean, isn't the Colonel just one year older than me.....”

In a rare occurrence, Diana actually looked a little sullen.

“Eh, seriously?”

Seeing the wet log act surprised, Diana seemed to become even more unhappy for some reason.

“Do I really appear that childish? I'm already nineteen-years-old, you know.”

“Eh!? You're older than me!?”

“Eh!?”

Yasuo stood up out of shock, and Diana was surprised seeing Yasuo look so shocked.

“.....You definitely don't look it.”

“Yasuo, you're so mean!”

“Hey, Onii-chan, are you making Diana-san cry again?”

“What do you mean, again? And why do you always show up with such horrible timing!?”

Nodoka had just come down from the second floor, probably to get something to drink. She was now looking at Yasuo with a scary expression.

“I'm sorry, I thought that we were about the same age... Ahaha.”

“That's a lie. Yasuo, you're terrible at lying. Even though I'm older, you've been viewing me as someone younger than you all this time, haven't you!?”

“This kind of childish reaction makes her look like a younger kid, right? I kinda understand.”

“Nodoka, you too!?”

“You should try and act more like a younger kid.”

“Well, maybe if my older brother wasn’t so unreliable, I would act my age.”

Yasuo could not win against his sister who always had a ready comeback for anything.

“So anyways, Khalija-san is only twenty? She seems very mature for someone her age... No, I mean, as a soldier. Ahahaha.”

His teacher at prep school, Kobayashi, was also around the age of twenty.

Of course, since he went to a good college and was working as a teacher, he looked a lot more mature compared to the current Yasuo, but he also had the look of a college student, and the impression he gave was definitely different from that of a newly graduated student working as a salaryman.

However, in Khalija’s case, even if you put aside the fact that she is a high-ranking military officer, there are many things about her that make her seem older than her years.

Diana sometimes acted very childish, and maybe that just served to heighten the difference between the two...

“Were you just thinking that I am childish again?”

“N-No...”

“I don’t care anymore.”

While Yasuo had been thinking about things like that, Diana had been looking in the direction of her apartment.

“The Colonel has followed a slightly special career path compared to the other Magitech Knights in Resteria, so maybe that has something to do with it.”

“A special career path?”

“That’s right. I already told you that the Colonel is very knowledgeable about Techno Weapons, right? She managed to repair my Castor to such an extent, using only materials found in Japan, after all.”

Saying that, Diana pulled Castor out of the pocket of her sweatshirt.

Yasuo had been thinking recently that even though she was carrying around such dangerous and heavy things in the pockets of the sweatshirt that she wore at home, it was strange that there were no unnatural bulges when looking at her at all.

It looked like she hadn’t been able to repair the external appearance, as Castor did not have the gold colored cover that Pollux had, and the grip also appeared to have been secured with something that looked like duct tape.

Even so, when Diana channeled a little power into it, the light of magic appeared near the mouth of the weapon.

“The Colonel’s father was a famous Techno Weapon craftsman. She was the youngest daughter, and apparently she was the most gifted amongst her sisters.”

“Eh? Khalija-san is the youngest daughter?”

“She doesn’t look like it at all...”

“...Well, putting that aside.”

Diana, who had been told that she seemed like the youngest child in spite of being an only child, pretended that she didn’t hear that and continued to speak.

“If you’re wondering why I know about this, it’s because, during the construction of my father’s Regulus that I told you about the other day, my mother took advice from the Colonel’s father. Meister Claudius Welleger. I’ve heard that he was originally from the Grand Duchy of Torjesso, and he immigrated to Resteria during the war against Demon King Kaul. The

Colonel's silver hair is a common feature among people who have their roots in the region around Torjesso.”

“Oh? Meister is a title given to master craftsmen, right? If she's the daughter of a person like that, it's no wonder she's good at handling Techno Weapons.”

“But what do you mean by he ‘was’ a Techo Weapon craftsman?”

“He passed away a little while after my mother finished making Regulus. He was apparently quite old by the time the Colonel was born... I've heard that she enlisted in the army right after his death.”

The name of Meister Welleger was so famous that everyone involved in the Techno Weapons industry had heard of it. Khalija, who was said to have inherited her father's talent, was sought out by the Techno Weapon Research Division, where she displayed a great level of ability.

“Hmm? But she's now a Magitech Knight who fights on the front lines, right? Using that weapon you spoke of.”

“The 『Snakebone』, Marfik. It is a variable Techno Weapon with more than ten forms. Most Techno Weapons can only take two or maybe three forms at the most, but the Colonel is also a first-class soldier who is capable of using more than twice that number under combat conditions. Of course, that makes it an extremely complicated Techno Weapon, and maintenance would be impossible unless you had skills on par with Meister Welleger. She is truly the kind of person who looks like they have become one with their Techno Weapon.”

Diana had forgotten that she had been treated like a child, and boasted about Khalija's achievements like they were her own.

From what Diana said just now, it could be seen that Khalija was loved by Magitech Knights of her own age group.

“Still, it feels strange. If she's that skilled, wouldn't that Research Division be unwilling to let go of her?”

“I’ve heard that there was a lot of argument regarding her reassignment. However, she displayed a level of battle strength and tactical understanding that led to her being promoted to Colonel soon after being reassigned, and she has also shown great results in the fight against the Shii. It was right around that time when my father was killed in battle, and the Knights Division was wavering. It was said that having someone like her on the front lines who was experienced with both Techno Weapons and battle was a great source of support, and even I thought the same when I heard about her, although I had not yet met her in person back then.”

“Oh? So she’s not just an annoying person. I guess that makes sense.”

“Besides, she’s my ideal, in more ways than one. Unlike me, she hasn’t been overshadowed by her family’s achievements, and has continued to show a level of ability that doesn’t lose out to her predecessors.”

“That is...”

Diana, who didn’t stand out much in the Knights Division in spite of having parents who were known as Heroes who saved their country, and Yasuo, who was depressed because of failing his tests in school, in spite of having parents who were a legendary Hero and a Great Magician.

Compared to Khalija, both of them were depressed about how they could not match their parents’ achievements at all.

“It’s quiz time, Diana-san!”

Nodoka, who had been silent until then, suddenly shouted.

“A frog’s offspring is \_\_\_! What are the words that go in the blank space?”

“Eeh? Eh? Umm... A frog’s offspring... what was it again? A frog’s offspring is also a frog, that’s one of the idioms that is commonly used, right?”

“Bzzzt! Unfortunately, that’s the wrong answer. The correct answer is, a frog’s offspring is a tadpole!”

“What’s with you all of a sudden? Also, isn’t that cheating? You should say if it’s a question about the Japanese Language or a question about biology before asking the question.”

“It doesn’t matter either way. I strongly feel that this idiom should go out of use.”

“Eeh? Why the sudden declaration?”

A frog’s offspring is also a frog.

It means that children will resemble their parents, and also implies that the children of mediocre parents will also be mediocre.

“Tadpoles do their best with their lives on the line, and become frogs only after going through a lot of danger and competition. By the time they reach that stage, they are already different from their parents. Any adult who doesn’t realize that has probably not worked a single hard day in their lives. Besides, if 『A frog’s offspring is also a frog』, then were our grandparents Heroes? Great Magicians? No, right?”

“.....Well, yeah.”

“We are still children, and have not achieved anything at all. We are still in the middle of working hard to get there. Khalija-san is like a tadpole that just happened to grow hands and legs a little faster. At the very least, if you don’t think like that, you won’t be able to carry on working.”

This was pretty condescending talk for a fourteen-year-old who was in the third year of middle school, but neither Diana nor Yasuo were able to dispute it.

“If you ask me, I think your environment is far too easy, Onii-chan. The year when I’m old enough to take college admission exams is the first year when they’ve done away with the National Center Test for University Admissions. I won’t have any information in advance about what the test will be like, and I can only rely on my own hard work, but I can’t just say that a frog’s

offspring will also be a frog and give up. If I'm not careful, I might end up getting eaten by a dragonfly nymph or a water beetle while I'm still a tadpole."

"Dragonfly nymph? Water beetle?"

Although she knew about halibut, it looked like Diana didn't know about the commonly found aquatic insects from Japan, so she appeared to be confused.

"Of course, it is important to know where to concentrate your efforts, but I feel that if you get into the habit of working hard, it won't be a waste no matter how old you get. So that's why..."

Saying that, Nodoka flashed a smile and held out her hands towards both of them with her palms facing upwards.

When they stared at her hands wondering what she was trying to say, a flash of light ran across her palms, and although it was only the size of a fire from a matchstick, a small flame floated in the air over her hands.

"!?"

Yasuo was so startled that he couldn't even make a sound.

"Nodoka... Why?"

Diana also had her breath taken away as she looked alternately at the small flame and Nodoka's face.

"It's like the proverb about the young monk."

"...Umm, what was that again?"

"The one about learning from your surroundings, like a young monk reading sutras he's never been taught. I can't summon Dad like you can, Onii-chan, so I need to do whatever I can. I don't think that I will be able to fight, but you never know when something like this can come in handy... man, this is really tiring. I just used the bath earlier and now I'm all sweaty again."

Her magical energy capacity was probably still quite low.

Nodoka was sweating heavily after creating a flame the size of a matchstick for just a few seconds, but compared to Yasuo, who was still struggling with the foundations of sorcery, Nodoka was still a great deal ahead.

“Ah, if you’d like, you can use the bath again after the Colonel is done.”

“Ah, okay, I’ll do that. Well then, I just came down here to get something to drink in the first place.”

Saying that, Nodoka took a bottle of tea or something else from the refrigerator and went back upstairs.

“...Is that talent as well?”

“I’m not sure... but it probably is.”

Nodoka was in the same circumstances as Yasuo, and she would sometimes listen to Diana’s lessons along with Yasuo. However, the fact that she surpassed Yasuo in such a short amount of time and managed to produce a flame on her own was honestly astonishing.

“I can’t keep losing to her like this. Seriously.”

“That’s right... However, please leave the matter of the Shii to us and work hard on your school studies. Don’t try and practice sorcery again in secret, okay?”

“Ah... Yes, I’ll do my best.”

Yasuo, who had been practicing it at school, uneasily looked away.

“So you’ve been doing it.”

And Diana saw right through it.

“Hahaha... Hahaha...”

“Well, that’s fine. But it’s not good to get impatient. As the Colonel said, Yasuo, your requiem is already at the level of a high level cleric, so just focus on clearing each task before you, one at a time.”

“Understood. Keeping up a steady effort is important, right?”

“That’s right. What was that idiom again, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single sweep.”

“A single step. Humans don’t have tails to sweep.”

“No, I didn’t mean that. I just mixed up the pronunciation, like a girl from the Tokyo area might mix up 『Shi』 and 『Hi』 .”

“Seriously, why do you always talk about weird stuff like that which makes it hard for me to know how to reply... Hmm?”

“Ah. Aaah, aah, how am I supposed to use this again!?”

Yasuo heard the sound of something vibrating, and when he looked around, he saw an unfamiliar slimphone vibrating on top of the table.

“Oh, it’s the latest model.”

It was the latest model YOIPHONE, in pink and silver colors.

While thinking that his mother had been really enthusiastic about buying it, Yasuo looked at the screen and saw that the name of the caller was 『Madoka』 .

“Slide this green part over to the side.”

“Ah, y-yes... Hewwo!”

Yasuo wanted to comment about Diana still messing up her pronunciation, but that comment died on his lips when he saw Diana, who had gone red because of her mispronunciation, suddenly put on a serious expression.

“Yes... Yes. Eh? It’s already been more than ten minutes... Okay, I understand. I’ll come back there right away. I don’t think it’s anything

serious, but the Colonel doesn't have a slimphone, so I'll try searching for her. Goodbye... Umm, how do I disconnect the call?"

"Touch that red part over there."

"Ah, it disconnected."

"Mom must have disconnected it on her end. What's up? Did something happen to Mom?"

"Ah, she's finished her shower and wanted to come back, but she didn't have a key to lock the door so she asked me what she should do."

"Eh? But Khalija-san already went there... oh, so that's what you meant when you said it's already been more than ten minutes."

"Yes. I'll go back there for bit. There are only two keys, and the Colonel has one of them."

"Ok, sure."

"If you want to use the shower, please give me a call. Also, I'll have a duplicate key to my apartment made for you to use in case something happens in the future."

"Sure, that's fine— Eh? A duplicate key!?"

"Now then, I should get going."

Yasuo was surprised because he had almost gotten caught up in the flow, but Diana left quickly, probably because she didn't want to keep Madoka waiting.

Yasuo stared at the closed door with all sorts of thoughts running through his head, and then,

"Calm down. She probably meant that she'll have a key made for all of us in the family."

Nodoka, who was supposed to have gone upstairs, was looking at him from the staircase with a grin on her face.

“T-T-T-T-That’s right, that’s probably what she meant, right? I knew it!! Hahahahaha.”

“Seriously, what kind of things were you imagining, Onii-chan?”

“Shut up!! Don’t keep eavesdropping on my conversations!! Just go up to the second floor already!!”

“Hey, Yasuo, Nodoka. What are you two yelling about? There’s a hole in the wall of the bathroom so don’t make so much noise at night.”

Their main door had exploded, their car had exploded, the bathroom wall had a large hole in it, and he had discovered that Igarashi had a beautiful, childhood friend as a girlfriend. This cultural exchange with another world was so depressing.

Would he be cursed by the gods for hoping for a slightly more romantic development, even if it only happens through a misunderstanding?

However, the only certain thing in Yasuo’s life right now was the incredibly prosaic future of being made to sit on a bed of nails at school tomorrow and questioned about Diana’s identity.



“What was that? I felt really irritated just now for some reason.”

Shouko, who had been revising what she learned in school that day, stood up from her chair after suddenly losing her concentration.

“Aaaah, I’m so stiff... Ugh. It’s already eleven pm..... Haa.”

Looking at her slimphone that was charging beside the study desk that she had been using since she was in elementary school, Shouko saw that the time was already a little past eleven pm.

Unlocking the phone for no particular reason, she saw that one of applications on the screen had a small ① symbol on the icon.

“.....”

She knew who it was from, and what that notification meant.

It was from Yasuo, a ROPE message with his excuses.

“.....Hmmp. I don't care. He's being too self-conscious.”

She made to tap the ROPE icon with her thumb, but for some reason, she lost the will to do it.

Even if she didn't read the message, she knew what would be written inside. It would be about those beautiful foreign women.

Even Shouko didn't seriously believe that Yasuo was in a relationship with those mysterious women.

She had just been surprised at seeing him get out of the taxi, and panicked upon seeing what looked like a standard kiss scene from a drama or movie, but considering Yasuo's personality, he would never do something like that. Even so, she had not been able to keep her emotions under control.

She had realized that she couldn't keep her emotions in check, and while trying too hard to hold them back, she had gone and said something like that.

Even though she didn't really feel that way. No, maybe she actually did.

She knew that she was being unreasonable. After all, no matter how you looked at it, Shouko was just one of Yasuo's acquaintances.

Their relationship was not even developed enough to call them friends.

Even back in middle school, when the distance between them had been at its least, she had not talked with him unless there was a pressing need to do so.

The longest she had probably talked to him was during that assignment to

“Research the Occupation of a Person Close to You.”

After the change in classes after second year, she ended up in a different class from him. After that, their third year had gone by, and until he met her by accident in front of the prep school the other day, Yasuo had forgotten about her.

In other words, Shouko knew barely anything about Yasuo.

She knew where his house was, but Yasuo himself wasn't aware of the fact that she knew.

“Worrying about this by myself, so stupid. I mean, I'm basically like a stalker at this point.”

Suspecting the relations that a boy had with people of the opposite sex, when she wasn't even that close to him.

“But... I can't help it.”

She didn't understand why she felt that way about Yasuo.

If she considered this calmly, it was love. She admitted that to herself because she didn't want to feel like a child who refused to accept it.

She had probably been in love with Kenzaki Yasuo since the second year of middle school, ever since that incident.

However, the reason for that was far too shallow.

Even considering the aftermath of that workplace research assignment, when she tried to remember if there was anything that drew her towards Yasuo so strongly, she couldn't think of anything.

“It couldn't be helped, I wasn't used to dealing with people, so I fell for the first guy who showed me the slightest bit of kindness.”

She didn't think he did it because he had any special feelings for her.

He probably hadn't really thought it through, either. Actually, if he was the kind of person who thought things through before doing something like that, she probably wouldn't have such strong feelings about him.

“Diana, huh...”

She didn't really remember what happened back then because her mind had gone completely blank, but she understood right away that it was a pet name, and seeing them calling each other by their first names and talking in a lively manner, she thought that they looked like they were really close.

“That seems nice.”

Shouko sat back down at her desk while spacing out and wrote 『Shouko』 in a corner of the notebook that lay open on her desk with a pencil.

“!!”

She went red in the face, and erased it right away.

“Time to sleep. I should go to sleep and forget about all of this. My thoughts get all muddled up at night. Ah, come to think of it, my eyes are always tired lately too. Ugh.”

Shouko turned towards her closet and pulled out her futon while berating herself for being taken over by her girly side for even a moment, and spoke in a loud voice as if trying to erase her embarrassment.

“..... !!”

Once she was done laying out the futon, she buried her face in the pillow and held her head in embarrassment once again.

“I'm such an idiot.”

Leaving her messed up bangs as they were,

“I should take a bath, brush my teeth, and go to sleep.”

She walked to the corner of her room with unsteady steps and took some underwear out of the closet, and then went downstairs. Once in the dressing room, she took off her clothes and tossed them in the laundry basket.

“Hmm?”

Shouko suddenly felt that something was off when she saw her reflection in the mirror. She was still wearing the same underwear that she had put on yesterday.

She wondered if she had forgotten to take a bath yesterday, and suddenly remembered.

“Ah, that’s right, I fell asleep without even changing into my pyjamas yesterday. Ah, I must be really out of it. I even forgot that I didn’t take a bath.”

For the past few days, she had been feeling sick when she woke up.

She would have a splitting headache and her body felt heavy, there were bruises in strange places on her body even though she didn’t remember getting hurt, and felt a dull pain akin to muscle fatigue, the whole package.



She probably didn't realize it in the morning because of that.

“Hmm? I did take a bath yesterday though, didn't I!?”

She had. Or at least, that's how she felt.

She didn't know why, but the sensation of 『having gone into the bathroom』 was strongly etched into her consciousness.

However, her actions from the morning and the sensation from her body were in opposition to that memory.

She had a vague sense that her body and hair were more greasy than they should have been.

“Seriously. Have I been thinking about stupid stuff for so long that I can't even remember if I took a bath or not?”

She didn't think that she had been taken over by her girly side to that extent, but,

“Oh well, it doesn't matter. I just need to wash myself thoroughly today.”

After that, she took her underwear off as well and put them in the laundry basket, and entered the bathroom.

“...It should be okay. I didn't get close to Yasu-kun today so he shouldn't have noticed... wait.”

Shouko barely managed to keep herself from slamming the showerhead that she was holding against the floor.

“My head is seriously not okaaaay!! Ugayaaa!?”

Shouko accidentally opened the overhead shower tap all the way in wanting to finish her bath as quickly as possible, and yelled after getting doused with cold water.

“.....Good thing it wasn't hot water.”

Shouko's house was quite old, and the pipes for hot water and cold water in the bathroom were separate.

The water heater was also quite old and it wasn't possible to make any delicate temperature adjustments. If she had opened the hot water tap instead, she would have received a shower of blisteringly hot water.

Feeling depressed with herself for losing her calm and showering herself with cold water, Shouko quickly scrubbed her hair and body clean and immersed her body into the bathtub.

“Haaaah.....”

Lots of things had gone wrong today. If things stayed this way, then the situation would completely go out of her control.

Her emotions were running wild because she was trying to run away. She had to face them properly and put her feelings in order.

Shouko drifted off into thought about the time when she had run across Yasuo at the Ozone Tokorozawa Shopping Center.

She finally remembered it. Her name was Dianaze Krone.

She had beautiful golden hair, and perfect, unblemished skin. Her speech was polite, backed by her perfect Japanese.

Her expression had stayed stiff throughout their conversation, probably because she was apologizing for her actions on the day when she had met with Yasuo again, but her beautiful face suggested that she could make most men go slack jawed if she smiled.

Although the combination of golden hair and green eyes was quite eye-catching, she had a refined and quiet sense of beauty without a hint of gaudiness.

In the few seconds before she had noticed Shouko, she had been worried about keeping Yasuo waiting.

She remembered her exaggerated seriousness when she was apologizing.

However, the impression Shouko got when she had seen her for the first time was that of a strong and stern woman.

She was probably a truly strong woman, the kind who was usually soft but could be strong when it was required.

Her movements back then were also almost superhuman, so she must be physically fit as well.

“Aaah.”

At that moment, Shouko realized something.

“Ah... I see, so that’s how it is.”

Thinking about it calmly, she understood why she was so irritated when she saw Yasuo getting along with that girl called Diana.

“I’m...”

However, whether she could accept that or not was a different matter. Shouko took a deep breath, and dunked her head under the water.

*She is exactly the kind of girl I wanted to be back then.*

*Obedient, cute, able to speak her mind even in front of the person she likes, and has a strong sense of self.*

*But being clumsy, I ended up as a gloomy, shy girl who never looked at people or smiled happily because I was afraid of how people saw me.*

*Because of that I couldn’t even say what was on my mind, and I just kept smiling even while people were making fun of me, I was such a good for nothing girl.*

*While still in middle school, I realized that I would never be able to become the girl I dreamt about, so I stopped trying.*

*That’s why I became who I am today. But even then...*

*I'm still the kind of girl who is suspicious about Yasu-kun's relationships even though I barely know him, still so shy that I can't even look at him properly, hiding my true self behind coarse words and acting like I don't care because I can't tell him what I really want to say, and am sitting here laughing by myself.*

*I haven't changed one bit.*

*When I entered high school and all my relationships with people were reset, I thought it was a chance to change myself.*

*I have more friends now, can talk to guys, and even get along with people from my middle school who don't know how I used to be back then.*

*But at the end of the day, it's like my heart has just changed a set of clothes. Once those clothes come off, I'm still the same second year middle school student I was back then, trapped in my own shell.*

*Even though I want to be a girl like that, a girl who can stand beside the one she loves and laugh without hiding anything.*

*Feeling unreasonably jealous, I can't even bring myself to read a ROPE message from Yasuo. I feel so stupid.*

*I have to apologize. But what should I say?*

*I was rude because I was too conscious about my own shortcomings. What good is saying something like that?*

*Besides, Yasuo and I aren't that close. I'll just come off as self-conscious and make him wonder what's wrong with me.*

*Even so.*

*"Uu."*

*She was feeling short of breath.*

Her thoughts had rapidly risen to the surface with the worst possible timing, and because of that, Shouko became more aware of her own reality and felt depressed.

She took a deep breath, but maybe because she had immersed her head in hot water for too long, she felt strangely dizzy.

She thought that thinking of stupid things made her do something even more stupid, but her body refused to obey her will.

She wondered if she had stayed in the bath for too long, and in the next instant her vision turned completely red, and,

“Ah, this is bad...”

As soon as she whispered that, her consciousness fell into darkness.



Yasuo was sitting at his desk, working on his Social Studies report, when he heard the sound of a notification from his phone and saw that there was a mark on the application icon for ROPE indicating that he had received a new message.

Looking at who had sent the message, he saw that it was from Diana, and the message said that she had been unable to find Khalija.

『Has the Colonel come back there yet』

Seeing that, he replied to the 『Diana』 inside the phone screen.

『She hasn't come back here. Are you still searching outside?』

『Yes. I don't want to keep Madoka waiting for too long, so I plan on returning soon. It's been about 1 1 1 ☆♪ ↑ 11☆11↑↑』

“Hmm?”

He suddenly saw a bunch of characters and numbers jumbled up and he furrowed his eyebrows in doubt, but he soon received an animated sticker of

a creepy-looking rabbit character crying, so he vaguely understood what had happened.

『Do you see a key that says ‘kana’ or ‘AEU’ anywhere?』

After he sent that,

『It’s fixed!』

He received a happy-sounding message. He also received another sticker of the same creepy-looking bunny making a peace sign.

“She can send stickers, but doesn’t know how to switch the keyboard back to alphabet mode?”

Yasuo smiled wryly.

『It’s been about one hour, so I plan on coming back there once for now.』

Ah, so she had been trying to type 『1 hour』 .

And this time, she wasn’t sure if she would be able to revert to the alphabetical mode, so she typed it out as 『one』 .

“She should just type the message in kanji.”

There had been a popular book which made fun of messages sent by mothers who weren’t used to digital devices, and the messages Diana sent were pretty close to that.

“That reminds me, I didn’t get around to asking about what language they speak in Ante Lande.”

He didn’t have any time to relax since Khalija came over, and as Khalija also spoke perfect Japanese that was in no way inferior to Diana, he had completely forgotten until now.

『Maybe she went drinking for a change of pace?』

『Drinking tea?』

“No, I’m talking about alcohol.”

He inadvertently spoke that aloud instead of typing it.

Looking at the clock, he saw that it was already past eleven pm, and even high school students would know that adults wouldn’t go out of the house to drink tea at such a late hour.

However, if a person wasn’t aware that 『going out to drink』 was an idiomatic way of saying 『going to eat at a restaurant that serves alcoholic drinks』, they might take the statement at face value.

“Hmm? But doesn’t ‘drink’ in English also have the nuance of drinking alcohol?”

Maybe it was just that Diana was not in the habit of consuming alcohol.

He had never seen Diana drinking alcohol, and he didn’t even know what the legal age for drinking in Resteria was, and whether Diana was allowed to do so.

It would take another two years until he was old enough to drink, but would he be able to go drinking with Diana by that time? Or maybe he would go with his father first?

“...It’s entirely possible that I won’t have the time to go drinking as well.”

The possibility of him ending up as an unemployed twenty-year-old who had failed at both getting into college and becoming a Hero was definitely not zero.

He tried to get rid of those terrifying thoughts, and remembered that as he was born in April, he was already old enough to vote.

There were no elections planned at either the national level or the regional level right now, but when a voting card with his name on it was finally delivered to their house, would he experience some sort of mental change?

He had absolutely no understanding of politics, but would he feel the need to study about various things to make his vote count?

“Behaving like an adult is actually quite difficult if you do it seriously.”

Considering how Khalija said that people were considered to be adults at the age of fifteen in Resteria, if he went to Ante Lande and became a Hero, would he end up having to carry a heavy burden instead of just being respected as an individual person?

Had his parents carried such a burden as well?

『In any case, I'll be coming back now. I left Madoka at my apartment and came outside, so you haven't taken a bath yet, right, Yasuo? Would you like to take a shower once I'm back?』

“.....Seriously.”

He felt that it would be far better for his mental health if he borrowed the shower while it was still just his mother who was staying there.

Even though he was in his own room, he felt worried for a second if Nodoka was watching him from somewhere and hurriedly looked around.

It was bad for his heart in many ways, so he wished she would stop saying things in such a manner already.

If he had received such a message from a regular girl like Shouko, he could imagine what sort of things Nodoka would say to him and was unable to keep a calm face.

『No sorry to do this when you're away, but I think I'll go take a bath right now.』

『I see. Understood. Please take as much time as you need.』

Well, that was easy enough.

“Even though she said that, it would be better to get out of the bath by the time Diana gets back.”

Diana’s apartment only had the minimum necessary furniture and appliances, and there were still some things that had not been delivered yet, so according to Nodoka, it was a 『pretty dreary-looking place』 .

It was the first time that he would be entering a girl’s room, but seeing as Diana had been staying at the Kenzaki family house until a few days ago, he didn’t feel all that nervous.

If anything, the bathroom at his house had been destroyed before Diana’s room had a chance to become more like that of a typical girl’s room, so that was the only silver lining in this situation.

He prepared his underwear and a towel, and was about to go downstairs.

“Still unread, huh? As I thought, I should speak to her directly instead of sending a message by ROPE.”

Looking at the screen of his conversation with Shouko, he saw that the message he sent earlier that evening with his explanation was still not marked as read by the recipient.

However, he could not erase the message that he had already sent. So all he could do was hope for a reply and wait.

Just when he thought that.

He saw a mark appear next to the message indicating that it had been read.

“Ah.”

Yasuo was surprised by this sudden turn of events, but he was even more surprised by the reply that came soon after.

『I’m coming to see you.』

“.....Eh?”

It was a short message, written entirely in Hiragana.

『Eh? Do you mean you're coming over to my house?』

He inadvertently replied, but that message didn't get marked as read.

“What's going on?”

Not only was the conversation going nowhere, the contents felt like something out of a horror story.

There were plenty of cases where people sent a message knowing that they had made a typing error or used the wrong kanji because they were busy, such as when they were riding a bicycle.

Maybe Shouko had actually been too busy to look at her slimphone until now, and after she finally saw his message she sent a hurried reply...

“No, but still, would she actually come over at such a late hour?”

It was already past eleven-thirty pm.

Yasuo had thought that it might have been better to talk to her in person earlier, but it was also not so important that they had to urgently meet in person so late in the night to discuss it.

『It's pretty late today, how about sometime tomorrow?』

He was pretty worried about the situation so he sent that message, but this one stayed unread as well.

As he thought, something was strange.

He decided to just go ahead and call her, but before ringing for very long, he was routed to voicemail.

“T-This is weird.”

He continued calling her, but she didn't pick up at all.

No wait, he heard something.

It was the sound of a phone vibrating.

There was the sound of a phone vibrating in concert with the phone call.

“.....Eh?”

The sound of a vibrating phone?

Why was he hearing something like that?

When the call went to voicemail and Yasuo disconnected, the vibration stopped as well.

And then, when he placed the call again,

“!?”

Yasuo jumped away from his desk, and knocked his chair backwards. The chair which was on wheels moved backwards into the corner of the room until it hit his bookshelf, knocking various things to the floor, but Yasuo was in no state of mind to worry about that.

Eventually, the call went to voicemail again, and the vibration stopped at exactly the same time.

However, Yasuo was staring at a certain spot with his slimphone still held to his ear.

There was a slight gap in the curtains of his window.

He could see a sliver of the outside through that gap.

The sound of the vibration came from out there.

However, he didn't care about that anymore. He could see it. It was definitely there.

It was that red light.

“You've... got to be kidding...”

The face of the Shii that was looking in through the windowpane with one eye looked to be the same as that of the Shii that had destroyed their bathroom.

The depths of that black flame that burned without a sound were slightly illuminated by the light from the room that leaked out through the gap in the curtains.

His father was at home. His mother was also close by. Diana was also on her way back.

There was only one enemy. They had to defeat it for certain this time.

But... But this Shii was...

“Ta...Tatewaki-san, is that you?”

『Grrrrrrrr』

It had destroyed the wall of the bathroom to get inside, but this time it seemed content to just watch from outside the window.

『o.....』

“Eh?”

『...st... ve...』

The voice was similar to that of Alexei’s Shii, it seemed to come from the depths of hell and inspired terror in those who heard it.

Even so, he could tell that the underlying voice was that of a girl.

Yasuo realized that just as each Shii was different depending on who they were when they were alive, which could also be called their 『identity』, they could also have different voices.

『...st ...ve... Yasu...o...』

“Ah... Aaah, no way.”

Alexei's Shii came in search of Hideo the Hero.

In that case, this Shii that came to the Kenzaki house twice in search of him while muttering his name...

“What... Just what happened... Tatewaki-san is a Shii? B-But why...”

If Shouko was actually a Shii, did that mean she had died a long time ago?

No, the assumption that Shouko had already died before they met again was too far-fetched.

In the first place, Shouko wasn't supposed to have had any connection to Ante Lande at all.

Just what sort of thing had happened to turn Shouko into a Shii?

However, considering the power it had displayed in breaking down the wall of the bathroom, and its ability to put up a fight against Khalija, no matter what was on the inside, it was certain that Yasuo was no match for it.

As he thought, he had no option but to call for his father. However, raising his voice might provoke it.

He was hesitant to use the Holy Sword summons inside the house to bring his father here, so he tried to slowly move out of the room, but,

『Grrokah.』

Along with a strange growl, the Shii disappeared from his window. At the same time, he heard something hard fall onto the balcony.

“What!?”

As soon as the ominous presence disappeared from the window, Yasuo opened the curtains without thinking.

For some reason, he didn't consider the possibility that he could be attacked from outside.

He just saw the same old view of the night that was usually visible.

However he noticed something strange on the roof of the house on the opposite side of the road, opened the window, and jumped out onto the balcony.

“Eh.”

It was a snake made of light.

There was a snake of light on the roof of opposite house, and it was restraining the Shii, and the person holding the tail of that snake was...

“Khalija-san!”

There was no mistake. She was wearing the tracksuit that she had still not returned to him, and the circlet with an embedded gemstone.

Maybe he was just seeing things, or it was reflecting the light from the snake of light, but it looked like the gemstone was glowing faintly.

So that was the appearance of the weapon known as the Snakebone, Marfik. If so, it had a grand and imposing appearance that certainly lived up to the name Snakebone.

In any case, it was good that Khalija had chosen to capture it instead of slaying it. If she happened to destroy it for some reason, he had no idea what the consequences would be.

Yasuo patted his chest in relief and waved his hand at Khalija.

“!!”

At that moment, it looked like Khalija had realized that Yasuo was looking at her.

“Huh?”

However, she stood up and turned her back to Yasuo.

“Khalija-san?”

Just before she turned around, even though it was dark, he could tell that she had a sad expression on her face.

“Eh!?”

She then spun around and leaped high into the air, and disappeared somewhere Yasuo’s eyes couldn’t follow. Of course, she took the snake of light and Shouko who had turned into a Shii along with her.

“What was that... just now... What is she... Khalija-san, where did she go... That’s right, I need to let Diana know...!”

He had to let everyone know about what happened just now.

He turned around with the intention of going back inside the house and calling everyone, when his foot struck something.

“This is...”

It was a slimphone.

It was a slightly outdated model YOIPHONE, enclosed in a plain, transparent case.

When he pressed a key, a lock screen image that looked like it was a default image that had not been changed was displayed on the screen.

Also displayed on the screen was a notification message displaying information about recently received calls. It read, 『Incoming call: Yasu-kun』 .

“What... What the hell is going on!?”

Yasuo gripped the slimphone and ran out of his room to tell his father and Nodoka what had happened.

“That small-sized Shii is Shouko-san!?”

“And Khalija-san carried it off!?”

“Are you sure about that, Yasuo?”

Diana, who had returned to the house, Nodoka, and his father looked like they didn't know whether to believe what Yasuo was saying.

Even when Yasuo showed them Shouko's slimphone, they were still not immediately convinced.

However, a flash of light suddenly appeared outside the window in the small garden of the Kenzaki house, and when everyone looked in that direction to see what happened,

“Open up! Hurry!”

They saw Madoka who was supposed to be waiting in Diana's room for Khalija to return.

She had a stern expression on her face, jumped into the house the moment Hideo unlocked the window, and made a staff appear in her hand.

“It's the Shii.”

“Hah?”

“Eh?”

“What!?”

“Don't tell me...”

The four of them reacted in different ways, and simultaneously looked at the slimphone that Yasuo was still holding.

“There were two of them in the garden. There was also one on the road. I really doubt that's all of them! We need to get rid of them quickly, or somebody could get hurt!!”

An unknown number of Shii. The small-sized Shii. And Khalija.

“This was unexpected.”

Hideo shook his head like he was exasperated.

“It looks like we were dancing in the palm of someone’s hand right from the start.”

## Chapter 4 – Song of the Starry Sky

There was a small spiral of light, coiled in the sky.

It was very hard to see, but once you realized it was there, you would see that it appeared to be pulsating in a blue color, looking like the Pleiades cluster.

“Isn’t it time yet... How much longer is this going to take...”

Khalija was looking up at it with a flustered expression.

It had already been more than ten minutes.

She knew that it would take time, but did not expect that an unscheduled 『Activation』 would take such a long time.

“I won’t be able to buy much time if I’m up against Hideo. Every second counts. Hurry up.....!”

The spiral of light that Khalija was looking at as if she was praying eventually coalesced into a pillar of light that dominated the heavens, and a small point of darkness opened up in the center.

“Alright! It’s open!”

If anyone saw it from far away, it probably looked like an illuminated christmas tree rising into the sky.

That was the appearance of the Polar Body Advanced Sorcery, the 『Return Path』 of the 『Gate Tower』 .

『Grrrrrr! Grrrrrrrrah!』

“.....No matter how much you cry out in that low voice, no one will be able to hear you from here. Seriously, having a place like this close by was really convenient”

After being able to calm down a little, Khalija looked around.

She was in a huge park.

Although she had captured the Shii that Shouko Tatewaki had transformed into, she had not thought about what to do after that.

However, Khalija had no other options when she saw that Shouko's Shii had once again approached the Kenzaki house.

If a single Shii that was only slightly stronger than average was discovered in a place where Hideo, Madoka, and Diana were gathered, they would no doubt destroy it without a second thought.

Besides, this Shii was no ordinary Shii.

Only Khalija knew that Tatewaki Shouko had turned into a Shii while still alive.

If Dianaze or the members of the Kenzaki family destroyed it without realizing that, there was no telling what the consequences might be.

“That said, there's no guarantee that you can be saved even if I take you back to Ante Lande with me...”

A snake of light was coiled around Shouko's Shii a little distance above the ground, raising its neck like a poisonous serpent.

“...Looks like it was true after all. As long as they're not touching the ground...”

If a defeated Shii was left unattended for too long without sending it off, it would be engulfed in a swirl of black flame similar to when it appeared and would get sucked into the the ground.

In that case, to keep a Shii from escaping, you just had to prevent it from touching the ground.

“Should I laugh at the fact that you are so inflexible, or moan at the fact that doing something like this is difficult precisely because it sounds simple?”

After giving a lonely smile, Khalija looked down at her hand.

In her hand was Marfik, which had shrunk down to a size that could fit in her palm.

The 『Snakebone』 Marfik looked like nothing more than a rod at first glance.

However, in reality it was a collection of small, individual units of cylindrical shape, and by controlling each of those units with the power of sorcery, the weapon could be made to take various shapes.

By detaching the individual units and re-attaching them with sorcery, it could be quickly turned into a sorcerous rope like its current form.

Although manipulating it was very easy for her to do, it was extremely difficult for anyone who was not used to handling it. Khalija had first realized this soon after she was assigned to the Research Division.

Marfik was one of the variations of a Techno Weapon created by her father.

After enlisting in the Knights Division and being welcomed into the Research Division with a lot of fanfare, Khalija had held the ambition of wanting to spread the name of this weapon that was notorious for being difficult to use, as well as the name of her deceased father.

However, no matter how much she tried to forcefully make it popular, there was no point if there was no one who could actually use it.

It was then that she had found those blueprints.

The blueprints were drawn up in her father's style and in his handwriting, but it had been abandoned before being completed. Apparently, it was a design for a new Techno Weapon that was a stripped down version of Marfik, with reduced features and lower production cost.

Its name was Sinistra, the 『Gosetsu』 [\[3\]](#).

Apparently, it was capable of taking on different shapes depending on the situation.

She didn't know at the time why her father had abandoned the design before completing it.

Looking at the date on the blueprints, she saw that he had been working on it just before he passed away, so maybe he had just passed away before he managed to complete it.

At that moment, Khalija had become convinced that completing this Sinistra would be a shortcut to reviving the Marfik.

At that time, there had been a competition by the Research Division to develop the next generation of Techno Weapons. Khalija took over her father's design, put all her ability into completing it, and turned it in as an entry for the competition.

It cleared many document selection rounds and product tests, and when it was finally selected for combat testing by the military, Khalija had felt proud from the bottom of her heart.

To train a person in using a Techno Weapon like the Marfik which had a high degree of variability, you would first have to train them to be capable of selecting the correct weapon based on the situation, and they would also need to train in using that particular weapon.

In addition, the Magitech Frameworks required by the weapon would increase, which meant that the weapon would not only cost more to produce, but also become more difficult to use. Only a limited number of people would be able to use it.

However, the Sinistra was a weapon with five, fixed forms that the wielder could choose from, so she had thought that it would counteract the complexities associated with a variable-form weapon, and could be wielded by more users.

It would be possible to develop Magitech Knights and Techno Weapons that could adapt to the ever-changing situations on a battlefield.

To Khalija, it looked like an extremely beautiful form of a soldier who had reached their peak.

“...I thought it was for the best. But it was bad luck. For both of us.”

Khalija looked upwards, toward the sky.

The hole in the sky had opened sufficiently.

With this, it should be able to somehow manage both herself and Shouko’s Shii.

“Wait for me, Father.”

『Gugu.... Grrrrrr~』

After ensuring that Shouko’s Shii was still firmly restrained by the snake of light, Khalija flew up towards the hole that led to another world, the Gate Tower, guided by a pillar of stardust.

The inside of the Tower was also a space filled with stardust.

“Ugh, so heavy.”

As she thought, the Shii was also being counted as a heavy mass.

No, was it because the original body of the Shii was still alive?

“But it’s okay... Just a little... Just a little more!”

Her speed was less than half of what it had been when she came to Japan.

However, it was fine now. Since she had managed to enter the Gate Tower, she didn’t have to worry about being caught by Hideo and the others anymore.

If anything, the true battle would start once she made it to the other side.

Although she had been charged with the mission of working with Dianaze as her assistant, she was coming back after only a few days. What’s more,

instead of Hideo the Hero, she was bringing back a Shii. Of course people would wonder what was going on.

If she was not careful, she could end up imprisoned and stripped of her military rank.

She was ready to face the consequences even if that came to pass, but it most likely would not.

There were plans to capture a Shii to learn more about them from when they had first started to appear, but all attempts to do so had ended in failure.

If she and Marfik were to succeed where so many others had failed, it would surely bring her closer to her dream.

『Grrrrr.』

The growls of the Shii brought Khalija back to reality from her dark desire.

*What was I thinking just now?*

*Get closer to my dream? How idiotic.*

*Just for the sake of one wish, I was prepared to throw everything away.*

*I knew that every sacrifice made along the way was necessary.*

*That is why, if this wish is fulfilled, I cannot hope for anything else.*

*Once I return to Resteria, I will most probably be arrested, despite the circumstances.*

*However, I'm sure that 『she』 will make arrangements to get me released from prison in due time.*

*That was our initial agreement, and it wouldn't be surprising for 『her』 to have that kind of influence in the first place.*

*This gift is also meant to ensure that she keeps up her end of the bargain.*

*Once everything is over and 『she』 grants my 『wish』 , I will wipe away all traces of myself.*

*I will live in poverty in some place nobody knows about and wait for my life to come to an end.*

*That is what I have decided.*

“.....I’m sorry.”

After unconsciously touching her circlet once again, Khalija apologized to the girl from a different world, and was about to laugh at herself for her own incompetence, when,

“!?”

All of a sudden, the stardust around her wavered.

Her flight speed dropped.

The mass being transported increased.

Impossible. She had released such a large number of Shii into middle of the city.

There was no way they could have caught up to her so quickly.

Besides, it had already been several minutes since she had entered the Tower. The entrance should have closed long ago.

“!?”

Looking back, she saw a portion of the view of Japan that she was supposed to have left behind, surrounded by the stars of the Pleiades.

The entrance was not closed. It had been anchored in place.

The entrance of the Gate Tower should have closed automatically, but someone had forced it open.

Something was heading towards her at high speed from the open entrance.

There was no need to consider who that was, it was obvious.

“Ugh... A little more. Just a little more, and...”

However, no matter how hard she tried, she could not increase her own speed.

The propulsion force of the entire tower had dropped because of the person who was closing in on her from behind.

“.....!”

Khalija gritted her teeth and looked backwards once again, and in that instant, she changed her strategy after seeing that person.

“.....I can't turn back from this path anyways!”

Khalija gave up on trying to run away and descended to stand on the wall of the tower of stars.

Perhaps because gravity was warped, she was able to stand on the wall of the cylindrical tower instead of falling back towards Japan that she had left behind her.

Seeing that, her pursuers also landed on the wall a little distance away from her.

“You came faster than I expected.”

Did her voice tremble when she said that?

While worrying about that, Khalija looked towards Dianaze Krone and Kenzaki Yasuo, who had followed her into the Gate Tower.

“Colonel... Colonel, what is the meaning of this!?”

“What do you mean by ‘this?’ The fact that I’m using the Gate Tower to go back? Or the fact that I’m taking this Shii along with me? Or maybe... the fact that Shii appeared in city right after I started behaving suspiciously?”

“.....!”

Diana looked shocked at the manner in which Khalija spoke.

Each of those were questions that Diana had wanted to ask, and she had hoped that Khalija was not involved in any of them.

“Let me make this clear, I wasn’t lying when I said that I was sent to Japan to assist you. I have written orders from Her Excellency Erijna and His Majesty himself. It’s just that I had another, personal, objective in addition to that.”

“A different objective? Colonel, what happened to you all of a sudden!? Going against royal orders and releasing Shii in the middle of a peaceful city, what is so important to you that you would go so far to achieve it!?”

Diana’s shout echoed through the emptiness of the tower of stars.

“I don’t plan of doing anything in particular. I have no intention of rebelling against my country. It’s just that I was weak. I was incompetent. Because of that, a bad person took advantage of me. I didn’t want people to scold me for falling into the clutches of a bad person, so I desperately hid the fact. That’s all.”

“I don’t understand! I don’t understand, Colonel! What are you talking about!?”

“You don’t need to understand. Major Krone. You, who have worked hard and overcome many trials without losing to the pressure from your family’s name, managed to free your father from the terrifying flames of the Shii, and are strong enough to fight alone in a different world will probably never understand. That’s why, if you want to stop me, you’ll have to fight me here.”

“Colonel! That wasn’t because I was strong! People who have died cannot come back to life, that is a law of nature! I had no choice but to submit to that!”

“...Just the fact that you can admit that is proof that you are strong, and I am weak. My aim is to twist that law, after all.”

“I don’t understand what your objective is that requires twisting the laws of nature, but what does Tatewaki-san have to do with any of it?”

It was clear that Khalija had no intention of listening to Diana. Yasuo summoned his resolve and asked Khalija that question.

“So you had already realized, Yasuo? That this Shii is Shouko Tatewaki.”

“.....I only realized it quite recently. Tatewaki-san is a person from Japan. I don’t know why she turned into a Shii, but I can’t let you take her away. Please give her back.”

“What do you plan on doing if I give her back? I don’t think you have the ability to do something about this inexplicable phenomenon that caused a living person to turn into a Shii.”

『.....』

Shouko’s Shii, which was still bound by Marfik and had been growling and struggling until earlier, now just stared at Yasuo with its red eyes.

“We’ll find a way, back in Japan.”

“Are you implying that Japan has any institutions that are capable of researching a phenomenon like this?”

“Of course not. But I know that it’s still a better idea than letting you take her away. The fact that you hid from us and tried to do things in secret proves that whatever you have planned for Tatewaki-san, it’s nothing good.”

“Hahaha. No doubt.”

Khalija’s eyes were completely serious.

“In that case, why did you come here?”

“Eh?”

“Is it because this girl is your friend? It should have been Hideo the Hero who came after me, or if not, Major Krone should have come alone.”

“That’s because..... Guh!”

That sensation and impact were something he had never experienced until now.

“Y-Yasuo!!!!”

Diana’s scream echoed throughout the Tower.

Yasuo’s body shook violently, and he fell to his knees on the wall of stardust.

Blood flowed out from his body from the side of his body that had been pierced, and spread into the world beyond the wall in the form of a haze.

At some point, Khalija had held up the cylindrical Marfik and was pointing it towards Yasuo like a handgun.

There was a hole on the end of the cylinder. She had fired a magical bullet from there.

She had fired it at Yasuo. A human.

A young man who had intended to risk his life for Resteria.

“Remember what I told you in the beginning? A person who can’t even stand by themselves will only die on the battlefield.”

From his position of kneeling, Yasuo fell over like a rag doll.

“I avoided his vitals. But if you don’t get him to a hospital soon, he’ll die.”

“Guaaaaaah.”

It was not a scream.

However, Yasuo, still lying on the ground, cried out once the pain finally hit him.

His brain could not handle that level of pain.

However, the signals that his life was in danger spread to every cell in his body, and filled his heart with fear.

“You intended to become a Hero with this level of ability?”

Khalija spat out those words as if she was disgusted, and suddenly, a shadow fell across her face.

Diana had closed the distance with Khalija in an instant, after deploying her twin swords at full power.

“Coloneeeeeel!!”

“That’s a good face. That’s what a soldier should look like.”

Khalija manipulated Marfik and blocked both the swords without batting an eyelash.

“!?”

“It was unfortunate.”

Diana’s body wavered for a second after encountering this unexpected defence, and Khalija didn’t let that chance escape as she pointed the finger of her left hand at Diana’s body that was completely open to attack.

As Diana attempted to jump back to avoid getting attacked, something terrifyingly powerful grazed her flank and the shockwave was transmitted throughout her body.

“Ugh... Gah!?”

Something small slammed into Diana from outside her field of view without making a sound as she tried to gain some distance.

“Gah!!!”

Without being able to avoid that hit or even discern its nature, she took the brunt of Khalija’s melee attack and was slammed into the wall of stars.

“Guuhaa!!”

She didn’t take any damage from that as it was not truly a solid wall, but she definitely received a fracture from that last attack.

She had managed to pull off a surprise attack, but could not do anything against Marfik at all.

“You’re a hundred years too early to try and beat Marfik and me with such an ordinary attack and such an ordinary Techno Weapon.”

Khalija grabbed Diana by the hair as she lay on the ground and pulled her upright.

“Can you see it? This is the true essence of my Marfik.”

After being pulled up, what Diana saw were over thirty small cylinders.

Each one of them glowed when receiving the light of sorcery from Khalija’s hand, connected with each other, and moved about freely.

This is what had hit Diana from a place outside her field of view earlier.

Khalija had controlled one of the units with a magical tether and slammed it into Diana.

If she wanted to, she could probably use each one of those units as bullets that could even break through rock and shred an opponent to pieces.

“You can still stand, right? Take Yasuo and go back right now. Even though I avoided his vitals, he’s an untrained civilian. If he loses even a little blood, he will die. If you’re too late, then none of your wishes will come true.”

“.....Why are you doing this?”

“You want to hear my reasons right now? Is hearing the cause of my madness more important to you than Yasuo’s life?”

“Colonel...!”

“Making an expression like that won’t stop me, and won’t save Yasuo either. Disappear from my sight. I will also disappear, and will never meet either of you again.”

Khalija released Diana's hair and started to walk back towards the snake of light that was still restraining Shouko's Shii.

"...Why?"

"Hmm?"

However, she was stopped by a voice that was distorted in pain, and turned around with a annoyed expression.

"Why are you doing something like this?"

Yasuo, while drenched in sweat, had still raised his head and was looking at her.

".....Yasuo. Do you realize what kind of situation you're in right now? You'll die. A magical bullet blew right through you, and there's a hole in your body where holes should not exist. Or has the fear made you go insane?"

"Shut up, I already know. But Khali... you're not the sort of person who would do something like this."

"Actually, I just did."

"You must have a reason. Let me know what it is. Don't make me ask you so many times."

Khalija smiled charmingly in a manner that was no different from the smile she had shown Yasuo during the past three days when she had been teasing him, and lowered her shoulders.

"Is it one of those 'My last request before I enter the abyss' things? Well, fine. The abyss is the realm of the dead, right? My story is related to that, in a way. If things end like this, Major Krone won't have much to put in her report either."

"Gu... ahh."

Diana lifted herself up and prepared to leap at Khalija, but,

“I won’t let my guard down. Listen to me quietly.”

With a slight motion of her finger, she transformed one of the units of Marfik into handcuffs and pinned Diana against the wall of the Tower.

“Have you heard about the fact that my father was a Techno Weapons craftsman? He passed away before I grew up, but among my sisters I was the one who inherited his talent to the greatest degree. My father also imparted all the knowledge and skills that he could to me. He was an incorrigible drunkard and, with his age being what it was, he probably knew his time was near. In any case, because of the knowledge of Techno Weapons and the skills I inherited from my father, I was able to have a successful career in the Knights Division after his death. Her Excellency Erijina also kept an eye on me because she got to know my father through their work on the Regulus of 『Lightning』 . I used to stand in front of my father’s grave and say that I was proud. I was such an idiot.”

Khalija crouched in front of Yasuo and her shoulders shook as she laughed quietly.

“But you know what? No matter how much skill you have, and how many things you learn, you will never be able to make a good Techno Weapon if you still have the heart of a child. If the craftsman does not understand 『the beauty of the weapon』 , then it will never be transmitted to the person who wields it. By the time I realized that fact, many things had already passed the point of no return. Hey, Dianaze Krone.”

At first, Diana’s ears could only register that as a sound.

“What would you do if I told you that the underlying cause of General Alexei Krone’s death lies with me?”

“...Ha?”

Diana’s motions of trying to desperately break out of Marfik’s restraints suddenly stopped.

“If not for my thoughtless actions, your father might not have died.”

“.....What... are you...”

“There were many things going on at the national level when General Alexei was sent on that mission during which he died. Along with the General, that expedition had many veteran Magitech Knights as well. It had been thirty years since the world entered an era of peace. As nobody expected to find monsters like the Shii, that expedition force was tasked with carrying out many 『experiments』 . Now that I think of it, that expedition was also your first battle, right?”

Images of that incident which she had never forgotten flashed through Diana’s mind.

She had been in the tent with the other surveying officers, the people who were tasked with surveying the land, comparing what they saw to the topographical maps that had been prepared in advance, and determining what direction the expedition force would travel in.

Diana had been struggling with her paperwork inside that tent.

Neither her senior Magitech Knights, nor the veteran surveying officers expected to have to fight.

The Techno Weapons on her waist were pretty much just a decoration. There were even people who had no Techno Weapons within reach because they got in the way when drawing maps.

The Swordmaster, Alexei Krone, was present, and he was in command of veteran officers and the companies under them. In ordinary conditions, the surveying officers should have never found themselves in combat.

However, the result was that the expeditionary force fell apart after the raid by the Shii.

Unable to properly carry out even half of the retreat plan that had been set up in advance, the expeditionary force fell into a rout and Alexei had been killed.

Diana couldn't really remember what she had been doing back then.

All she could remember was obeying the orders of her superior, and running desperately to the designated point without breaking formation.

She hadn't been worried about her father's safety.

The series of events that happened that day were a source of never-ending repentance for Diana.

“That expedition was also tasked with the official combat testing of a new generation of Techno Weapons. A few of the Magitech Knights were ordered to submit reports on the new model Techno Weapons after the mission was completed. Based on their results, the plan was to deploy the new Techno Weapons in a few selected divisions of the army. There were three new types of Techno Weapons to be tested, with fifty people testing each type. A total of one hundred and fifty people in that expedition had been assigned new Techno Weapons. Of the three, one of them was the the 『Gosetsu』 , Sinistra, that I had developed. It was a variable Techno Weapon that could take five forms, namely a polearm, a longsword, a bow, twin swords, and twin pistols. I wanted to take this Techno Weapon that my father left unfinished and make it popular around the world, and someday increase the number of Knights who would be able to use Marfik.”

Her smile turned dark.

She was using that Marfik to kidnap a girl from another world.

『Grrrrrrr.』

Khalija continued to speak while turning around to look at Shouko's ferociously growling Shii.

“All fifty people to whom my Techno Weapon was assigned, died. Not a single one of them made it back.”

“!!”

“.....Seriously?”

“When testing new weapons, you need to be prepared to face unexpected situations. General Alexei was also aware of this, so he stationed the hundred and fifty people who had volunteered to test the new weapons close to himself. Apparently, he said that even should some of the new weapons fail against the mysterious new enemy, he would be able to protect them. However, you know the result. Instead of protecting their wielders and the General, my weapons presented their hearts to the Shii on a silver platter. Of course, there were other companies that fell into rout as well. However, all fifty people who used my weapon died, and the reason for that was simple. Sinistra was completely unready to handle the reality of the battlefield.”

“.....What happened?”

“A deficit in durability due to the complicated shape-changing mechanism built into the weapon. Magitech Frameworks that demanded delicate control of sorcery for shifting the forms even in emergency situations. There were several other flaws that we don't have the time to go into. Don't you think it's funny? Of the new generation weapons that were recovered on a later date, more than half of the 『Gosetsu』 were not in any one of the five standard forms.”

The weapons had failed in the initial steps of transformation, or the wielders had been killed while the weapons were in the middle of changing forms, or they had completely failed to change form in the first place.

However, the recovered weapons all had the same story to tell; their wielders had been killed before they could put up any sort of resistance at all.

“I ended up in a sorry state, like a snake that doesn’t know where to go and ends up tying its own body into knots.”

For a craftsman who had been told that beauty is strength, this was a very difficult sight to withstand.

“Since ancient times, weapon craftsmen have known that their creations were meant for the purpose of hurting other people. Even so, they took pride in the fact that that the weapons would protect their wielders, and the country that stood behind them. But what about me? I was conceited because of my skills and my father’s fame, and ended up causing the deaths of the people who wielded my weapons and the Hero who protected the nation. I was immature, and the weapon that I created for the sake of winning a stupid competition ended up taking the lives of fifty people!!”

“.....Ugh!”

As if responding to Khalija’s rage, Marfik bound Shouko’s Shii and Diana even tighter.

“I finally realized the reason why my father had left Sinistra unfinished. Even five forms is still too much. In battle, there is such a thing as an optimal disposition of troops. There is no point putting your troops armed with longswords in the same place as your archers. What use is a bow to a soldier who fights on the front lines? My father realized that half-baked versatility does not give more options, but instead reduces the level of each available option. That is why he abandoned Sinistra before it was completed, even though he came up with the idea. If you want to wield Marfik, then you have to wield it from the start.”

Khalija’s words came from her mouth without any hesitation.

She had probably had the same conversation with herself many times, many dozens of times, maybe hundreds of times.

Neither Yasuo nor Diana could say anything to interrupt her regret that had been refined to this extent.

“Nobody blamed me. It was the responsibility of the Research Division that had approved the design for combat testing, and moreover, there hadn’t been any problems in the earlier tests. That’s why my superior at the Research Division just told me to keep working hard. However, I wasn’t mentally strong enough to go back to my research just like that. Fifty Magitech Knights. The Swordmaster, Alexei Krone. Even though the Research Division knew just how huge the loss caused by me was, they just told me that. Remember what I said, Yasuo? The current Resteria is completely different from the land that Hideo traveled through thirty years ago.”

Just who was the scorn in her voice aimed at?

Was it the whole world, or perhaps at herself?

“It was only later that I found out that the Research Division had a hostile relationship with Her Excellency Erijina, who was carrying out Techno Weapon research on her own. In that peaceful world, the Division was just carrying out erratic research while being kept afloat with tax money, after all. Apparently, they didn’t see eye to eye with the country’s Heroes, the Krone couple, who expected constant innovation and integrity. There are records saying that when Her Excellency Erijina created the Regulus for General Alexei, the Research Division protested. They said that they would lose face in front of the citizens and other Magitech Knights, and that more consideration should be given when selecting the General’s weapon. Don’t you think that’s hilarious?”

“Something... Something like that...”

“From my perspective as a journeyman craftsman of Torjesso working on getting my Meister title, I could only see Resteria’s Techno Weapon Research Division as a rotten organization filled with bureaucracy. More than half of the contents written in the research process documentation were flimsy

excuses to get a larger budget. Even the process of handing down skills to the next generation was perfunctory. All they did was to gauge the mood of the top brass and carry out trivial upgrades to trivial Techno Weapons, and they were using Magitech Frameworks that were several generations behind what other countries in the world were using. A country like that told me that I shouldn't worry about getting fifty Magitech Knights and one of the country's Heroes killed. It was insane."

Khalija's anger was burning as dark as that of the Shii's, but the tone of her voice suddenly dropped.

"But the most insane person there was me. Fifty people—no it was far more than that if you count the number of people who were involved with them—died because of my arrogance, and here I was still living on like nothing had happened. I misappropriated a design that my father had already discarded and stained the name of Welleger as well. That was why I left the Research Division and moved to being a front line fighter. So that I could make up for the large hole in our defences that I had created, even if just a little. So that I could run away from my sins... but I would still see it every night, in my dreams."

Khalija's blue eyes wavered and she looked down at her own hand.

"In my dreams, the ghosts of the dead would torment me for continuing to live in spite of creating Techno Weapons that killed their wielders instead of their enemies. Behind the eyes of every Shii I faced, I saw the appearance of the Magitech Knights whose faces I had never seen. That's right. I didn't even know what the Knights who died using my weapons looked like. After some time passed, I had a thought. What would my father, a Meister, do at a time like this?"

Khalija's father, Claudius, who was a citizen of the Grand Duchy of Torjesso, had escaped from the invading hordes of Demon King Kaul's armies and sought refuge in Resteria. Back then, when Techno Weapons still did not

exist, he was a weaponsmith who delivered a fixed number of arms and armour to Torjesso's Knights Division from his own workshop.

“I only inherited my father's knowledge and his techniques, I did not inherit his heart. I did not learn what beauty means. I had reached a certain level in knowledge and technique, but my father passed away before he could teach me to train my heart.”

Her fellow craftsmen, and rival researchers at the Research Division. Or even the weapon craftsmen who worked on the streets.

There were many people from whom Khalija could have learned the proper mindset required to craft weapons.

However, the Techno Weapon craftsman named Khalija Welleger had been replicating her father's work for so long that she was incapable of adjusting her feelings based on the opinions of strangers.

“Would my father have scolded me for using designs that he had discarded to further my own ambitions? Or would he have talked to me about his own experiences of weapons he made failing to protect their wielders? Or would he have pushed me away without saying anything, and told me find the answer myself? I had no way to find out. Even so, I didn't even know how to carry the sin of indirectly causing the deaths of fifty Magitech Knights and the country's Hero without my father's advice that was impossible to obtain. Major Krone. You praised someone like me for inheriting the title of Meister, didn't you? Can you still say the same thing about me after hearing this? A failure like me who stole the name of her father, dirtied it, and yet could not help but cling to it!?”

Khalija looked at Diana who was pinned to the wall of stars.

“.....You were given the mission to summon Hideo the Hero, Major Krone, and when your first report made its way back to Resteria, that woman appeared before me. She gave me this circlet and said something to me.”

“Woman?”

In spite of having an agonized expression due to the pain, Yasuo furrowed his eyebrows.

“She told me that the Shii are just the dead people who are coming back to life. She said that they are still just incomplete expressions formed from the dregs of the spirits left over in this world, but that it would someday be possible to bring the dead back to this world... She said that she would be able to bring my father back to this world.”

“Did you actually believe something like that!? A person like you, Colonel, believing that the dead can come back to life!?”

When it was discovered that the Shii had the same appearance as the people who died during the war with Demon King Kaul, there were quite a few similar theories that said the same thing.

However, because of the Shii’s bizarre appearance, and their cruel tendency to steal the hearts of the living, such theories quickly lost traction.

There were whispers of a heretical cult that worshipped the Shii and claimed that they were lost souls who were coming back to life, but those rumors were not even at the level of becoming an urban legend; they were just on the level of being scary stories that kids told to scare each other.

That was why Diana couldn’t believe that Khalija took such idle gossip at face value.

“I believed her.”

“Why!!?”

Khalija’s reply was brief.

“She came to me, accompanied by fifty Shii who were equipped with Sinistra. What more reason would I need?”

““...!!””

Both Yasuo and Diana were lost for words.

Just imagining the sight of fifty Shii was enough to make a chill run down their spines, and on top of that they were all equipped with the 『failed experiment』 that Khalija regretted more than anything.

Perhaps that was the sight that Khalija had kept seeing in her dreams.

Moreover, that 『woman』 had chosen those fifty Shii equipped with Sinistra, knowing that it would pave the way for darkness in Khalija's heart. At the very least, she certainly seemed to have the ability to 『selectively choose from amongst the dead』 .

However, in spite of that.

“I thought that they had appeared to kill me. Part of me hoped that was true, and it was even something I had seen in my dreams. However, she said it wasn't like that. She said that it would be possible for me to apologize to them directly, and even receive judgement from them directly. However, there was still something that was lacking to reach that stage. She told me that a 『latch』 was required.”

“.....A latch?”

“Yeah. She said that right now it was only possible to summon a shadow of their previous existence like the Shii, but if she could open the door fully, then it would be possible to summon a more complete existence. And she needed a 『latch』 for that purpose. I was still in a daze from seeing the fifty Shii before me, and I asked her what she meant by a latch. If she wanted to open a door, shouldn't she be searching for a key instead? But she insisted that it was a 『latch』 . Ever since the Shii appeared, she had been releasing them all over the world to try and find this latch. However, she had reached the limit of what she could do by herself, so she gave me this circlet.

Apparently, it is possible to seal a certain number of Shii into the crimson stone embedded in this circlet and carry them around. She told me to use

them to search for the latch.... But I never expected to find it in a different world, while on a mission that I just happened to receive.”

Khalija slowly turned around.

Yasuo and Diana followed her sight and froze.

A latch to summon the dead back into the world of the living.

“It is a living person who harbors one of the dead.”

“Colonel! Please, stop this! Dead people cannot come back to life! People have no choice but to accept the pain and suffering that even the gods cannot do anything about...!”

The heartfelt cries of Diana, who had lost her father twice, failed to reach Khalija.

“What power do the gods have? If what I am doing is heretical, then it is their fault for making a world where people can lose their way.”

After declaring her scorn for the entire world, Khalija stood up, as if signalling that the conversation was at an end.

“Killing the two of you here would be simple, but I don’t want to do that. After all, I am the kind of person who would believe a story that ordinary people would laugh at, and betrayed all of you and my country because of that. The two of you don’t need to forget about my betrayal, it’s better if you hate me for it. I stayed here for this long talking about my past, because I don’t want you to struggle to come up with excuses for my behavior. I will never appear before you again. I might be dead in the near future. Once word of my pathetic death reaches you, I would be happy if you feel relieved.”

Saying that, she turned around and walked towards Shouko’s Shi.

“Colonel... Colonel, please wait.”

“I will leave that unit to you. You can use it as evidence during my trial. Goodbye.”

Khalija ignored Diana's cries, waved her hand casually, and made to leave, when,

“Wait.”

Someone grabbed her wrist and forced her to stop.

“!?”

“I haven't given you permission to leave yet.”

What Khalija saw when she turned around in shock was,

“For starters, return my tracksuit.”

It was the face of Kenzaki Yasuo.

The match was decided in an instant.

“Gah!!”

An intense pain ran through her wrist, and Khalija lost her balance.

Not only that, more than half of Marfik's units that had been floating suddenly lost their support and scattered across the surface of the tower of stars.

“Kuh!!”

Diana's restraints were fully undone, and the restraints binding Shouko's Shii almost came undone.

Diana, who had recovered some stamina after being forced to kneel for so long, hurriedly jumped towards Yasuo and Khalija, but Khalija had already shaken off Yasuo's hand, moved away from him, and prioritized maintaining the bonds restraining Shouko's Shii.

“There's no point in doing all this if you get away!”

『Grr.... Grrrrrrrr.』

“Yasuo!? Yasuo, are you okay!? What just happened...”

“W-Why!? Why can you still stand!?”

For both Diana and Khalija, just the fact that Yasuo was able to stand was enough of a shock, but they were unable to suppress their astonishment at the fact that he had also used some unknown magic to nullify more than half of Khalija’s Marfik.

“.....I’m probably not cut out for it after all. The kind of magic used to attack other people, I mean. I’ve never even been in a serious fight.”

He seemed to lose his strength at the same moment Diana moved to support him, and almost fell over. However, there was still strength in his gaze as he looked at Khalija.

Diana unconsciously looked at the part where the magical bullet from Marfik had pierced Yasuo.

It was his left flank.



Even though Khalija had avoided damaging his internal organs, Yasuo's body was far weaker than that of any Magitech Knight. There was no way that he could be alright after having his body pierced through.

But what was happening here?

The blood had stopped flowing and was clotted, and the wound was in the process of closing.

“Everyone wants to become like the person they admire, and if there is someone close by who is brilliant, they want to become like that person, but they can't. They cannot win against people with talent. If that talented person is also hard working, then it feels like there's nothing that can be done.”

What was running through Yasuo's mind was the sight of his little sister, who was also a student facing exams like himself, born from the same parents, managing to use flame sorcery after just listening to explanations from the sidelines despite the fact that Yasuo was unable to do it, no matter how carefully he was instructed.

Born with talent, knowledgeable about worldly affairs, and has good grades.

That was his talented little sister, who unhesitatingly called him useless to his face.

“But just because I don't have talent, I can't just keel over and die. In that case... I have no option but to do something that I am at least reasonably good at, and somehow stay alive... In the first place, I might feel that the grass is greener on her side, but I have no idea how she herself feels about it.”

“.....No way, Yasuo, that wound...”

“If my Dad could do it, I just thought that I would be able to do it too... I might not be as good as a cleric, but Khalija-san also showed it to me, didn't she? She showed me that Magitech Knights could use it as well.”

Healing magic.

It was a type of magic used for things like treating external wounds, alleviating disease to a certain extent, and removing poison from the body.

It was one of the few miracles left that could not be replicated by the Magitech Frameworks in Techno Weapons, and could only be performed by humans using 『Magic』 .

After the fight against William, Hideo's healing magic had even fixed Diana's broken bones.

Khalija had also used the same power to heal the cut on Yasuo's throat.

“I, too, want to look cool while fighting. I want to be like Diana and Khalija-san, like my Dad and Mom, taking down enemies without breaking a sweat and protecting my family. But I'm probably useless at things like that. I'm not cut out for that. Moreover, I'm so frightened that I can't even keep myself standing firmly. In spite of that, it was you who told me that there was something I could do better than anyone else, Khalija-san... When I tried it, I was surprisingly able to do it. Although it still hurts quite a bit.”

“.....I'm regretting ever telling you that. Although I don't remember telling you the location of the main unit.”

“Hehe, I heard that from you as well. Don't you remember, Khalija-san? You told me that Sorcery Circuits are weak against electricity. Such a small 『main unit』 probably has no durability to speak of. Sorry for breaking it.”

The bangles on Khalija's wrists. One of them had been fried by Yasuo's lightning magic.

Those bangles were the main units of the Snakebone, the control towers, so to speak.

“How did you know about them?”

“It was because you weren't touching any of the other units. The reason why Castor and Pollux are specially made to be used by the right and left hands

respectively is because they absorb magical energy from the portion of the grip that is in contact with the palm, right? In that case, I assumed that you wouldn't be able to control the units without some mechanism to supply the magical energy, and kept watching while healing myself. And then I saw that the threads of magical energy that extended from the units closest to you were concentrated not at your palms, but at your wrists instead."

".....You got me there."

Perhaps it was painful, as Khalija fingered her wrist while smiling.

"I had completely let my guard down. I didn't expect that you were such a quick-witted person who was capable of looking at things so calmly."

"Despite my appearance, I've come close to dying once. You know about that, right?"

"Don't play dumb with me. If it's about numbers then I've experienced it far more times than you."

"So you're losing to beginner's luck... being experienced must be scary as well."

"...Damn brat."

Khalija's expression lost all traces of being laid back.

Seeing that, Diana once again raised Castor and stood in front of Yasuo.

"Sorry, Diana. The healing worked pretty well, but the lightning was bad. I feel like I'm about to throw up."

Despite the fact that he couldn't even make a proper flame, he had generated an electric current strong enough to destroy a Techno Weapon.

Yasuo was assailed by a sense of energy loss and dizziness like he hadn't eaten for three days, and collapsed to the ground, feeling like vomiting.

“Please don’t worry... I won’t be defeated this time. We don’t have much time either. I’ll settle this quickly.”

“Major Krone. Do you think that you can defeat me now, just because half of Marfik is gone?”

“Yes, I believe I can. No, I *will* defeat you.”

“.....Very well. But I can’t hold back this time either. You will die.”

“Prepare yourself.”

While Yasuo was collapsed on the ground, the two beautiful Magitech Knights faced each other with their lives on the line.

“.....”

However, Yasuo was no longer looking at them.

『.....』

He was only looking at Shouko’s Shii, that kept staring at him.

※

It was a landmark of Tokorozawa City. It was a place of relaxation for the people who lived in the city, and a place with a high concentration of administrative offices belonging to the government: Tokorozawa Aviation Memorial Park<sup>[4]</sup>.

Inside the park, where entry during night time was restricted, Nodoka watched with widened eyes as her father carried a magical sphere that was giving off light like a lighthouse.

“.....Uwaah, Dad, what the heck is that?”

“Seriously, this is so annoying! I heard that even if they are defeated, the Shii will just escape if you leave them lying on the bare ground, so I’m taking the effort to trap them in a barrier of light! I’ve covered pretty much all the

places around here and I think I've defeated all of them, but it's just a matter of time until someone finds these and calls the police!"

Up in the sky was the 『Gate Tower』 that even Hideo had never seen before.

"Don't talk to me! I feel like I'm about to throw up as well! Nodoka! Wipe off my sweat, please. Also, give me some juice!"

"Yes, yes! On my way!"

Nodoka obeyed her mother's instructions and wiped the sweat from her mother's forehead with her handkerchief, and placed a plastic bottle of juice with a straw that she had purchased at some point near her mouth.

"What are you doing over there?"

"I'm anchoring the entrance of the Gate Tower! By the time we got here, she had already jumped in. Diana-chan wasn't capable of doing this, so I had no choice!"

Madoka was already in full-throttle style while holding the Holy Staff Marlowe. She had unsealed the so-called Magical Lady appearance.

If she didn't do this, she wouldn't be able to fight against the energy trying to close the entrance of the 『Gate Tower』 which had taken three percent of the national budget to activate.

To tell the truth, she probably felt like jumping into the Gate Tower herself right about now.

However, there was no telling where the gate was connected to, and even if they somehow managed to save Shouko, if the gate was closed they might be unable to return to Japan.

If such a thing were to happen, she had absolutely no idea to to explain and apologize to the Tatewaki couple that their daughter had not only been

possessed by a monster from another world, she had also been kidnapped by a Magitech Knight and taken away to another world.

Diana didn't have the power to keep the entrance of the Gate Tower from closing.

Because of that, Madoka had no choice but to stay here and keep the the entrance open, and begrudgingly allowed Yasuo to enter the Gate Tower along with Diana after making him promise that he would summon his father if things got dangerous.

“What!? So Yasuo is in there as well!? I need to go there as soon as possible!”

Hideo panicked upon hearing what had happened and was about to jump into the entrance, but the Magical Lady stopped him.

“Wait! We need to wait until the last possible moment!”

“Why!?”

“When Diana-chan and Yasuo jumped in there, the pressure from the Gate Tower increased drastically. If you jump in there as well, I probably won't be able to hold it. Then there would be no point in doing all this! ”

“B-But still...”

“It's okay. Yasuo and Diana-chana are still okay. They might be injured, but it doesn't appear to be anything life threatening.”

“How can you possibly know that!?”

While Hideo looked frustrated, Nodoka held an unfamiliar Slimphone in front of his face.

Displayed on the screen was the free phone call window of the ROPE application.

The recipient of the call was 『Yasu-kun』 .

Apparently, the call was being recorded as well.

Smiling wryly at her father who looked ashamed, Nodoka pointed up towards the sky.

“It looks like he’s still barely getting a signal. I’ve also pretty much understood the details of why Khalija-san did something like this.”

“.....What?”

“Promise me that you won’t tell him I said this.”

Hideo gazed in amazement at the soaring tower of stardust in the sky.

“Onii-chan is doing quite a good job of fighting this time.”



Diana was calmly intercepting the units of Marfik that were attacking her like a meteor shower.

She used magical bullets to change their trajectories, and used the twin swords of light to hit away the units that came too close at a speed that the eye couldn’t follow.

Of course, that wasn’t enough to destroy Marfik’s units.

However, Diana only had to deal with slightly more than ten units right now.

It looked like the units that were controlled using the bangle on Khalija’s right hand that Yasuo had destroyed were mostly the ones used for attacking.

As Shouko’s Shii was still bound, it appeared that those units were all being controlled by the left bangle, but Khalija couldn’t use those units for fighting either.

Although it was called Snakebone, the current movements of the units were not snake-like at all, and although variability was its main feature, Khalija was only using them as projectiles.

Occasionally, one of the units would fly towards Yasuo, but Diana made sure to knock them away with magical bullets.

“Did you think I would lose my composure if you attacked Yasuo?”

“I did. I’m let down by your reaction, though!”

“I have also worked desperately to accumulate combat experience after that battle! I wasn’t just sitting around crying!”

“I see! However, all that experience is going to go to waste today!!”

“Don’t make me laugh!”

Diana swung both her swords of light at a unit that came close to her. That contact caused a dull sound that was heard for the first time in the battle, and two small explosions were caused in the distance behind Diana.

“I’m not so weak as to lose to you who called Castor and Pollux  
『ordinary』 Techno Weapons, Colonel!”

“You’re acting a lot more tough just because the power of Marfik is halved!  
Fine, I accept your challenge!”

Khalija concentrated the units around her left hand.

“I will just need a single swing with my blade of light.”

The rod-shaped Marfik glowed and took the form of a short sword, and Khalija raised it high. Her right hand was empty.

Khalija pulled back the left side of her body pretended as if she was about to jump.

“!”

As soon as Diana braced herself to receive it, Khalija released a lightning magic from her right hand several times more powerful than what Yasuo had used, aimed perfectly at its target.

“Oh no...!”

Diana was in a stance where she had no choice but to block them head-on with her Techno Weapons in order to avoid getting electrocuted.

The weapon that bore the brunt of the attack was Castor, in Diana's right hand.

Castor, that had been heavily damaged after receiving the lightning of Regulus.

There was no way it could work at its best after being patched up using materials found in Japan.

“Die!!”

Diana's guard on her right was broken through, and a large opening was formed in her defence. Aiming at that spot, Khalija swung Marfik that was in the shape of a short sword.

Diana was also not one to go down from just that, and twisted her body to the right to barely avoid the slash from the short sword.

However, it had been Khalija's intention all along to pull Diana into a fight where her own Techno Weapon had the advantage.

“Fool.”

The short sword, made from the interlocking units of Marfik, was right next to Diana's body.

Khalija had made the units take the form of a short sword to force this situation to occur.

Marfik was a Techno Weapon made of several units, and Diana had already seen that the units could be separated and fired off like bullets.

Even if Diana managed to dodge the blade by a scarce margin, Khalija just needed to explosively separate the units at a range close to Diana's body.

“It's over.”

In the next instant, Marfik exploded in Khalija's hands.

"...Why..."

Khalija could barely think through the intense pain, and from the position of still holding the short sword, collapsed to the wall of the tower.

"Ah..."

Close to her left hand, she saw that Marfik had lost the shape of a short sword, and the units had scattered across the floor.

Khalija managed to turn her face in the direction of Diana, and saw that Castor's muzzle was pointed towards her.

".....The Sorcery Circuits... didn't break?"

"Yes."

"...They were made from iron wire found in Japan. They should have broken apart easily."

"I believed that it definitely would not break."

Diana declared while keeping her weapon aimed at Khalija.

"Castor is a robust Techno Weapon that only my father's Regulus was able to break. It has a simple structure, and that's what makes it strong."

However, she had a very sad expression on her face.

"A craftsman who bore the name of Welleger repaired it for me. There was no way it would break from lightning magic of that level."

"...Hahaha."

Khalija laughed and looked at her own left hand.

"So you trusted me. Even though I told you all about how the Techno Weapons I had worked on had betrayed their wielders."

The main unit used to control the other units was missing.

Her arm was bent at a strange angle, and the bangle had been reduced to dust and spread out over the wall of stars.

“Kill me.”

“No, I won’t.”

“I still have some magical energy left. Even with just my right hand, I can still fight.”

“No. With your leg in that state, you can no longer kill me.”

“...Haha.”

Khalija already knew that.

After the death of General Alexei Krone, Dianaze Krone had risen to the rank of First Lieutenant based on her fighting ability alone.

Of the magical bullets fired simultaneously from the twin Techno Weapons, the bullet from Castor had shattered the main unit of Marfik, and the bullet from Pollux had pierced through Khalija’s right leg.

『Grrrrr...』

The growling of the Shii closed in on Khalija from behind.

After being freed from the snake of light that had lost its function, Shouko’s Shii accurately selected the weakened enemy.

“...What a mess. I released all the Shii that were sealed in the crimson stone in Tokorozawa... You don’t have to save me, Major Krone. I will...”

“Don’t misunderstand. I said that I would not let you die.”

“.....What?”

Khalija made a dubious expression and raised her head. A song reached her ears.

The voice was extremely hoarse and the breathing was ragged, but the intonation was steady.

On hearing that, Shouko's Shii stopped in its tracks and turned its head to look at the source of the song.

Those red eyes started moving slowly towards Kenzaki Yasuo, who was singing the requiem while sprawled on the ground, unable to so much as lift his head.

“Impossible... Trying to send it off without defeating it first...”

“He is not trying to send it off. However, I'm sure that Yasuo has already realized it.”

It had happened on the night when Khalija had first appeared.

They were on their way back home from dinner after celebrating Diana's moving into a new apartment.

When Yasuo sang the requiem to send off the Shii that Hideo and Diana had defeated, the flames of Shouko's Shii had also waned.

If Yasuo had kept singing the requiem like that, some sort of change would have definitely occurred.

However, Khalija had barged into the fight before that could happen.

Shouko's Shii sat down in front of Yasuo and start swaying its body happily. In concert with the swaying, the black flames turned into soot and started vanish just like what happened when the Shii were sent off, and soon, those ominous red narrowed as if it was smiling, and then closed.

The black flames turned into soot and swirled away from the body, and were sucked into the human eyes that appeared from underneath.

After all the flames had disappeared, what was left was Tatewaki Shouko, naked as the day she was born.

From her posture of sitting down, Shouko's eyes remained closed as she fell over sideways.

“Yasuo! Don't lift your head! Turn around!”

“Eh? What... Ueeeh!?”

Diana panicked and yelled at Yasuo, but she could not take her eyes off Khalija, nor could she stop pointing her weapon at her.

Of course, Yasuo didn't immediately understand why Diana had suddenly yelled something like that, and when he raised his head to see if the requiem had worked, he was greeted by the sight of skin that he should not have seen, and hurriedly turned away.

He had thought that the song had worked to dispel the Shii transformation, and found that Shouko was lying naked among a sea of stars.

Just what had Shouko been doing when the Shii took over her body?

“Kukuku... Hahaha... Ugh!”

Khalija started laughing seeing the situation, and then her face twisted from the intense pain.

“Aah, why did things end up like this.”

“Colonel?”

“...I accept my defeat, Major.”

Khalija slightly extended her right hand and touched the wall of the tower.

The next instant, the sea of stardust was suddenly warped.

“Wha—”

“This is... Colonel!”

“Calm down. I'm just closing the Gate Tower.”

Yasuo, Shouko, and Khalija were tossed up from the surface of the tower, and even Diana wasn't able to remain standing.

“The 『Return Path』 is closing. We are going to be returned to the entrance.”

“Uwaaah...!”

Khalija moved only her eyes to look upwards.

Over there, she saw the sky of the other world, a place called the Aviation Park located in Tokorozawa, which was located in the Saitama Prefecture, in a country called Japan.

The stars flowed in the opposite direction, and the space surged backwards.

“Aah... No matter what I do, it always ends in failure.”

Khalija said that as if mocking herself, and was the first person to be pushed out of the entrance.

“Yasuo! Yasuo!”

Diana stretched her hand out towards Yasuo, but she was nowhere close enough to reach him, as she was mercilessly pushed out of the entrance.

For some reason, Shouko wasn't being pulled towards the entrance and she continued to float in that space.

“Tatewaki-san!!”

Yasuo unconsciously hugged her close because she was floating close to him. For some reason, he had a premonition that she would stay floating and be left all alone in the tower if he didn't do anything.

The moment he grabbed Shouko, a powerful force caught hold of Yasuo and forcefully tried to throw him out of the tower.

“Guh... Goddamnit!”

Yasuo had used healing magic that he was unfamiliar with to heal the first serious wound he had received in his life, and on top of that he had also used the last reserves of his strength to use lightning magic, so he had absolutely no strength left to resist. He felt like he would be ripped away from Shouko if he let down his guard even a little.

“There’s something I have to tell you, no matter what...! Gaaaaaaaah!”

He refused to let her go.

Yasuo’s body had spun around so many times that he no longer knew what way was up, but he still refused to let Shouko go.

If he let her go, Shouko would disappear somewhere along with the Shii.

That was how he felt.

That time seemed to stretch on infinitely, but in reality it wasn’t even ten seconds.

The savage power that had swept Yasuo around like lint in a washing machine suddenly released its hold upon him and Shouko.

“.....”

After the pressure was released, it took him some time to realize the fact.

By the the time he realized it, he was in the sky of Tokorozawa along with Shouko; then gravity slowly began to reassert its hold and he started falling towards the ground.

“U-Uwaaaah...”

Yasuo had never been skydiving, but even he knew that this situation was pretty bad.

The ground was a lot closer than he had expected.

He couldn’t see Diana and Khalija anywhere.

However, Shouko was within his arms.

He couldn't afford to die along with her before getting to tell her any of the things he wanted to say.

That's right. There was something that he definitely had to say to her.

“I'm not dating anyooooooooone!!”

This was the perfect time to use that.

“The Hero Hideo is the person who will obtain victory for new frontiers wings go forth flower petals take flight gather the shining azure sunlight avatar of the wind Holy Sword Liutberga answer my call and take form!! Phew!!”

Yasuo somehow managed to say the whole chant in a single breath.

“.....Oooooooooh!?”

A pillar of light rose into the night sky of Tokorozawa, and from within appeared a salaryman on his day off, carrying the Holy Sword of the Wind and bearing a shocked expression on his face.

On the other side of the pillar that light that signalled the summoning of the legendary Hero, the 『Return Path』 of the 『Gate Tower』 that created a connection to a different world seemed melt into the night sky and vanish.



On the roof of the rented apartment, Marigold Hills Tokorozawa, Diana was standing with her arms spread apart and her eyes closed.

A crystalline substance the size of a clenched fist was floating over her hand.

The dust on the roof formed concentric circles with Diana at the center, and the powerful flow of magical energy caused it to whirl upwards. In the next instant, Diana shot that crystalline substance towards the sky.

“Go on.”

There was a slight disturbance in the sky of stars, and the crystalline substance vanished.

“Haaaah...”

The weather was warm enough to cause her to sweat a little, and she fixed her bangs that were stuck to her forehead.

After that, she heard a dull voice from near her feet.

“Did you send it already?”

“Yes. Just now.”

“I see.”

After Diana landed in the courtyard of the apartment site and entered her room through the window, the source of that voice spoke in a somewhat sad manner.

“With this, I guess I’m out of a job.”

“You brought this on yourself. I don’t want to lose my job either, so I didn’t hold back at all when I sent my report.”

“That’s fine. That’s fine, really. Aahhh.”

“Don’t think we’re done already. We’re going out again right away.”

“Yeah, I know. Where were we supposed to go, again?”

“For now, we’re going to the department store opposite Tokorozawa Station.”

“Ah, that’s right. What were you planning to buy? Sweets?”

“We can’t very well buy liquor. Rather than the actual item, what’s more important is the attitude of taking something to give when going to visit someone.”

“Understood. Ah, that’s right, we’re out of milk. Let’s buy some on the way back.”

“.....Yes, yes. Now, it’s time to leave. We need to be on time. Are you ready, Colonel?”

“Don’t call me Colonel. I betrayed the Knights Division.”

Khalija Welleger appeared from the shadows in the back of the room, wearing a tracksuit and with her left hand wrapped in a triangular bandage.

After being ejected from the tower and returning to Japan, Khalija had received treatment for the injury to her right leg, but refused to allow her left arm to be healed.

After hearing the conversation that had been sent through Yasuo’s slimphone and recorded on Shouko’s slimphone, Hideo and Madoka hadn’t pressed Khalija to explain her actions.

The fact of the matter was that Khalija could not be judged by the laws of Japan.

Khalija herself thought that she should have been killed on the spot.

However.

“Don’t worry about it. It barely took me thirty minutes to get rid of that number of Shii.”

“Although you looked like you were out of breath.”

She was overwhelmed by the words of the couple who were also Heroes of Salvation, who talked about the incident like it was no big deal.

Khalija had released twenty Shii.

Not only had they been defeated so easily, they had also been captured using some magic she had never seen to prevent them from escaping, this was no ordinary thing.

The magic was apparently not as flexible as the snake of light created from Marfik, and would not be able to hold the Shii for very long, so as soon as Yasuo returned, he sent off all twenty Shii using the requiem.

Khalija, having lost all her weapons, admitted her defeat and decided to leave her fate up to the Kenzaki family.

As a result, Diana ended up getting custody of Khalija, and she officially became a freeloader at Diana's apartment.

"I'm just used to calling you Colonel."

Even though their relationship from both official and private standpoints had been reversed, Diana still didn't change her basic attitude towards Khalija, and once in a while she let Khalija catch a glimpse of her strong will that she had never shown in Resteria, which often surprised Khalija.

"It just sounds like you're making fun of me."

"In that case, let's stay this way for a while. I am the master of this house, so please listen to what I say."

"Have you always been such a straightforward person?"

"Of course."

Diana, wearing skintight jeans and a tunic, picked up her handbag that contained her wallet and slimphone, and gave Khalija a fearless smile.

"My surroundings have always been difficult in many ways, so I had no choice but to be this way."

'.....'

Khalija looked confused because she didn't understand what Diana was talking about, but Diana just laughed and refused to say anything else.

"Well then, let's go. I need to switch with Madoka and stand guard over Yasuo later in the evening."

“Yeah, I understand.”

Khalija, who nodded, was still dressed in a tracksuit.

The tracksuit which had the name of Kenzaki stitched on it had ended up full of holes and covered in bloodstains after the battle with Diana, and they had no choice but to throw it away.

The matter had been settled with Diana paying for a new tracksuit for Yasuo, but for some reason, Khalija had gotten really attached to tracksuits and even today she was covered from neck to ankle in a blue tracksuit.

“...Time to go.”

After struggling to put on her brand-new sneakers with just one hand, Khalija lightly patted a small box that was placed on top of the shoe rack and followed Diana outside.

“Wouldn’t it be good to have Hideo or Yasuo fix that, after all? It’s inconvenient for your daily life as well.”

Diana suggested that after seeing Khalija struggle to put her shoes on, but Khalija shook her head.

“At the very least, let me stay this way until you get a reply to your report from earlier. That way, they will also be able to stay at ease.”

“But...”

“Don’t be naive, Major Krone. I am a cowardly rebel and a traitor. In the first place, it would not be surprising if I was forcefully confined inside the room. What would you have done if I was powerful enough to fix my fractured bone on my own? There is no need to feel pity for me. You need to be resolved enough to use me as a shield if the Shii suddenly appear.”

“Is that something a traitor would say?”

“It’s because you are all too soft.”

“Japan is a peaceful country, after all.”

“It is sinful for soldiers to get accustomed to peace.”

Diana looked visibly annoyed with the topic, and suddenly remembering what Nodoka had said, she decided to try it out.

“But you already heard what Hideo had to say, and besides, I know that deep down you’re very kind and not at all the kind of weak-willed person that you say you are, Colonel.”

“...Hey.”

“You are still someone I look up to and trust, Colonel, and now that we have overcome that difficult battle, I believe that you will once again use that power for our sake.”

“M-Major Krone... Listen to me...”

“Please don’t tell him that I told you, but Yasuo also said this. He said, ‘The reason why we were able to stop Khalija-san is because she had paid attention to me all along and occasionally gave me advice.’”

“Umm, I never... I mean...”

“He also said that he had to work harder because even a strong person like you had things you were worried about. Yasuo had also realized that you spoke gentle words to him every now and then to keep him from breaking down....”

“I-I understand! I understand, so please have mercy...”

Khalija blushed a bright red and crouched down on the spot.

Khalija, 『who doesn’t like feeling embarrassed when she’s praised』, was unable to withstand Diana’s straightforward words and was moaning after covering her face with one hand because she could not raise her broken arm.

“Seriously, what do you say we get your arm fixed on our way back today?”

“...You’re doing this on purpose to tease me, aren’t you?”

Khalija looked up at Diana with a bright red face and teary, resentful eyes.

“It was half serious.”

Diana said that to her.

“You’re no friend of mine!”

“How many times are you going to say that?”

He had heard Aoto say that at least ten times today alone.

Aoto used that phrase like it was a suffix and randomly mixed it into conversations, so even Yasuo was starting to get seriously annoyed.

As expected, it seemed that Aoto had taken issue with the fact that Diana had come to pick him up the previous day, and Yasuo also realized that he wouldn’t be able to convince anyone using the same story that he had used with Khalija, so he ended up telling the truth by saying that Diana was the daughter of mutual friends of his parents to settle the issue.

Of course, just because he had told the truth, that didn’t mean that Aoto would be okay with it.

“So you’re saying that there’s a very good chance of your relationship progressing to something more serious...”

“If you want to talk about probability, there’s a fifty percent chance. Isn’t that the same with every girl in the world?”

“Don’t give me that sophistry! Tell me more about your blissful school life and make me jealous, Yasu!”

“Aoto, you’ve been seriously disgusting since the past few days.”

“I’ve never told anyone this before, but there was a time when I refused Valentine’s Day chocolates from one of my juniors to look cool, I regret doing something stupid like that that so much!”

“Shut up. Just go to your club already. Do what you originally planned to accomplish and show us all a great play.”

“Shut uuuuuupp!”

It was after school but the sky was still shining blue, and it didn't feel like evening at all.

Actually, Yasuo, who didn't belong to any clubs, had some work at the faculty office.

“Hmm? What's that?”

Aoto asked after seeing the A4 size report that Yasuo pulled out of his bag.

“My make-up test for Social Studies. I told you that I had to submit an essay, right? I finished it earlier than expected, so I'm going to turn it in.”

“Oh? What was the topic again?”

“I had to write an essay on whether eighteen-year-olds should be treated as adults now that the voting age has been reduced.”

Seeing Yasuo state a difficult topic so casually, Aoto had a complicated expression on his face.

“I see. Actually, the mayor of our city retired due to illness, so we had a sudden mayoral election. I was so excited back then.”

“Hmm? But you're not eighteen yet, right?”

“Yeah. I got depressed when I realized that. Sure, I don't know if the mayoral election would have any sort of effect on my life, and I wondered what was so fun about seeing all those posters of old people smiling, but, how do I put this, it really drove it home, you know?”

“Drove what home?”

“Yeah, you know, when we entered middle school and stopped carrying the school bags made for kids, didn't you feel like you were all grown up?”

“Aaaah... I probably did.”

“Even for stuff like manga, middle-schoolers read sports manga where high schoolers are the main characters, so they equate entering middle school to gaining powers they never had before, stuff like that.”

“Yeah, I understand that. The seniors from third year looked so grown up.”

“Yeah, but we’re like this now.”

“Don’t say it like that. Although I understand what you’re trying to say.”

Thinking that middle schoolers and high schoolers were grown ups, it was just a fantasy.

When they reached that age that they had respected and longed for so much when they were younger, and considered whether they had become existences worth of that respect, it didn’t feel like it at all.

Even though they had become third year high school students, it didn’t feel like they had become capable of smiling fearlessly at ace players from all over Japan, or using their strong will to break free from the persecution by adults, or using keen powers of observation and an intelligence greater than adults to calmly decipher everything they saw, and becoming the head of the students that everyone looked up to.

Not only did they not feel like it, in reality, they had not become such people.

The more people tried to act in that manner, the more they were forced to accept the difference between imagination and reality, and the speed with which they learned to recognize failure and give up was far greater than when they had still been carrying those school bags made for kids.

There were times when he was sitting with his friends, talking with them about vulgar things and chuckling, playing around, and studying because he had no choice, when he wondered if he was really all that different from the twelve-year-old elementary school kids.

“Even if you had been able to vote in that mayoral election, you would have probably been disappointed by how ordinary it was.”

“Probably, yeah. But, you know, eighteen is the age when you’re allowed to drive a car, and if you’re a guy, you can get married. It’s also the age when people go on to either become college students or members of society. On top of that you’re allowed to vote as well, so I remembered that feeling of excitement from my younger days and though it was really cool. Well, these are all things that adults do all over the world, so it can’t be helped if they feel a little ordinary.”

“...I wonder how it is in my case.”

There are many people who think that becoming an 『adult』 means that they will be freed from many restrictions that were placed on them before, and obtain the freedom to do many different things.

However, that freedom comes with many responsibilities and obligations, and 『adults』 spend every day worrying and working hard in return for that freedom.

There have also been cases of people who had been recognized as 『adults』 by society due to the law or customs, and those people couldn’t handle the responsibility that came with it and thus lost their way.

He had always thought that he would naturally 『turn into』 an adult someday, but the closer he got to being an adult the more indistinct it became, until he was not sure what it even meant to be an adult anymore.

In some ways, it was similar to the existence known as a 『Hero』 that Yasuo was aiming to become.

It was something everyone knew about, but no one had a concrete definition for it. In spite of that it was an object of longing for many, and was seen as being something special.

“I wonder how one becomes an adult.”

“If I become an adult, will I manage to find a girlfriend as well...”

“So you come back to that after all.”

Was Aoto really that shocked by the fact that Igarashi had a girlfriend?

Girlfriends don't just naturally come crawling out of the woodwork just because you reach the age where it is appropriate to have one.

However, if Yasuo said that right now, it would just come back to bite him.

Yasuo sensed that Aoto was about to fall into a troublesome loop and decided to end the topic and quickly picked up his bag.

“Well then, I have to get going.”

“What, you're going already? Stick around for a bit, I still have some time until my club starts today.”

“No, sorry. I have plans for later today.”

Yasuo really wanted to stay back for a little longer, but tardiness on today of all days would not be forgiven.

He still had some time, but if possible he wanted to get some stuff done earlier, and when he said as much, Aoto wrinkled his forehead as if unhappy about something.

“Plans... Which one is it!? Which girl!?”

“Uwaaah, so annoying.”

“You're no friend of mine!”

“Yeah, yeah. See you later.”

“Yeah, just go. Bah.”

“You don't actually need to say ‘Bah’ aloud.”

After leaving the classroom while laughing, he hurried to the faculty office.

“Oh, it looks pretty well put together.”

The teacher for Social Studies, Takayama, skimmed through the report and nodded as if satisfied.

“I’ll return it to you later after grading it, but thinking of topics is annoying for me as well, so study properly next time, okay?”

“Yes.”

Now all he had to do was get through the make-up test for Classical Literature tomorrow, and he would be done with with this pilgrimage that started with him failing his tests. However, Yasuo had another difficult task to clear before that.

After leaving the main gate of the school by himself, he walked to the nearest corner in the road where Diana and Khalija waited beside a taxi.

“Where’s Mom?”

“She had some preparations to make regarding the plans for later, so we switched guard duty with her one hour earlier and she already went back home.”

Diana, who answered his question, was carrying a paper bag with the symbol of a famous Japanese sweets store.

“Got it. Well then, let’s go.”

Saying that, Yasuo climbed into the taxi.

The two women climbed into the back seat, and Yasuo climbed into the seat beside the driver, and stated their destination.

“Please take us to the Aviation Memorial Park.”

The three didn’t talk much while sitting in the car, and there was not much conversation about anything apart from the souvenirs that Diana had purchased.

It took the three of them nearly double the time it would have taken by train, but they eventually arrived at the entrance to the Aviation Memorial Park that faced the national highway.

They mingled with the large groups of children, and there were unexpectedly a lot of families present considering that it was evening on a weekday.

In one corner of the park, they saw someone who had spread a sheet on the ground, set aside a large wrapped package, and was staring at the trees, even though the season for viewing flowers had passed by a long time ago.

Yasuo gathered his courage, and,

“Tatewaki-san!”

Hearing that, Tatewaki Shouko, who was sitting on the sheet, turned around slowly and slightly raised a hand in greeting.

Her expression did not show any strong emotions, and she looked the same as always.

I see black, gold, and silver heads bowing towards me, does that make me the platinum card?

While thinking of something pointless like that, she looked at the top of the heads of the people assembled before her.

Of course, those heads belonged to Yasuo and the two girls who had appeared around him recently.

It was a brilliant real-life demonstration of the art of prostrating oneself.

Diana, who was in the middle, was holding out a bag of Japanese sweets made using sweet potatoes from an auspicious shop in Kawagoe<sup>[5]</sup>, like Echigoya offering a bribe to the Governor<sup>[6]</sup>.

“We’re really... very sorry for the trouble we caused you...”

“Haaa.”

“You must be understandably angry about what happened, but I assure you, we will take responsibility and we are doing everything we can to resolve the aforementioned issue, so if you can find it in your heart to forgive us...”

“Pfft.”

Shouko barely kept herself from laughing at the sight of this golden-haired beauty, who looked like a Hollywood actress, apologizing in such a formal manner using perfect Japanese. She waved her hand lightly, although she knew that they wouldn't be able to see it.

“Yeah, that's okay, I already heard about the circumstances the other day, and there's nothing you can do about it now, right? So there's no point in me getting angry about it.”

“Thank you very much...”

“It's not a matter of forgiving you or not, and it's hard to talk to you this way, so please raise your heads. It is a communication between people of different worlds, after all. Let's talk about more constructive and fun things.”

After the three of them finally raised their heads, Shouko held out the wrapped package that she had prepared beforehand towards them.

“What is this?”

“That's obvious. It's a packed lunch.”

Saying that, Shouko pulled away the string that kept the wrapping in place, and a fairly old three-layer lunch box was revealed.

“Here, have some wet towels. Ah, you probably can't use chopsticks with your arm like that right? Don't worry, I have forks as well.”

“T-Thank you.”

Shouko efficiently distributed wet tissues, paper plates, and disposable chopsticks to everyone, and even prepared a plastic fork for Khalija who had

an injured arm. After that, Shouko opened the lunch box to display a picnic lunch that looked like it had been made by a professional.

“Huaaaaaaa...!!”

Diana’s eyes sparkled and she made a sound of appreciation.

The first layer was filled with cylindrical-shaped onigiri that were a brilliant fusion of nori-wrapped and rolled onigiri.

The second layer had several varieties of side dishes such as fried chicken, stewed vegetables, sausages cut in the shape of an octopus, and salad.

Although there were a lot of different ingredients used, there was no sign of the food falling apart or leaking at all.

The third layer had a selection of cut fruits. There were oranges, apples, bananas, and strawberries. They were all cut into bite-sized pieces, and it looked like the sort of arrangement you would see at the buffet table of a restaurant.

Yasuo felt strangely nostalgic at seeing this arrangement of food that not only roused the appetite, but also roused feelings of exhilaration in those who saw it.

Now that he thought about it, it had been a very long time since he had seen a picnic lunch like this.

He had probably not eaten something like this since the last sports festival from his elementary school days.

“Alright, before we dig in, let’s take a picture together to remember this moment! Yay!”

“Ah.”

While the three of them were still hesitating at this sudden proclamation, Shouko expertly used the front camera of her slimphone to capture a perfect photo that included all who were present as well as the lunch spread.

“I’ll send the photo over ROPE later on. Right then, let’s eat. Ah, Khalija-san... did I get your name right? If you have trouble serving yourself, let me know. I’ll help you.”

“A-Ah, well...”

Khalija was actually taken off guard for once by Shouko’s attitude.

Seeing that from the sidelines, Yasuo, who had not forgotten that they had come here to apologize, decided to ask Shouko about something.

“D-Did you make all of this yourself, Tatewaki-san?”

“That’s right. Well, the only things I made from scratch are the stewed vegetables. I appropriated most of the other ingredients from the kitchen of my family’s shop. Ah, did the two of you already know that my family runs a bar?”

“A-Ah, we’ve heard about it.”

“Well, yes...”

“Well that aside, eat up. It may not be as professional as the food made by my parents, but it shouldn’t taste bad either.”

“Y-Yes. I will gratefully accept...!!”

They couldn’t very well refuse after Shouko asked her so many times, and when Yasuo felt that something was off and looked towards Diana, he saw that her eyes had widened in surprise after she took some stewed radish from the box and put it in her mouth.

“D-Diana...”

“W-What’s wrong, Major?”

“...Yasuo... Colonel...”

Diana trembled as she looked at the two people sitting beside her.

“It’s delicious... This is incredibly delicious!!”

““Aaah.””

“I see. That’s good.”

“Radish... This is radish, isn’t it? Ah, what is this inexplicable feeling, there are no root crops with such depth of flavor in Resteria. It is different from the flavor of soy sauce... just what is this flavor...”

“I let it simmer for quite a while in the soup stock, so that’s probably it. It’s probably better than the Oden sold in convenience stores, but it’s not *that* great.”

“No! I feel sorry for saying this in front of Yasuo, but even Madoka’s cooking has not reached this level!”

“R-Really...”

“Please go ahead and eat it! You won’t understand until you do! This delicate, sponge-like texture!”

“Sponge-like?”

Sitting beside Diana, who was eating freeze-dried tofu with a serious expression on her face, Yasuo also reached out with his chopsticks to take some chicken that had been stewed with vegetables and put it in his mouth. He failed to notice that Shouko’s expression was tinged with nervousness.

“Ah, it really is delicious!”

He didn’t have an over-the-top reaction like Diana, but even Yasuo was able to understand that it was a flavor that was difficult to achieve in home-cooked meals.

“Thank goodness...”

Shouko, who appeared visibly more relieved than when she reacted to Diana’s praise, also reached out and took an onigiri.

“Starting from here, the fillings are plum, salmon, and kombu, in that order. Ah, you don’t have to finish everything, okay? I know we don’t have that much time.”

“I-I can’t possibly let this go to waste!!“

“Major, calm down a bit. You’re losing sight of our original goal.”

Khalija admonished Diana who had a frantic expression, but Diana was serious.

“We didn’t come here to have a picnic. We came here to apologize to her once again, and decide on our plans for the future, correct?”

“Ah.”

Diana froze with an onigiri in each hand, looking like she had just remembered. Seeing that, Shouko chuckled.

“This feels kinda weird.”

“I’m sorry, we relaxed too much.”

While Yasuo apologized, Diana sat beside him with a red face, but as expected, she did not let go of the onigiri.

“Yeah. To be frank, I find this easier. I was pretty nervous about this as well.”

“But I wasn’t kidding when I said this was delicious.”

“Yeah. I’m glad you liked it.”

“...Hmm?”

Khalija looked a little dissatisfied while observing the conversation between Shouko and Yasuo, but understanding her position, she decided not to say anything unnecessary at this time.

They continued talking about inconsequential things for a while after that, and around the time when they had finished about half the food, Shouko suddenly asked,

“So, what should I do from now on?”

Diana, who had managed to calm down by then, spoke up as a representative for the three of them.

“You will have to accept that we will keep you under guard.”

“Guard, huh? Ah, there’s some rice stuck on your cheek.”

“T-Thank you. Ahem.”

It looked like the relaxed atmosphere was still going to continue.

“What you’re going through, Shouko-san, has no precedent even in Ante Lande. I’ve given you a gist of the current situation in our world, but the truth is that there are still many things that we do not know. Among them, your condition is particularly—”

“Worthy of observation, huh?”

“...Exactly. The fact remains that we are unable to remove the Shii from inside your body. I think the time will eventually come... when you will have to travel to Ante Lande.”

“.....Travel to another world, huh?”

Shouko smiled.

“Is it far away?”

“.....It takes about two hours for a one-way trip.....”

“That’s closer than I thought.”

Shouko smiled wryly.

“What about you, Yasu-kun? Have you already gone there? To that place called Ante lande.”

“.....No, I haven’t. It apparently costs a lot of money.”

“I see. ”

“I see. Well, it sort of sounds like going on a trip to recover from an incurable disease, so I probably won’t be able to come back for a while once I go there. Although I don’t really feel ill at all. I’m in great shape, you know?”

“T-That’s right.”

Even Diana didn’t know how to reply to what Shouko said.

“Well, I understand, and I believe you. I’ll cooperate with you guys. There are a lot of things that can’t be explained if what you said isn’t true, and besides...”

Shouko glared at Yasuo through narrowed eyes on purpose.

“If the situation wasn’t really that grave, then it would mean I exposed myself for nothing.”

“Uh... No, that was...”

Having that topic raised without warning, Yasuo suddenly became flustered and was unable to look at Shouko’s face directly.



Shouko had woken up on the bed in Nodoka’s room, in the Kenzaki family house.

She noticed out of the corner of her eye that she had been covered with a blanket that she had never seen before.

“...Huh? Where am I...?”

Turning her head to the side, she saw an unfamiliar younger girl and a beautiful girl with golden hair whom she had seen before.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Kenzaki Yasuo’s little sister. My name is Nodoka.”

“Oh, Yasu-kun’s little sister... Why are you in my room?”

“Actually, you’re in my room.”

“I don’t understand...”

“You’ve been through a lot. I’ll go and inform the others that you’ve woken up, Tatewaki-san.”

After seeing the girl who called herself Nodoka quickly walk out of the room, Shouko realized that the room indeed smelled different from her own, and then suddenly noticed something strange about her own body and sat up straight in the bed.

“Why am I not wearing anything!?”

She had felt that the blanket was strangely close to her skin, and no wonder, seeing as she was naked.

Shouko was extremely confused at the current situation where she found herself sleeping naked in someone else’s house.

“U-Umm... you were like that before you got here.”

The golden-haired beauty spoke to her.

“Y-You’re Yasu-kun’s...!”

“No, that’s a misunderstanding...!”

That golden-haired beauty who called herself Dianaze Krone started talking about things that she could not understand at all, which only served to deepen her confusion.

However, in her confused state, Shouko realized that there were a few points that explained some of the strange things that had happened to her for the past few days.

“So you’re saying I was wandering around the city after turning into a monster?”

“I understand that it must be hard to believe. However, it is the truth. Here...”

Dianaze held Shouko's slimphone out towards her.

Shouko didn't know why this girl had her phone, but she took it and unlocked the phone.

She saw that there were a bunch of apps that were already opened, and after going through them,

“...Yeah, I don't remember this at all.”

There was a message in her conversation with Yasuo on ROPE that she had no memory of sending.

The time the message was sent was 23:30.

The last thing she could remember before that time was taking a bath.

However, she had no memory of leaving the bathroom, and the next thing she knew, she was lying naked in a room in the Kenzaki family house.

The only explanation that made sense that someone from the Kenzaki family, or this person called Dianaze, had kidnapped her from her house.

“.....A song.”

“Eh?”

“I seem to remember someone singing.”

While she was trying to come up with an explanation on her own, a memory of hearing a song that put her heart at ease suddenly rose to the surface from within her mind, and she said it aloud without thinking.

When she heard that, Dianaze suddenly gulped.

“Yasuo was the one who was singing. The song was a requiem from our world.”

“A requiem?”

“Yes. Yasuo's singing undid your Shii transformation, Shouko-san.”

“Yasu-kun... Requiem... Ah.”

“Shouko-san!? Are you okay!? Does it hurt anywhere!?”

A teardrop suddenly rolled down Shouko’s cheek, causing Dianaze to panic.

“Ah, no, I’m okay. But it’s strange, despite the situation, I felt relieved. When I heard that Yasu-kun saved me, I felt really glad.”

Her teardrops continued to fall.

“Wasn’t Yasu-kun angry?”

“Eh?”

“Wasn’t he angry with me?”

“No, not at all. Why do you ask?”

“I got angry with him for selfish reasons and caused him a lot of trouble... I wanted to become like you, but couldn’t.”

“Become like me? Umm...”

“Sorry. It probably doesn’t make any sense to you, does it? In any case, I need to apologize to Yasu-kun. Is he around?”

“Ah, y-yes. But you should rest for now. Not much time has passed since the battle. You have received treatment, but we still don’t know what the after effects of transforming into a Shii might be...”

At that moment, they heard the sound of someone hurriedly running up the stairs.

“I heard Tatewaki-san is awake!? Tatewaki-san are you-!! Ahhh!?”

Yasuo, whose clothes were torn in many places and had injuries all over his body, barged into the room and froze after looking at Shouko who was still sitting upright.

“Y-Yasu-kun, I...”

“U-Umm... sorry, I...”

Seeing Yasuo go bright red and turn around, Shouko finally remembered the situation she was currently in.

She was covered with a blanket, but she was still naked.

For some reason, Dianaze had also gone red and was looking from one of them to the other, and Shouko’s face also suddenly turned red.

And then,

“Noooooooooooooooo!!!”

She ended up throwing the slimphone in her hand with all her strength at the back of Yasuo’s head.

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Unconsciously touching the part of his head that the slimphone had connected with back then, Yasuo frantically tried to explain.

“I really had no intention of doing that!!”

“Nodoka-chan apologized to me later, saying that she tried to stop you but you didn’t listen.”

“Y-Yeah, but... I really...”

“Yasuo.”

Khalija, who had been quiet up to that point, spoke in a subdued manner.

“As a man, you should do the honorable thing and take responsibility.”

“You’re the cause of this whole mess, what are you talking about!?”

“It’s true that most of the blame for the recent incident lies with me, but the fact that you ignored Nodoka and saw Shouko naked is entirely your fault.”

Shouko also nodded as if agreeing with what Khalija said, and Yasuo felt that Diana was also indicating that he should put up with Shouko’s mood.

“.....I’m sorry... I was rash.....”

Yasuo gave up and bowed his head to Shouko once again.

“Okay, I forgive you.”

“Are you really okay with that, Shouko?”

“Colonel, you have no right to ask that.”

“It’s fine. It was that kind of situation, after all, and it just goes to show how much he was worried about me, and besides...”

Shouko glared at Yasuo once again and delivered the final blow.

“If what I heard was the truth, then he had already seen me naked inside that place called the Gate Tower.”

Yasuo gulped hard and tried to settle his heartbeat.

“But it’s fine. I don’t really understand what it means to be possessed by the dead and turning into a monster, but if you saved me from that, Yasu-kun, then it’s fine.”

“Shouko-san...”

“There was a time in the past when even a rough girl like me looked up to and wanted to become a soft and fluffy princess like Diana-san.”

“Soft and fluffy... No, I’m really not so great...”

“Diana-san, your manner of speaking is like something out of a period drama. It’s pretty funny. Do the people from the other world speak Japanese as well?”

“Ah, no. It’s just that, because of Yasuo’s father, Hideo’s achievements, our country especially encourages the citizens to learn Japanese. That’s why, although imperfect, Japanese is widely understood by the commoners as well.”

Ah, so that was the reason. Yasuo's question from a few days ago was finally answered unexpectedly.

As usual, Yasuo could not gauge just how much of an impact his father and mother had left behind in Ante Lande, but from what he had heard just now, it looked like at least in Resteria, there were more people who understood Japanese than he thought.

Yasuo felt like he had heard someone say something similar to him recently, but,

“I see.”

Shouko gave a small sigh and asked another question.

“.....Yasu-kun, are you really going to finish your Hero Training and go to Ante Lande?”

“No, that hasn't been decided yet. It looks like I won't necessarily be welcomed with open arms, and as you heard earlier, I'm even lagging behind Nodoka when it comes to magic training.”

“I see. But that means you haven't entirely abandoned the idea either, right?”

“Right now I'm just waiting and see how it goes. There is sure to be some sort of reaction from their side because of the recent issue with Khalija-san, so I can't say anything about it right now.”

“If you ask for my personal opinion, I'd rather you didn't go.”

Shouko said something unexpected, causing Yasuo and Diana to be surprised.

“Even without thinking about it too much, it's easy to imagine that you're sure to face a lot of trouble over there, and might also find your life in danger.”

Nodoka had something similar to Diana once in the past, and appealed to Diana to give up on taking her father away.

Diana also understood that feeling, so she couldn't say anything.

However, Shouko's expression hinted at a completely different sense of resolve.

“Besides, if you go away to Ante Lande before my issue is fixed, things might get messy.”

“Messy?”

“Yeah.”

Shouko looked away from the three of them, and stared into the distance.

“If you leave, Yasu-kun, I'll turn into that thing called a Shii again.”

“Eh?”

“What do you mean?”

Diana and Khalija were startled.

Why was Shouko so sure about that?

Even Khalija, who had exercised some control over the Shii using the power of the crimson stone, didn't really understand the logic behind the 『latch』.

“I'm just saying that it is a possibility. I'm not sure about it. But you know how being able to reproduce a phenomenon is important in science, right? After hearing about Ante Lande, I remembered a bunch of stuff that I think happened back when I had turned into a Shii. And then...”

The sun was low in the sky, and the red light of sunset was slowly covering the park.

“No matter what the situation, I strongly think that I want to be able to see you, Yasu-kun.”

““!!””

Diana and Khalija suddenly turned to look at Yasuo at an incredible speed, and as for Yasuo...

“.....Eh?”

He had a stupid expression on his face.

“When I saw you getting along with Diana-san and Khalija-san, I was really angry... But then you, who are so indecisive, sent me that message on ROPE and I was really surprised... But I still ignored your message without reading it and went to take a bath, but I couldn't get it out of my mind...”

“Umm... That is...”

“I...”

A ray of sunlight fell across Shouko's face and illuminated her brilliant smile.

“...Realized that I still love you after all this time, Yasu-kun.”

“.....!!”

“.....Wa wa wa.”

“Ooh?”

Yasuo looked stunned and his face gradually turned red, Diana understood what had happened a second later and looked flustered, and Khalija looked from Shouko to Yasuo as if she was impressed.

“Thank you for the good show.”

“You're welcome.”

Shouko calmly parried Khalija's teasing.

“This is really important, okay? I've loved you ever since we were in middle school, and even though we hadn't met for quite a while, when we met each other again, I realized that I still loved you with all my heart, and so I got really jealous of Diana-san and Khalija-san, and then I ended up turning into a Shii. This is very important, do you understand?”

“A-A-Ah... I.....”

“T-T-T-T-T-That’s right, this is really important, but this is a little difficult to accept all of a sudden.”

“Major Krone, you’re not the one who has to accept it. What are you talking about?”

“Colonel, how can you be so calm!?”

“Just think that I’m not here. As someone who has sinned, I just have to sit quietly with my head lowered and await the ruling.”

Shouko was smiling peacefully as she saw the three people who were reacting in completely different ways to her sudden proclamation of love.

“Calm down. I’m not asking you to go out with me, Yasu-kun. However, this is something important to me, you, and Diana-san and Khalija-san as well, so I thought that I had to tell you. I thought it might be of some use to you when you go to fight against the Shii in the future.”

Using the love of a young girl as a hint to uncover the nature of monsters that are harbingers of death.

The very idea sounded sinful.

“Yasuo, don’t you have anything to say?”

Khalija prodded Yasuo who was sitting in a daze with his mouth open at this completely unexpected situation.

“A-Ah, I mean... that is...”

“It’s fine. I know that it must be hard to respond after hearing something like this all of a sudden.”

Even after being prodded, Yasuo looked like the unprecedented situation was going to make him overheat, and so Shouko stopped him.

“I don’t want to hear an answer that you came up with on the spur of the moment.”

“T-Tatewaki-san, I...”

“Ah, just one thing, Yasu-kun.”

Shouko suddenly pointed her finger at Yasuo, who was still agitated.

“Y-Yes?”

“Shouko.”

“Eh?”

“Shouko. That’s my name.”

“Yeah, I know...”

“If you feel even the slightest bit sorry for getting me mixed up in a mess like this, then call me by my name.”

“Eh!?”

“What, you call Khalija-san by her first name as well, and you don’t even use honorifics with Diana-san, right?”

“Yeah, but you know, that’s not the same thing...”

“There’s no difference. The two of us are already partners on this grand adventure involving a different world called Ante Lande. Is it so strange to not want to be so formal with one of your partners?”

She actually called it a grand adventure.

“A-Ah...”

“Come on, it’s Sho-u-ko.”

“Uwaaaaa..... S-S-Sho...u.....ko...san.”

“Doesn’t the ‘-san’ just make it more embarrassing?”

Even though she said that, it looked like Shouko was also a little embarrassed.

“.....Yeah.”

Yasuo felt like his blood pressure was going to cross the safety limit.

“...Sho....u.....no, I mean, this is...”

This situation was obviously different from calling Diana by her pet name without honorifics.

Calling a girl by her first name without using any honorifics all of a sudden, after she had just said that she loved him straight to his face, that was too difficult.

He could not come up with any logical explanation as to why exactly it was so difficult, but in any case, it was just too difficult.

It even felt like a taboo that he should not touch.

However, that is what Shouko had requested of him.

What kind of situation is this?

What am I doing?

I... I...

“.....Looks like this mission was a little too hard for you, Yasu-kun.”

While Yasuo was thinking that, it was Shouko who backed down first.

“Useless.”

That merciless word from Khalija was the sound that signalled the end of the mission.

“N-No, it’s just that I’ve never done anything like this before, so...”

“Yes, yes, I understand, you can keep calling me like you have been. I’ll just consider that you took my words that seriously. Haa...”

Shouko's smile looked like she was sad, but also relieved in some way. She then looked at Diana who was sitting next to Yasuo and blushing even more than he was.

She was empathizing with Yasuo as if she was the one who was confessed to and was completely lost for words. Just how much cuter could this girl from a different world become?

Shouko thought that she would never be able to become like her, no matter how much time passed.

“It's so hard to have a princess as your opponent...”

Shouko muttered that and lowered her shoulders, and then,

“Well, it looks like we're going to have a fairly difficult relationship from now on, Yasu-kun.”

She said that to Yasuo.

“Yes it does, Tatewaki-san.”

This was his current limit.

“Looking forward to working with you.”

So, for now, the fact that she had a reason to boldly stay by his side was good enough.

That's what Shouko told herself.



“Onii-chan and Diana-san, what happened to the two of you?”

“Oh my, their faces are so red.”

“It looks like they've experienced a lot of things that are difficult for young people to endure.”

After returning home, Yasuo and Diana sat down dazedly in the living room, causing Nodoka to look confused and Madoka also wondered what had happened.

“Difficult things? Was Tatewaki-san unwilling to give her forgiveness?”

“No, that part progressed almost ideally, and she said she was willing to cooperate. However, the process of reaching that point was... I think Nodoka might not believe me even if I tell you.”

“I have no idea what you’re trying to say.”

Nodoka abandoned the matter of Khalija’s explanation that she didn’t understand, and changed the topic.

“So, did you find out anything? About that 『latch』 thing.”

“We discovered one of the triggers that caused Shouko to turn into a Shii. This depends on Yasuo, but there is a way to deal with it.”

“Hauu.”

“...?”

Hearing that, Yasuo turned even redder than before, and Nodoka grew even more confused.

“However, we still don’t know the reason why Shouko became a 『latch』 , that is to say a human capable of transforming into a Shii. Judging by the timing, the only logical explanation is that she somehow came in contact with the Shii during the incident with William Bareig. Besides there’s that person who gave me the circlet capable of controlling the Shii, and I don’t know how she sent the Shii to Japan. It doesn’t seem like she’s related to William in any way. In the worst case, you will have to consider that there were other people working for her who were sent here before me.”

“Even before Khalija-san, could that mean before Diana-san as well? If that’s the case, isn’t that quite dangerous?”

“I don’t know. Considering that nothing happened between the time after Major Korne arrived here through when I arrived, I might just be thinking about this too much... In any case, to remove the Shii from Shouko, she will have to go to Resteria at least once. However, the Shii are something that came from that world in the first place. I don’t know much of an influence that woman who approached me has. We are in a situation where we cannot make any rash moves.”

“...So you’re saying that nothing has changed, and we can only continue wait for something to happen?”

“It’s just as you have said, Madoka. Although it shames me to admit it, I moved only for my personal reasons and personal profit, but there might be people out there who will move because they believe in the cause and their ideals. If such people exist, they will certainly make a move sometime soon, so I think that you will not have to wait very long until something happens.”

Khalija agreed to Madoka’s words with a serious expression.

“Maybe Shouko is the one who should be protected more actively than Yasuo and Nodoka.”

“To protect her from people who are after her because she can turn into a Shii?”

“That’s right. Those people have connections all over the world. There is a chance that they can activate a Gate Tower in a different country based on information obtained in Resteria. You cannot let down your guard at all.”

“So what were they called again? The people who tempted you into doing what you did.”

Khalija looked like she was remembering her painful past as she answered Madoka’s question.

“There is an organization that gathers and supports the refugees who faced losses during the war with Demon King Kaul, who call themselves 『Carnelian of the Coal Mine』 .”

The Grand Duchy of Torjesso no longer existed, but the people who used to live there were not wiped out.

There were many people from Torjesso who escaped to other large countries from the calamitous invasion by the Demon King’s forces and became refugees, and moreover, there were refugees from places other than the Grand Duchy of Torjesso as well.

During the war thirty years ago, in addition to dealing with the direct damage caused by the Demon King’s army, the countries also had to worry about how to handle such refugees as well.

The refugees were also desperate to live, and there were cases where the refugees turned to crime to survive in the countries that had given them shelter.

To reduce those sorts of incidents as much as possible, a number of organizations were set up after war broke out to support the refugees. Carnelian of the Coal Mine was also one such organization.

“That woman... she had silver hair and blue eyes, just like me. She’s probably someone from Torjesso as well. However, the Carnelian of the Coal Mine didn’t restrict themselves to helping only refugees from Torjesso. I cannot imagine just how wide their net extends.”

Those people had suddenly appeared before Khalija, who was in despair due to the failure of the Sinistra, used sweet words to trick her, gave her a circlet with Shii sealed inside, and told her about the secret regarding the 『latch』 .

“The six Shii that attacked all of you when I first came to Japan were set free from my circlet without my approval. Now that I think about it, those people might have been using other people they won over like me to spread the Shii

all over the world. There's also a chance that they had something to do with what happened to the mission during which General Alexei was killed..."

"....."

Seeing Madoka's expression turn stern upon hearing Alexei's name, Khalija told her that woman's name.

"That woman has the title of 『Foreman』 and is probably the leader of Carnelian of the Coal Mine. She introduced herself as Beatrice Heller."

## Afterword

Broadband internet connections started to become common around the time I finished high school and was moving on to college.

Actually, I think the reduction in price and wide adaptation of broadband connections laid the foundations for the internet becoming so popular, but I'm sure there must be some readers of this book who don't even know what the term 『Broadband』 means.

Back when I was a highschool student, internet connections were divided into 『Narrowband』 and 『Broadband』 connections.

As the terms “narrow” and “broad” imply, broadband connections were fast and had a large data capacity that used technology such as ADSL and CATV, and in the current day, these networks are being replaced by fiber optic connections.

On the other hand, narrowband connections used technology based on analog telephone lines, such as ISDN, and while they had low capacity and low speed, they were also much cheaper.

It was a time when the capabilities of digital devices and completeness of the online experience were completely incomparable to how it is today, so there were people who were able to get by just fine with narrowband connections, but back then, being able to 『load the homepage in a few seconds』 was a kind of status symbol, this is actually quite terrifying.

The connection was based on top of the analog phone lines, with a pay-as-you-go system where the bill would increase the more you used it. Moreover, the logic was the same as making a phone call to the ISP through a modem, so when establishing the connection, you would hear sounds from the modem that would make you wonder if it was not possible to do something about this.

After booting up the PC and initiating a network connection,

『 Ga ga ga ga ga ga piiiiiiiiiii hyo ro ro ro ro ro ro ro ro!! 』

If you wanted to send an email,

『 Ga ga ga ga ga ga piiiiiiiiiii hyo ro ro ro ro ro ro ro ro!! 』

Every time a customer at your part-time work place asked you to check the inventory,

『 Ga ga ga ga ga ga piiiiiiiiiii hyo ro ro ro ro ro ro ro ro!! 』

And then, depending on the time of the day and the performance of the computer,

『 Zu... Zu... Zu... Zu... 』

The home page would load so slowly that you could almost hear the sound.

It was almost the same as waiting for a fax to come through.

Something of that standard was quite common, so when broadband connections became more common and detailed home pages could be displayed just a second after clicking the mouse, it was something of a revolution.

Despite that, if you go to an electronics store in the modern day,

“Would you like to purchase a new internet connection~ Would you like to purchase a mobile data plan~”

You get people selling high-speed internet connections in a manner that makes you think even cucumbers or Pacific saury are sold more carefully. This is actually quite terrifying.

It's been a while. I am Wagahara Satoshi, a fossil from the digital Triassic Period.

The things I've talked about so far are from about twenty years ago. You're pretty much an old man once you start reminiscing about the past, but I don't want to go back to those times or think that things were better back then, so I'm probably still just barely safe.

During the writing of the first book of this series, 『Yuusha no Segare』, I talked about how I carried out research regarding the current atmosphere in which current high schoolers take their exams, but students do not just live for the sake of studying.

Studies are certainly their first priority, but life-enriching methods of playing and having a private life are also important parts of living.

However, these are quite difficult to research. More like, completely impossible.

If an old man halfway through his thirties shows up at middle and high schools around the city during a weekday and asks to interview the students, it will definitely have the opposite effect.

However, trying to look back on my own high school life for reference is no good as, apart from using digital devices, when I try to recall what kinds of things I did with my friends for fun, I can only think of 12-hour marathon runs of Daihinmin, which is of no use at all.

Part of me wishes that I had led a more vibrant student life, but the answer would definitely be “no” if you asked me whether I could live such a life if I had the ability to relive those years. So I don't think that I want to go back to those times or think that things were better back then at all.

This book is about the 『now』 of students who are worrying about what they should aim for and how to live their lives.

In the end, most of the things they worry about will not make sense until the appropriate time comes, and while the problems are often easier to solve than

they first appear, I would still like to believe that thinking hard about these issues will be helpful someday.

I will continue to think hard for the purpose of making another interesting story for the next volume, and hope to reunite with all of you people who have read this book again someday.

Goodbye!



## Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ Japanese citizens can vote at 18 years of age, but are not considered adults until they reach 20. The voting age was reduced from 20 to 18 in 2016.
2. ↑ Refers to the Costco Wholesale retail shop in Iruma, Japan.
3. ↑ Gosetsu (五節) are a set of five festivals celebrated in Japan.
4. ↑ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokorozawa\\_Aviation\\_Memorial\\_Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokorozawa_Aviation_Memorial_Park)
5. ↑ Referring to the Kameya Eisen sweets shop.  
<http://aboutfoodinjapan.weblogs.jp/blog/2016/04/history-with-sweet-potato-kameya-eisen-sweets-maker-kawagoe.html>
6. ↑ Echigoya is an oft-used name in period dramas for corrupt merchants who bribe officials to get what they want.  
<http://kyouki.hatenablog.com/entry/2014/08/31/212641>

## **Credits**



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