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SWORD SAINT ADEL'S SECOND CHANCE

《A Peerless **Swordmaster** Begins

《Anew as a **Saint** to **Save the Princess**



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“U-Uh... Yes,
it’s been too long.”

“It really is you,
Adel!”

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“Let’s go, Adel!”

“I shall accompany
you, Princess!”

Adel felt grateful for her new female body.
Before, being so much bigger than
Euphinia would have made it extremely
awkward for them to dance together.

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Chapter 1: Birds of a Feather Flock Together

Welna, the capital of the Kingdom of Wendill, had been very prosperous as a tourist destination for a long time. This was in no small part thanks to its close proximity to Alderford, the mecca of the Holy Tower Church. Pilgrims on their way to Alderford would find Welna to be their last and biggest stop. During the day, welnafare flowers added bright splashes of color to every inch of the City of Flowers, beaming to passersby under the light of the sun. At night, inns and taverns illuminated the streets, creating a quieter and more fantastical mood. No matter the time or occasion, there was always something for everyone in Welna.

However, even a city like Welna eventually went to sleep. The moonlit streets of the City of Flowers were normally beautiful and elegant in their own right, but tonight was...different.

“Hah hah hah! The City of Flowers doesn’t look half bad at night!”

“Lookee at all the flowers we grew in the garden pinned up ev’rywhere! ‘Doesn’t look half bad’ all right!”

“We havin’ a flower viewing at night?! This calls for some good booze!”

“I gotcha covered! Whoo! Everyone, grab a cup!”

A bottle produced seemingly out of thin air got passed around between a group of men. Then they raised their cups.

“Chee—”

“Don’t bring a bottle on patrol!” Mash thundered.

“And don’t drink! You’re on the goddamn job!” Adel added, shouting with equal vehemence.

“Sorry, Boss. Sorry, Boss Lady.”

“Don’t worry, Boss and Boss Lady! There’s enough for you too!”

“This is good stuff I nicked from the dining hall, though!”

“That’s not the issue!”

“And no nicking! If Princess gets in trouble for this, I’ll make *all* of you pay!”

“SHUT! UUUUUUUP!” Melulu roared at everyone, making them quail under her glare. “Keep it down! We’re out here to keep the residents safe, not wake them up! It’s our job to make sure that they can sleep in peace!”

Adel agreed with Melulu wholeheartedly. She was absolutely right. However, her words of wisdom had come a little too late. Several windows in the nearby homes rattled open.

“Shut the fuck up! You know what time it is?!”

“You want me to call the guards and make them drag you away, you useless drunks?!”

“If you don’t leave right now, I’ll call the guards too!”

The nearby residents had clearly reached the ends of their tethers.

Deflating to half her size, Melulu shouted in a soft voice, “W-We’re sorryyyy! We’re leaving. G-Good night...” After she and her group swiftly moved to a different area, she pursed her lips and grumbled, “Jeez, do these guys even understand the position they’re in?”

Thanks to Adel and Mash putting in a good word, the former gladiator slaves had gotten hired as castle guards. But so far, their duties had mainly been miscellaneous tasks like digging holes, carrying tools, and growing welnafare flowers in the castle’s garden. Not once had they been ordered to man the gates or go on patrol. In other words, they had yet to be treated as proper guards.

But tonight, they were officially out on patrol, albeit under the combined supervision of Mash, Adel, and Melulu. Proving that they could pull it off without causing any problems could improve their standing. Unfortunately, the way they were behaving indicated that they were unaware of the opportunity they had been given. It was worrying, to say the least.

“You guys, stop messing around and take this seriously,” Adel called out.

“Remember, you didn’t get this assignment because you earned it; you have to

live up to it.”

The former gladiators had been sent out on patrol simply because there was a lack of manpower. Very soon, the heads of state of the Four World Powers would be gathering here in Welna for the G4 Summit. The G4 Summit was an annual event that represented the current state of the world, where the Four World Powers held enough regard for each other to at least sit at the same table and talk to each other.

Being the “Middle Kingdom,” Wendill highly regarded this opportunity to boost its value to the rest of the world by providing a neutral place for the superpowers to meet. Since Wendill was so much smaller than the other countries, its continued survival hinged on being able to continuously prove its usefulness. This was why it had to ensure that the upcoming G4 Summit went off without a single hitch.

Problem was, there had been no short supply of trouble as of late. Two months ago, Central Tower, the symbol of the Holy Tower Church, had nearly collapsed when Elciel the War Saint went on a massive rampage, seemingly having lost her mind. A short while later, Wendill’s Holy Tower VII had broken down, an event followed by an attempted assassination of Prince Tristan of Torust in the northern city of Sidel. It came to light afterward that both the Tower VII breakdown and the assassination attempt had been masterminded by the Republic of Malka, one of the Four World Powers.

There was no guarantee that Malka wouldn’t try something again at the G4 Summit. As host of the venue, Wendill would get mud all over its face if anything happened, weakening its standing on the world stage. To ensure that the affair ran smoothly and ended peacefully, Wendill was tripling the security it would normally arrange for a Summit.

In this situation where Wendill needed literally every last hand on deck, the former gladiator slaves from the Moving Coliseum of Navarra finally got assigned patrol duty. When Commander Belzen, the head of the knights of Wendill, had given this order, the look on his face made it clear that he was only doing so because he was truly out of options.

“Adel’s right, you guys,” Mash said. “If you do well tonight, you just might get

to do actual guard work on a regular basis.”

Kamotsu, the one best at cultivating flowers, bit back a yawn. “But Boss, Boss Lady, we’re patrolling after a full day of tending to the flowers and digging holes. I’m pooped. Can’t we patrol during the day and rest at night?”

“Oh hell nah. Anyone catches a glimpse of your mug during the day, *you’re* the one who’s gonna get arrested! ’Cos you look like a thug! Bwa ha ha ha!”

“Ain’t that the truth! If it was up to me, I’ll start with you, that’s for sure!”

“*You’re* the one with a face you can only show at night when no one can see jack shit!”

“You wanna say that again, huh?! Pot calling the kettle black much?!”

“Heeeeeelp! There’s a suspicious person here! Please take him away!”

“Screw you! The hell you doing?! You’re way too drunk!”

Judging by how rowdy they were, the men were having a great time.

“Ugh, I’m getting a headache. We should’ve ditched these guys and gone on patrol by ourselves.” Melulu sighed loudly. “Adel, Mash? How did you bear running a mercenary group with them? I can’t see them properly pulling off *any* job. And then there’s you two, who seem more knightly than some of the castle’s actual knights. What even gave you the idea to become mercenaries with them?”

Adel and Mash silently exchanged a look. It wasn’t a look of guilt or alarm, but just a look that said, *Oh, right. We said that, didn’t we?* They had introduced themselves as mercenaries when they’d first met Melulu to gain her trust, but they’d since served as fellow knight escorts in Euphinia’s service for quite some time. They had learned a lot about Melulu’s character and past through the incident in Sidel the other day. She had been quite despondent for a while after getting back, but to their relief, she had been gradually regaining her previous cheer.

In other words, Adel and Mash now had a trusting relationship with Melulu. There was no need to continue keeping up the lie.

The two nodded at each other, then Adel said, “Actually, Melulu...”

“I know it’s a bit late to say this, but we were never mercenaries,” Mash confessed. “Sorry.”

“What?” Melulu’s eyes widened, just in time to see a horse with an awe-inspiring white coat approaching her all of a sudden. “Oh, is that you, Pega? Did you slip away from Princess? Sweetie, you shouldn’t do that! Though I guess it’s not a big deal, since Lilith should still be with her. Aha ha ha, that tickles!”

The horse licked Melulu’s face, then started nuzzling and burying his snout in her chest. By appearances, this was a heartwarming scene of a beautiful animal being playful with a beautiful girl.

“Whooo! The important goods just have to be there, yes sirree! Just feel that jiggle! Jiggle jiggle ♪!”

True to form, the comment was filth that made the former gladiator slaves’ whoops seem like a nobleman’s toast in comparison. Adel felt a headache coming on. In a way, Melulu was lucky for being unable to hear the voices of Divine Beasts. In the previous timeline, when Adel had shared that privilege due to not being a Saint, he had treated Pegasus with quite a bit of respect too. Sometimes, ignorance truly was bliss.

The thought of tying Pegasus up with Salamander’s Tail and sinking him in a river flashed through Adel’s mind. At the moment, her group was on a path next to the Erule River, which flowed through the middle of Welna. The riverbank was right there, down a small flight of stairs beside the path.

Just as Adel’s hand reached for the spelltool at her waist, the Divine Beast stepped away from Melulu and approached Adel.

“Now, let’s have a taste of this jiggle too, shall we?”

“Shut up. And don’t you dare touch me.”

Snap!

Salamander’s Tail cracked like a whip, whirled around the Divine Beast’s face in a split second and pulled him to the ground.

“Whuh?! How could you?! W-Wait, are you a Saint?!”

“Hah? Why’re you asking that?” Adel tilted her head quizzically, wondering

why Pegasus was asking about something he already knew.

It was Melulu who provided the answer.

“Hold on, Adel. This isn’t Pegasus! It’s not Princess’s Divine Beast!”

“What?!”

“Look! He doesn’t have wings. And he has a horn on his head!”

Just as Melulu pointed out, even though this Divine Beast had acted exactly like Euphinia’s Pegasus, his back was noticeably absent of snowy white wings. Instead, an impressive horn stood tall on his forehead. This was a different Divine Beast. It was a Unicorn.

Adel had no clue whose Divine Beast this was, but there was one thing she did know: this Unicorn and Pegasus were cut from the same cloth. As it turned out, someone just as vulgar and perverted as Pegasus did exist.

“We really don’t need another Pegasus, man...”

The very thought that there might be even more of their kind made Adel clutch her head in consternation. Euphinia’s Pegasus alone spewed enough vulgarity for this world.

“Pffft. You’re a dumbass. Adel’s great to look at but completely hands-off. You can enjoy her all you want from a distance, but you’ll pay with your life if you touch her!”

A new voice joined the conversation, sounding proud of itself. As the saying went, speak of the devil and he shall appear. Euphinia’s Pegasus revealed himself hiding at the bottom of the stairs, staring up at Adel with a slimy gaze.

“But boy is she great to look at! She spreads her legs and strips everywhere. There is no other woman who lets her guard down as much as she does!”

“Shut your mouth! What are you doing there?!”

“Oh hey, it’s the real Pega.”

The Divine Beast brushed aside Adel’s hostility with a neigh, then rushed up from the riverbank and nuzzled Melulu fondly.

“Hmm? What’s the matter? Are you angry because I mistook Unicorn for you

just now? Aww, I'm sorry, okay?"

"Woo-hoooo! Look at them jiggles! ♪"

"Melulu, there's no need to apologize!"

The other side of Salamander's Tail shot out, tying up and dragging the real Pegasus to the ground.

"Whoa whoa whoa!"

The two streams of fire extending from either side of Adel's spelltool now formed the composition of a pair of white horses trussed up together like prisoners. If it weren't for the one's wings and the other's horn, they would have been impossible to tell apart.

"A-At least do this without your weapon! You can punch me or kick me— No, please smother me!"

"Or you can choke me out with your legs! I'd do anything to feel those squishy thighs!"

There was no way to tell their personalities apart either. Honestly, Adel had no idea who had said what just now. They both had the same voice to her ears.

"A-Adel!" Melulu cried anxiously. "Princess might be fine with you treating Pega like this, but are you sure about the other one?! You might get in trouble for it!"

"I couldn't care less! They're both the same, as far as I'm concerned!"

"Seriously, why are you so harsh on them?" Mash asked, sounding a little intimidated.

Even the former gladiator slaves started muttering among themselves.

"She never gets that angry, even when we see her in her underwear."

"Well, but it's her who goes 'I just came outta the bath' or 'I just finished training' or 'It's hot.' She's the one in the wrong for stripping to cool off in the guardroom."

"True that. It ain't us. It's her."

"If she knew that, then I wouldn't have to keep yelling at her." Mash sighed.

“When will she fix her habit of taking her clothes off at the drop of a hat?”

Mash would caution Adel every time he saw her doing so, but she was showing no signs of improving. She was an adolescent girl beautiful enough to put flowers to shame, but there wasn't a drop of femininity or modesty in her. This often left the people around her scrambling around in reaction to her whims and fancies. Even Euphinia and Melulu had somewhat given up as of late and were beginning to accept that Adel was simply going to be Adel. Mash was pretty much the only one who was still keeping up the good fight.

“Why *is* Boss Lady that angry, then? Do you think... What if those horses have, like, *really* shitty personalities?”

“C'mon, you kidding? Those are Divine Beasts!”

“I may have been raised like shit, but even I show Divine Beasts respect!”

Through forming contracts with Saints, Divine Beasts provided the power for Sanctuaries and Holy Towers, which in turn secured land where humans could safely live. Areas beyond the protection of a Holy Tower were “profane land” where monsters spawned endlessly. Naturally, such conditions were highly unfavorable for human habitation.

The former gladiator slaves were ruffians, true, but they were still part of human society, which was protected by the Holy Towers as a whole. Divine Beasts and Saints were so crucial to the continued existence of the human race that even the dregs of society thanked them and paid them respect.

“And we're talking about a Divine Beast of Princess Euphinia. The princess who's basically a goddess. I bet he's the perfect gentleman. I bet he's super smart and super courteous to everyone he meets.”

“Sweet darling Adel! Jiggle jiggle or squishy squishy! Jiggle jiggle or squishy squishy! Give me either one! Gimme gimme gimme!”

Pegasus was nowhere near courteous and hadn't a shred of intelligence in his brain. He was in every way the antithesis of a gentleman. The former gladiators' surprisingly earnest trust could not have been further misplaced.

“Oh, put a sock in it! Stop wailing in my ears, you donkey! This one's name is Adel, right? She's so much better developed than my own Saint! Please, girlie!”

Let me taste your jiggle jiggle or squishy squishy!"

"You got a screw loose or what?! You're the donkey! Look into a mirror! Adel is a retainer serving my Saint. That means I have the right to do whatever I want with her! Dumbass!"

"Shut up! You have no such right!"

"Who the hell are you calling underdeveloped, huh?! Well, excuuuse me!"

The moment Adel sent Pegasus flying with a kick, Unicorn got a taste of someone else's foot too. The two Divine Beasts fell heavily with surprised grunts, but Adel paid them no mind. Instead, she turned to the interloper.

"And you are?"

Adel found herself facing a young girl around the same age as Melulu and herself. She had slightly curly black hair tied back in a high ponytail, which exposed her nape. This, added with the fact that she was shorter than Adel, gave her an overall slender and delicate image. However, intelligence shone brightly in her almond eyes, and she radiated a calm and composed aura.

Is this the Saint who's contracted with Unicorn? Adel thought.

"Goodness, and there I was wondering where my Divine Beast had gone. I guess it worked out since we managed to find each other. But first, let me say: I'm really sorry for the trouble my stupid horse caused all of you."

The girl bowed her head in apology.

"Oh, no, I apologize for tying up your Divine Beast," Adel quickly replied. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine. I bet he deserved it. Both of you are his type. Or rather, his whole kind's type. Most Unicorns love women with the right curves in the right places. And they're also sticklers for you-know-what. You get what I mean, right?"

"Um, I-I do... But more importantly, may I ask, who are you?"

Adel did not recall seeing this girl at Wendill Palace. In other words, she was not one of the Saints deployed to Wendill. Naturally, that led to the question of what a visiting Saint was doing out in the streets of Welna at this hour of the night.

There was a lot that Adel wanted to ask, but she suddenly remembered that courtesy dictated that she should first reveal her own identity and what she herself was doing.

“My apologies, we are a patrol sent by the castle—”

“It’s fine, I know. You’re Adel Astal. You’re the eccentric Sanctioned Saint who went to a whole lot of trouble to become knight escort to Princess Euphinia. That last name and that position—you’re an odd one, that’s for sure. Grandma Theodora told me all about you.”

“Hm? Eminent Theodora talked about me?”

The term “Sanctioned Saint” referred to Saints who held power in the secular world, such as nobles and royalty. There was a precept in the Church’s teachings that forbade Saints from holding secular authority, and another precept that obligated all girls exhibiting the abilities of a Saint to join the Church and live as a Saint.

Every so often, however, there were Saints who had also been born with secular authority. Euphinia was a prime example. She was a member of royalty born with the abilities of a Saint. This put the two precepts in direct conflict. Saints could not hold secular power, but she was born with it; since she possessed the abilities of a Saint, she had to live as a Saint.

The solution to this contradiction was the position of “Sanctioned Saint.” Put simply, Sanctioned Saints were granted express permission to hold secular power under the pretext that it was part of a mission assigned by the Church. The large majority of Sanctioned Saints were those born into noble and royal families like Euphinia, but there were some who had married into such families.

Adel’s case was neither of those. She had badly wanted to be Euphinia’s knight escort, just as in the previous timeline. To make it happen, she’d managed to convince the Church to declare her a Sanctioned Saint.

To someone not privy to the details, this made no sense, as Saints were the ones who needed protection. It was probably safe to say that there had never been a Sanctioned Saint who wanted to be another Saint’s knight escort. After all, that status was nowhere near as high as actual nobility. In fact, it was so minor that it wouldn’t make sense for the Holy Tower Church to hand out

Sanctioned Saint status for every request of this degree. If they did, it would defeat the purpose of having the system in the first place. As such, Adel's case was a very big exception that had been pushed through quite forcibly.

For added context, Adel's last name was Astal. This last name was shared by all orphans raised at Astal Orphanage in the Holy Kingdom of Rakul. In other words, those who knew the last name could immediately tell that Adel had come from extremely low origins. This was another reason why it was so unusual that she was a Sanctioned Saint. When strung together, the phrase "Sanctioned Saint Adel Astal, knight escort of Princess Euphinia of the Kingdom of Wendill" screamed "special case" in a plethora of ways.

The black-haired girl standing before Adel supposedly had a full understanding of Adel's complicated circumstances. And she had called Theodora "grandma."

"So...you're from Alderford?" Adel asked.

"AHHHHHHH!" Melulu suddenly shouted, pointing a finger at the girl.

Adel whirled in surprise. "Wh-What's the matter, Melulu?!"

"Do you know her?!" Mash asked, sounding equally surprised. At the moment, his face was hidden deep within his hood so as to avoid scaring anyone passing by in the night.

"A-Adel! Mash! Hurry, kneel! Guys, you too! You have to greet her properly!" Melulu urged while following her own advice. "She might look our age, but she's an Eminent! Same as Saint Theodora! I've spotted her once. She's the Artificer Saint!"

"The Artificer Saint..." Adel murmured.

The seven Saints most recognized by the Holy Tower Church were referred to as Eminents, and all of them had an alias. For example, Theodora was the Tower Saint, and Elciel used to be the War Saint. Supposedly, this teenage girl was the Artificer Saint.

"We're very sorry," Mash apologized. "Please forgive us for failing to greet you as we should have."

“Nah, it’s fine,” the girl said cheerily. “I’ve been looking forward to working with you guys. My name’s Chloe Navarra. Nice to meetcha.”

Chloe was smiling and giving off a friendly aura, but her last name immediately triggered a reaction.



Adel's eyes narrowed. "Did you say Navarra?"

"So, you're related to Cardinal Navarra?" Mash asked apprehensively.

"What, you guys know my grandfather?" Chloe asked. "He almost never shows himself in public, though. In a word, yes. I'm Cardinal Navarra's granddaughter."

Mention of the name Navarra made Adel and Mash recall their days in the Moving Coliseum of Navarra. In the previous timeline, Adel had been subjected to human experiments by Cardinal Navarra in the Coliseum that had permanently robbed him of his sight. Even now, Mash was left with the head of a lion, and the other gladiator slaves all bore disfigurements of some kind.

Chloe's name had never come up in the Coliseum, so there was no way to tell how deeply she was involved with the experiments, if at all. However, Adel and Mash were naturally on high alert. Even the former gladiator slaves were reacting to the name of Navarra.

Someone gasped. "N-Navarra?! I-I think I've heard that name before!"

Fisher, a former gladiator who was good at diving and was at least smart enough to manage the other guys in some capacity, retorted, "Of course you have, dumbass. You can't have forgotten. Right, guys?!"

"Like hell I'd forget! Like hell *any* of us would forget! ...Right?!"

"Of course! Don't insult me! ...Right?!"

"Fisher couldn't have put it better! Anyone who's forgotten has no right to call himself human!"

"Uh... Sorry, guys. What is it? T-Tell me."

An awkward silence lingered heavily in the air, until Fisher shrieked, "NONE of you remember?!"

Almost as a knee-jerk reaction, Adel and Mash yelled, "Shut up, all of you!" The conversation was going nowhere with the guys derailing it.

"See that, donkey? My Saint may be a squirt, but she's a big shot! Don't get in my way again if you don't want me to tear you apart and make a spelltool out

of you!"

"Do you even hear yourself?! You're nothing but an ass strutting about in a tiger's skin! You're— Wait a hot second. I-It's you! You're Nico! You're Nico from the Unicorn herd!"

"What?! Youuuuuuu! You're Pega! The loner Pegasus! Last time I saw you was when you were chased out of our herd! I thought you'd died in a ditch somewhere long ago! Well how about you drop dead now?!"

"How about you get the fuck outta my business?! I'm better than you weakass Unicorns who can't do jack shit without your whole herd behind you! In the first place, you being here contracted with that pip-squeak means you got chased out too, didn't you?! You can eat shit!"

The two horses tied up with Salamander's Tail smashed their foreheads together, giving each other the death stare. Apparently they had a history, and they were equally foulmouthed.

"What the fuck?! Your Saint is even punier than mine! There ain't no benefits with that! You had to settle, didn't you?! At the end of the day, that's all you're worth! You don't get what it means to be a Unicorn at all! You're nothing but a cheap copy, you donkey!"

"You don't know what you're talking about! Euphinia's still got a ton of potential! The day when she becomes jiggle jiggle and squishy squishy will come!"

This time, it was Adel and Chloe who shouted in unison. "Shut UP! God!" Then they stomped on Pegasus and Unicorn respectively.

Chloe sighed. "Looks like these two know each other. How can they be *more* than twice as noisy when together? I'm already fed up. This does not bode well for the future."

"I couldn't agree more," Adel nodded. "Their conversation was simply unbearable."

Based on what she had just heard, Adel surmised that Euphinia's Pegasus had wandered into a herd of Unicorns by himself long ago and been raised by them, eventually picking up their values and preferences. In other words, there were

many more like them in this world. What a deplorable state of affairs.

“By the way, what did you mean by ‘for the future’?” Adel asked.

“Well, the G4 Summit is just around the corner, but things have been rather unsettled as of late. The Holy Tower Church is concerned too, especially with how close Welna is. So, they decided to send someone to help with security. Grandma Theodora wanted to come herself, but her health isn’t the best at the moment. So, the ball got passed to me. I just arrived from Alderford.”

“Ah, so that’s why...”

Adel recalled someone mentioning that the Church would be petitioned for help with bolstering security this year. She had expected knight escorts and Temple Guards, but an Eminent had shown up instead. This was a gesture that proved the Church was taking the situation seriously too.

Even so, Adel couldn’t help but be bothered by Chloe’s last name. A small part of her kept wondering if there was something else going on. She would much rather have worked with Theodora, who she already trusted.

“Wow, you’re working with us?! Thank you so much, Saint Chloe!” Melulu, who didn’t know everything Adel did, was wholeheartedly happy.

“That said, as you can tell from my alias, I’m really just a spelltool artisan. I’m nowhere near as good in a fight. You’re the one who stopped Elciel, right? Yeah, no way I could do that. So, I’ll be counting on you!” Chloe gave Adel a smile, then patted her on the shoulder. “Since this mission fell into my lap, I have to do it well, or it’d mar my reputation. But if I manage to perfectly accomplish a task that Grandma Theodora was supposed to do, it would further prove that I’m the right person to succeed her position as head of the Eminents. This is a big opportunity for me.”

“I-I see...”

Adel had first pegged Chloe as a craftsman who only cared about her craft, but it turned out she was quite the ambitious person indeed.

Chapter 2: Chloe Navarra

Three days later, Adel was perched on the windowsill in the knight escort quarters, a suite located close to Euphinia's room reserved for the princess's knight escorts. The night sky was clear and sprinkled with brightly twinkling stars. Adel liked gazing at sights and sceneries like this. To her, a star-studded sky was just as great as the garden of welfare flowers behind the castle, filled as it was with vivid splashes of color under the dazzling illumination of the sun. These were both things that she had been unable to enjoy in her past life, having been condemned to a world of darkness.

In the past timeline, before Adel lost his sight, he had been a mere child, and therefore not mature enough to fully appreciate such sights. Now, not only had Adel regained her sight, she had also secured a place beside the liege to whom she wanted to devote her life. The peace she had obtained allowed her to finally stop to smell the roses every once in a while.

Adel slowly lifted the cup in her hands to her lips, her eyes still fixed on the starry sky. Before such a beautiful sight, the drink seemed even more delicious than usual. Of course, what she was drinking wasn't wine, but freshly pressed juice. She still had to go on patrol after this. It wasn't appropriate to show up drunk, and it would set a bad example for her subordinates. A single cup would have been nothing for her past self, but that was a different person in a different time.

"What a beautiful night sky. Here's to hoping that nothing untoward happens —"

Click.

The door opened, and Mash poked his head in.

"Adel, it's almost time to head— ADEL! What are you doing?!"

"What? This isn't wine. I specifically asked for juice."

"Not that! Your clothes! Wear some damn clothes!"

The only thing that Adel was wearing up top was her underwear. Her bottom half was properly clothed, but she was sitting cross-legged with her legs spread wide open.

“Huh? Oh, right. I was getting to it. I just took a bath and was feeling hot.”

This was a habit from when Adel was still blind. Putting on clothes without being able to see had been a chore, so Adel simply didn’t unless the situation called for it. Having gotten used to this, Adel now felt hot simply being properly clothed. Therefore, she often took off her clothes to get more comfortable. A frequent example of this practice was when she came out of the bath.

When the Armor of Lamentation had belonged to Adel, its ability to come to its owner also came in handy for immediately covering up if anyone was around. But she no longer had the armor, and so situations like this—Mash walking in on her being half-naked—happened every once in a while.

“How many times have I told you, Adel? If you want to cool off, do it in your own room!”

“I like the view from here, though.”

“That’s not as important as protecting what you should protect! In any case, hurry and cover yourself up.”

“Man, you nag like a mother-in-law sometimes. *Now* who’s the woman?”

Having the body of a woman was a detriment in such situations. If Adel had remained a man, no one would have thought twice.

Turning his back to Adel, Mash snapped, “I don’t want to hear it! Hurry up or we’re going to be late!”

“All right, all right, I’m doing it.”

“So, what’d you think of Saint Chloe? Did you catch anything suspicious about her?”

Despite Chloe’s prestige as an Eminent and promise to cooperate, Adel and Mash were still having trouble trusting her. Elciel had been an Eminent, and she had gone mad and started attacking everyone on sight in Alderford. Just being an Eminent was not a guarantee that someone was trustworthy.

Just in case, Mash had so far kept his face hidden from Chloe. He was so wary that he had also shifted things around so that he led a different group from Adel's and Chloe's when patrolling at night.

"Nothing yet," Adel said. "Maybe we are being a bit too on edge, but it never hurts to be careful."

"I couldn't agree more. Problem is, now we don't know if we've gained an ally or not."

"True. We can't help being suspicious of her. I'd much rather it was Saint Theodora who came. Or at least another— Speaking of, I heard that someone else might be coming too."

After being sent back in time, Adel had met three Eminent: Theodora the Tower Saint, Elciel the War Saint, and Chloe the Artificer Saint. However, there was one more whom she was acquainted with. In fact, they had grown up together. The person in question had eventually become an Eminent in the previous timeline, but Adel had no idea whether it had happened yet. Their last reunion had been when the Great War had already been underway for quite some time, long after Euphinia's passing.

"There's another Eminent you know?" Mash asked.

"I...think so? I don't know if she is one right now, but she should at least be a candidate."

"She must be a really talented Saint, then."

"You bet. In a way, she is even more powerful than Elciel."

In the previous timeline, this woman had been Adel's ally. In other words, she had been a Saint who stood with the League of Southern Nations against Mad Emperor Tristan and the Northern Federation. Consequently, and due to Adel's preference for going off and fighting alone, Adel had never faced her in battle, nor witnessed her from the side or stood shoulder to shoulder with her.

"That's high praise. How'd you get to know her?"

"Oh, that's simple. We grew up together in the same orphanage in Rakul."

"I see. So she's a Saint who came from an orphanage."

“Indeed. Her name is Katina. Katina Astal.”

When the Great War ended in the previous timeline, Katina had been about to become queen to the newly restored Kingdom of Wendill. The original country had been wiped out near the beginning of the Great War, with the king and Euphinia both struck down. However, Julian, Euphinia’s brother and the original successor to the throne, managed to survive thanks to the protection and aid of Eminent Katina Astal, who was also the love of his life. Julian had then assumed the crown and revived his country with Katina standing beside him every step of the way.

Right before being sent back in time, Adel had been attending a feast. The famous black-armored Swordmaster had been summoned to receive official recognition from the new King Julian. By then, there were already plans for Julian and Katina to be wedded soon.

However, Adel could not have cared less. With Euphinia gone forever and plans of revenge fulfilled, there was nothing left to live for. There hadn’t been a moment’s hesitation before leaping at the Watcher’s offer.

“So, you’re saying...” Mash started.

“Nothing. Just that I would have preferred to have her here instead of Chloe.”

“Well, I’m cool with anyone you’d vouch for.”

“I have an eye for people. Oh wait, but...”

I’ve turned into a woman after coming back in time, Adel thought. What will Katina think when she sees me?

Needless to say, Adel had been a boy in Astal Orphanage. If Katina found Adel like this, it would raise all sorts of questions. In the worst-case scenario, Katina might conclude that she was an impostor who had killed the real Adel and stolen his name.

“Ugh, that might be problematic in its own way. Chloe’s still marginally better, then, I guess. But she brought Unicorn with her, which is like having two Pegasi running around. And *that’s* absolutely deplorable.”

“What’s this about me being marginally better? Are you guys just tolerating

me?” Chloe asked, making Adel and Mash jump in surprise. They had failed to notice when the Saint had joined them in the knight escort quarters.

“Saint Chloe?!” Mash hurriedly pulled his hood back on in a fluster. “I apologize, it was nothing!”

Chloe had every right to be in the palace, as she had come to Welna to bolster the security measures for the G4 Summit. However, the room that she had been allocated was in the Saints quarter, alongside the other Saints under Mother Claire’s oversight. She had no business being here.

“Hey, I understand being sick of having two vulgar and chatty Divine Beasts around,” Chloe chuckled. “Princess Euphinia kept a smile on her face the whole time, though. I can’t tell if she’s just got *that* big a heart, or if she’s merely still too young to understand what they’re saying. Regardless, you two are serving a really incredible person.”

“It’s definitely the former!” Adel declared emphatically. “Her Highness has a heart deeper and wider than the ocean, a heart that envelops and accepts everyone for who they are! In her infinite mercy, she insists on reforming Pegasus instead of abandoning him, no matter how abhorrent he is. Also, her talent as a Saint is so extraordinary that it surprised even Saint Theodora! After Saint Theodora taught her how to repair a Holy Tower, she pulled it off right away!”

“Wh-Whoa... You suddenly get really talkative when it comes to Princess Euphinia, huh.”

“My *raison d’être* is to serve Princess Euphinia, so obviously I adore her from the bottom of my heart! I can list her charms all day long. Actually, why don’t I tell you? Come on, take a seat!”

“I, uh, I’m good, I think. Maybe next time. I actually came to fetch you for something.”

“What for?”

“Actually, you know what? Showing is better than telling. Can I experience Princess Euphinia’s charms in person? While we go on patrol together, say?”

“You’re in for a treat!”

Adel nodded enthusiastically and followed Chloe out.



An hour later, Adel's group was high up in the sky, looking down on the city of Welna from Pegasus's back.

"Squishy squishy, squishy squishy! Having the butts of beautiful girls pressing into my back is simply hea-ven-ly! This feels so goooooood! I'm so glad I have wings!"

"Shut up. Don't dirty Princess's ears with your filth."

Adel tied Pegasus's mouth up with Salamander's Tail, robbing him of the ability to speak.

"Thank you," Chloe said appreciatively. "It was very distracting."

"Umm... Don't hurt Mr. Pega too much. Okay, Adel?"

"Of course, Princess! Don't worry, I'm controlling my strength!"

The group on Pegasus's back consisted of Adel, Euphinia, and Chloe. Mash and Melulu were standing by down on the ground.

"Okay, can we stop here?"

"Mr. Pega, stop here please."

Obediently, Pegasus killed his momentum and hovered in place.

"Okay, one right here," Chloe murmured, taking out a circular item and throwing it downward. It was a spelltool, as it had a small anima crystal embedded in the middle. It sank into the Erule River down below and disappeared beneath the water.

"We need to go that way next," Chloe said, pointing.

"Please follow her instructions, Mr. Pega," Euphinia said.

"Was that a spelltool just now?" Adel asked.

"Yep, it was," Chloe replied. "One that I made myself."

"What does it do?"

"Let's call it...fishing."

“Fishing? You’re not talking about catching freshwater fish and eating them, I take it?”

“Nah, ’course not. Ah, this is good. Stop here.”

Once again, Chloe threw a spelltool into the night. As expected, it sank into the river running through Welna. Things continued in this way several more times, with Chloe dropping another spelltool at each stop. It seemed like she was intentionally hitting every single waterway connecting the city to the outside, from where the Erule River flowed in to every single tributary flowing out.

With a serious face, Euphinia asked, “Eminent Chloe, do you think there’s something in the river? Something that could pose a threat to the G4 Summit?”

“Yes, I do.” Chloe nodded. “Or at least, it’s a possibility. Nico said that he was picking up on a strange presence. Did Pega mention anything? They might not look like it, but these guys are sensitive to that kind of thing.”

“Adel, can you free Mr. Pega please?”

“Of course, Princess.” Letting Pegasus speak was going to be irritating, but there was no other choice. Adel retracted her fiery whip. “So, Pegasus, do you sense anything?”

“You bet I do. Something truly foul and nauseating. It’s coming from underneath the pretty lady’s ass!”

In other words, from Chloe’s shadow. And someone wasn’t going to take the slight lying down.

“Shut the fuck up, donkey! No one asked you to be a wiseass!” Unicorn poked only his head out and stabbed Pegasus’s neck with his horn.

“OW! Adel, sweet Adel! Save me! I’m gonna fall because of this idiot! We’re fallingggggg!”

“Cerberus?”

“I would really appreciate not being summoned for things like this,” Cerberus grumbled as his own head rose out of Adel’s shadow. *“So, whose head am I chomping off?”*

“Eeeep!” cried both Unicorn and Pegasus, with Unicorn promptly making himself scarce again.

“Stop mucking around and answer us seriously,” Adel said crossly.

“Mr. Pega, please!” Euphinia implored.

“Well... Umm... I guess I sense something...maybe? It’s like, something might be there, but I can’t see it. It’s hard to say for sure.”

Adel frowned. “What does that mean?”

“If they can’t see the source, that can only mean only one thing,” Chloe said, gesturing downward.

“It’s hiding at the bottom of the river?” Adel ventured.

“Which is why I’m now trying to flush it out. Okay, that’s the bait all set. Let’s get back.”

Under Chloe’s instruction, Pegasus set the group down on one of the Erule River’s largest sandbanks. Mash, Melulu, and Chloe’s knight escorts stepped up, joining them. That group had evacuated the area earlier on, ensuring that there wasn’t a single resident in sight. Onlookers had gathered on both sides of the river, curious about what all the knights were there for, but they were far enough back to be safe.

“Looks like the evacuation’s complete, and this thing is properly set up. Good job, guys,” Chloe said as she looked up at a giant door standing all by itself out in the open. The sight was so odd, of course it had gathered onlookers.

Carvings of a horse head and wings topped the door’s frame as anima crystals ran down its sides. Each nearly the size of a fist, these anima crystals were much bigger than the ones embedded in the spelltools that Chloe had been scattering into the river.

“What is this, Saint Chloe?” Adel asked.

“It’s a spelltool, right?” Euphinia guessed.

“It definitely is.” Chloe nodded. “It’s called Pegasus Gate. Everything that gets sucked through the small portals I dropped into the river will come out of this big one.”

“Pegasus Gate,” Euphinia murmured. “I never knew anima crystals from Mr. Pega’s kind could do something like this. The stories say that Pegasi are originally steeds that the gods rode to travel between worlds. Are you harnessing that ability to transcend space?”

“Exactly. When creating spelltools, you have to choose the anima crystal based on the effect that you want. It won’t work otherwise.”

Understanding gleamed in Adel’s eyes. “Ah, so you’re hoping that this will help us find whatever it is that’s hiding in the river. Still, this is a lot of anima crystals. Did you not consider making weapons with them?”

Impressions notwithstanding, Pegasus was a high-tier Divine Beast. A spelltool made using a Pegasus anima crystal would undoubtedly be very powerful, and that was even before factoring in the ability that it would have. Adel was satisfied with Salamander’s Tail because its different forms came in handy and she could raise its output with Ki Amplification, but it was by no means a powerful spelltool. In terms of sheer power, it was inferior to Sylphid’s Spear.

“You think more like a knight than a Saint,” Chloe chuckled.

“I obtained the abilities of a Saint only by chance. I *wanted* to be a knight.”

“Then I guess I can’t fault you for first thinking about weapons you can protect your liege with. But let me offer you a different point of view. Say a large storm hit a fishing village and destroyed all of its boats. With Pegasus Gate, the villagers wouldn’t have to go hungry despite being unable to go out to sea. Those who are too old to move could also use it to feed themselves. That’s helping people too, isn’t it? Spelltools that can do things like this are a boon in their own way. I actually prefer making this kind of spelltool over weapons. Though of course, I get a lot more thanks from the Church and knight escorts for making weapons.”

“Hmm, I see your point.”

To be honest, Adel was surprised to hear such a respectable perspective from the granddaughter of Cardinal Navarra, a man who had laughed while toying with the lives of his gladiator slaves in the name of scientific development. Swapping Mash’s head with that of a lion monster and destroying Adel’s eyes in an attempt to gauge the efficacy of boosted self-regeneration had been but two

out of countless other experiments that he had performed. The man hadn't had a shred of human compassion in his body.

The sheer madness that Adel associated with the name of Navarra was very much at odds with the humanitarian considerations that Chloe was raising. Adel shot a look at Mash and found eyes filled with bewilderment returning her gaze from the depths of his hood.

"That's so wonderful!" Euphinia gushed. "I want to be a Saint who can save a lot of people like you, Eminent Chloe!"

The princess looked at Chloe with deep respect in her eyes. Unlike Adel and Mash, she was wholeheartedly moved by the Eminent's words.

"Ooh, really? If you're interested, feel free to come pay me a visit in my atelier in Alderford when things settle down. I'll teach you how to make spelltools."

"I'd love that very much!"

"Grandma Theodora was raving about how talented you are at erecting Holy Towers. Holy Towers are spelltools too, so I'm sure you have a knack for them."

"Oh, please. I was getting in Eminent Theodora's way more than anything else, really."

"That's not true!" Adel cut in. "Princess, you did an absolutely amazing job repairing that Holy Tower! The difference between you and me was like night and day, proving that your talent is truly extraordinary. No one can say otherwise!"

During the incident the other day, when Holy Tower VII broke down and the surrounding area reverted to profane land, Euphinia had repaired the damaged structure under Theodora's direct instruction. And not long after, the princess had even managed to modify the technique to mark Wolff Sedis's location with a pillar of anima.

After Euphinia repaired Holy Tower VII, Theodora had actually given Adel the exact same training. Adel tried, but had been unable to do it nearly as well. There was no doubt that Euphinia's potential as a Saint was simply remarkable. Adel felt nothing but happiness at the massive gap in talent between herself

and Euphinia, as all she wanted was the strength to protect the princess. The more incredible her liege was, the prouder Adel was.

“Ah ha...ah ha ha... Thank you, Adel.” Euphinia smiled shyly, slightly overwhelmed by Adel’s intensity.

“All right, let’s begin!” Chloe called out. “Adel, hit the water in that spot with a big attack. The idea is to give whatever’s in there a fright. If they try to escape by swimming out of the city, they’ll end up being caught by the small portals.”

“You got it! Now *this* is up my alley!”

“Princess Euphinia, please deploy a Sanctuary for the knights to use. I’ll focus on operating Pegasus Gate.”

“Understood, Eminent!” Euphinia calmed her breathing, then raised her right hand up high. “Sanctuary!”

Surprise struck Chloe’s knight escorts like lightning.

“My heavens! What is with this enormous Sanctuary?!”

“Not only is the anima almighty, it is unbelievably dense! The spells we cast are going to be more powerful than anything we’ve ever seen!”

Even Chloe whistled in appreciation. “Oh, damn! No wonder Grandma Theodora kept going on and on about you having more potential than anyone she’d ever seen.”

“Now you finally get it!” Adel crowed. “Princess’s talent pierces the sky and her name thunders across the land!”

“What’re you grinning for, Adel?” Chloe chided. “Get moving already!”

Adel gave a start. “Ah, my apologies.”

Mash sighed. “Yeah, she deserved that.”

“She always looks happiest when Princess is being praised,” Melulu agreed wryly. “In fact, that’s the most excited I’ve ever seen her, I think.”

“Ahem. Sorry, Saint Chloe. All right, I’ll begin. Cerberus, you ready?”

“*Anytime.*”

Adel pressed a hand to her chest. As her fingers sank into the generous mounds, she sent every drop of her ki to the presence she felt deep within.

Ki was the anima that all humans produced. However, those who could sense and manipulate that energy were even more of a rarity than Saints. According to legend, in the distant past before the Holy Kingdom shattered into the Four World Powers, many champions possessed the ability. The founding king of the Holy Kingdom was a prime example. However, there was no way to ascertain the validity of these claims in the current age.

Even including the previous timeline, the only other ki user Adel had ever encountered was Wolff Sedis, Melulu's father. And now that she was a Saint too, she could combine this ability of champions with the Divine Beast who had become a part of her to pull off a technique that not even the history books had mentioned.

Fwooooooosh!

A pillar of flames engulfed Adel's body and burst into the sky, searing the very night.

"Wait, what's happening?!"

"What incredibly concentrated anima!"

"Look at Saint Adel!"

Even Chloe was shocked. "Wh-What is that?! I've never heard of this! Is this the power you used to defeat Big Sis Elciel?!"

When Adel stepped out of the flames, she had Cerberus's ears perched on her head and a big, bushy tail slowly waving behind her back. Ki Possession was a technique that allowed Adel to fuse her existence with that of her Divine Beast's. When she used it, her body manifested physical attributes of that particular Divine Beast.

"Adel, you look so lovely! Really, really, really lovely!" Euphinia cried, staring at Adel with stars in her eyes. She adored the way that Adel looked when using Ki Possession. She had even told Adel in person that she couldn't get enough of her animal ears and tail. And there was no way that Adel would feel bad about something that Euphinia loved.

“Thank you very much, Princess!”

“Can you turn around a little? I want to see your tail!”

“Of course, Princess! Feel free to touch it as much as you want!”

“Yaaaay! It’s so fluffy and soft. And it’s warm, like a bath. Every time I touch it, I experience all over again how good it feels.”

“Ha ha ha. Would you want me to try lifting you with my tail?”

“Oh, yes please! Aha ha ha! It’s so fuuuuun!”

“STOP PLAYING AROUND!” Chloe roared. “I told you to get to work, Adel!”

After jumping in fright, Adel and Euphinia mumbled apologies with guilty faces. Adel had gotten so elated seeing Euphinia happy that she had forgotten herself.

Mash and Melulu simply sighed and shook their heads.

“All right, getting back on track! Yah!”

Adel thrust the palm of her right hand toward where the Erule River was widest. The next instant, a fireball appeared in front of her hand. The fire was not red or blue, but black. This was the black flame spoken of in myths passed down among the Cerberi. The fireball grew at a visible rate, quickly exceeding Adel’s height.

“Th-This is phenomenal!”

“How many of us would it take to create that much fire?!”

With Chloe’s knight escorts buzzing with astonishment behind her back, Adel launched her ball of black fire at the spot where the water was deepest.

BOOOOOOOOM!

When the fireball landed, a giant pillar of water erupted. The shock wave had likely been heard very far away, as water conducted sound better than air.

Everyone present went “Whoa!” as Chloe giggled excitedly. “That was even more powerful than I expected! If there really is something in the water, they’re gonna be frightened out of their skin!”

The spelltool set up in the middle of the open space started glowing faintly.

“Now, let’s see what we scared up,” Chloe murmured as she opened the doors, revealing a slowly rotating squiggly whirlpool of air in front of a dark void that was impossible to see through. The next moment, a few freshwater fish leaped out, splashing vigorously.

“It’s just fish,” Melulu noted, sounding a little let down.

“Well, that *is* what Pegasus Gate was originally made for. Nothing came through this time, and that’s fine. Adel, keep going!”

“Understood, Saint Chloe!”

Adel started spamming black fireballs, making the river surface burst with geysers again and again. More and more fish were startled into jumping through the small portals which spat them back out through Pegasus Gate.

“Hey, Nico, Pega!” Chloe called out. “Do either of you feel any change in whatever’s out there?!”

“I can’t tell anything with all these explosions going on,” Unicorn protested.

“Hah! Look at this donkey blaming his own ineptitude on my dear Adel,” Pegasus scoffed. *“I can see everything when I take to the skies!”*

“You wanna say that again?!”

“Then do it!” Chloe snapped. “Stop lazing around and get moving!”

“Oh, there’s no point talking to him!” Nico cackled. *“The only value you can get outta that donkey is by killing him, turning him into an anima crystal, and adding it to your spelltool!”*

“Nico, you stop running your mouth too! If you can’t tell, then go dive into the water or something!”

“Y-Yes, ma’am,” both horses replied meekly before speeding away like they had been banished.

Adel continued lobbing fireballs into the water while watching the exchange. But then suddenly, the output of her flames plummeted. They sputtered in small bursts that disappeared before forming a sphere.

“Hm? What’s wrong, Cerberus?”

“I’m afraid you’ve fired too many shots. There’s a limit to my flames.”

“Ah, we’ve overdone it. Sorry. Rest up a little.”

Adel hadn’t felt anything herself from Cerberus’s fatigue, so there was no way for her to know. However, it was true that they had hit a personal best in the number of fireballs launched, so she was understanding. Unfortunately, even though Cerberus was going to rest, Adel’s transformation was going to last a little while longer.

“Saint Chloe, it appears Cerberus is spent. He needs some time to rest.”

“Mm, okay. There’s no helping it.”

“Want me to take over?” Mash offered. “I can’t match the scale of your flames, but it’d be better than nothing.”

“Oh right, I forgot about that. Yeah, go for it, Mash.”

Ki Amplification was originally a technique Adel had come up with to bolster the function of spelltools by infusing them with ki. During her fight with Wolff Sedis a short while ago, however, she had accidentally discovered that she could also apply it to augment the birds of fire that Mash created with spells.

Ki was an energy with a truly wide range of applications. When Adel worked with Divine Beasts, she could use it to perform Ki Possession. When she worked with casters like Mash, she could use it to amplify the power of their spells. It was entirely possible that there were many more ways to use ki that she simply hadn’t figured out yet.

For now, Adel placed a hand on Mash’s shoulder, then directed ki into his body like she always did when using Ki Amplification.

“All right, here goes!”

Mash’s hands formed several seals in quick succession, then a bird of fire appeared. Not only was this bird several notches larger than usual, its flames were blue, indicating that it was also much, much hotter.

Melulu, who was seeing this for the first time, exclaimed, “Whoa! It’s like you’re casting a completely different spell!”

The bird of blue fire glided above the river surface for a while, then suddenly took a plunge. A split second later, an explosion went off, followed by a geyser of water. The firebird had achieved the same result as the fireball, albeit on a smaller scale. This spoke volumes about the destructive power packed into the bird. By Adel's estimation, it was on par with an attack delivered with Salamander's Tail if she took the time to gather her ki and turn the spelltool into a giant blade of flames.

The good thing about this strategy was that it was much more efficient in terms of ki expenditure, as it only cost as much as using Ki Amplification. On Mash's end, casting firebirds with and without Adel's ki fatigued him just the same. The two of them working together were simply much better at dealing damage.

Chloe nodded. "Yes, that works too. It's more than good enough. Keep it up!"

Mash complied, proceeding to launch birds of blue fire nonstop.

"Actually, can you control where those birds go? Like, can you send them there, there, and there?" Chloe asked, pointing at directions all around.

"I will give it a try!"

Immediately, the fiery projectiles began flying into the river at faraway spots. Pegasus Gate started spewing out fish, turtles, and waterfowl at an increasing rate, practically throwing up every living creature that called the Erule River home.

"Phew," Mash sighed. "How's that?"

He was in the middle of taking a small break when suddenly, something burst out of the water.

"What the actual fuck?! Are you trying to kill me?! Your attack grazed my ass! Look at this, dipshit! You've gone and singed my tail!"

It turned out to be Unicorn, who had actually done as Chloe ordered and dived into the water. He made a beeline for Mash while shouting angrily, violently whipping his tail to draw attention to the spot where it was indeed a little blackened.

“Wh-What is he saying, Adel?”

Sadly, none of Unicorn’s words reached Mash. Only Saints could understand Divine Beasts.

“Apparently, your spell hurt him a little. He’s not happy about it.”

Wish it had been a direct hit, Adel thought, but she didn’t say it out loud.

“I-I see... I’m sorry.” Mash lowered his head apologetically.

However, Unicorn showed no sign of being appeased. *“What, that’s it?! When you apologize to someone, you gotta do it properly! Don’t keep your face hidden! You stink, you know that?! You reek like a monster! Are you bathing yourself properly?!”*

With a smooth movement, Unicorn used his horn to flip Mash’s hood back. Both Adel and Mash gasped in surprise.

“Wh-What the... That’s a, uh, pretty sweet look you got there. I-Is that fashion or something?”

The belligerent Divine Beast balked and backed up a step, allowing Chloe to see what had been revealed.

“Wait, that look— Are you...?”

Before Chloe could press the matter, however, Pegasus Gate started shaking violently, illuminating the entire area with a brilliant light. The knights started raising a ruckus.

“S-Saint Chloe!”

“Something’s happening with Pegasus Gate!”

“Yes!” Chloe confirmed. “This indicates that it’s caught something big. This isn’t a fish!”

“There really *was* something lurking in the water.”

“So it seems!”

There was no time for Chloe to question Mash. How he was going to dodge the matter was a problem for later, as everyone was forced to direct their full attention to the glowing spelltool.

Several seconds passed. Pegasus Gate continued shaking, but nothing appeared.

“Uh, nothing’s coming through,” someone murmured.

“No, it’s just too big to go through,” Chloe replied. “If we don’t do something, it’ll get away.”

“What *can* we do?” Adel asked. “Should I go face it in person?”

Chloe shook her head. “No need. Keep watching!”

She began forming hand signs, which was a simplified way to cast a spell without having to chant it. Saints could not use Sanctuaries that they deployed themselves, but there was nothing stopping them from using another Saint’s Sanctuary. Euphinia was maintaining one at the moment, so Chloe was tapping into it.

There was no need for Saints to learn how to cast spells, as their role in battle was to maintain a source of anima for their knight escorts to use while they remained under the protection of their Divine Beasts. This was why Euphinia had never undergone formal training in casting. In contrast, not only had Elciel been able to cast two spells at the same time, it looked like she had somehow managed to cast spells using anima from her own Sanctuary. Her mastery over casting was more than enough proof to support why she was called the War Saint.

Though no match for Elciel, Chloe was proficient in her own field of magic. As light emanating from her hand was sucked toward the anima crystals embedded in Pegasus Gate, the large spelltool began quickly expanding.

“You can change its size?!” Adel exclaimed.

“My spelltools can all be boosted by supplying more anima, through a spell I developed myself.”

Normal spelltools drew on anima crystals for power and were made to express a specific phenomenon irrespective of the presence of a Sanctuary or the abilities of their users. This was both a boon and a limitation.

In contrast, all of Chloe’s spelltools could be boosted with a special spell. A

spellcaster and a Sanctuary were needed to activate this function, but it was demonstrable proof that the effects of Adel's Ki Amplification could be replicated and directly incorporated into spelltools.

I've never heard of spelltools having this ability, thought Adel. No wonder she's the Artificer Saint.

"Heads up! Incoming!" Chloe called out as a massive form shot through the enlarged gate.

Many people shouted in surprise as a towering dragon covered in blue scales as beautiful as jewels appeared before their eyes. It emanated the anima of a Divine Beast, rather than the miasma of monsters. Adel recognized this presence and this growl.

"Is that Seiryuu?!" Adel exclaimed.

"It is!" Chloe nodded. "It's one of Big Sis Elciel's Four Guardians!"

As Cerberus had mentioned before, the Four Guardians were unique Divine Beasts who were the only ones of their kind. As such, this Seiryuu had to be the one contracted with Elciel. And there was only one conclusion to draw from that.

"Elciel is still alive?!"

Adel had killed Elciel once in profane land right after escaping from the Moving Coliseum of Navarra, once in Alderford, and once in the previous timeline during the Great War. However, she was apparently still alive and well.

"So it seems. Even after you defeated her in Alderford, we've had sightings of her from all over. There are even Saints who claim to have spoken to her. This is the real reason why the Holy Tower Church is keeping such a close eye on the G4 Summit: we suspect she is still at large and plotting something!"

"Ah, so that's why you're here."

"If an Eminent hurts the big shots from the Four World Powers, the Church would be censured by all of them at once. Now that Big Sis Elciel's gone rogue, she's a problem we have to deal with."

With a roar, Seiryuu swung a massive claw, trying to smash both Chloe and

Adel into paste.

“Please stand back, Saint Chloe!”

Adel stepped up and instructed Chloe to retreat to a safe distance. If she herself dodged the attack, then the Eminent would end up taking the brunt of it. She could not allow this to happen, which meant there was only one thing to do.

Out came Salamander’s Tail as a giant blade of fire, just in time to stop Seiryuu’s attack. A nose-turning stench filled the air as blue flames charred Seiryuu’s azure scales, but the dragon showed no signs of feeling pain. Apparently a little charring on its finger meant nothing to it. It simply pressed down even harder, demonstrating strength on par with—if not greater than—Byakko and Genbu.

“Thanks for the save. How are you doing that?!” Chloe asked in wonder as she got out of the way.

“I devote myself to training so that I can protect my liege!”

ROOOAAARR!

Seiryuu lifted its other front foot, intending to crush Adel with it.

“Back off!” Chloe cried. “I’m fine already!”

“No, there is no need!” Adel replied. *On the contrary, this is the time to seize the initiative!*

She pushed Salamander’s Tail up in a sudden burst of strength, throwing back the azure dragon’s first claw before the second landed. Seiryuu was pushed backward and off-balance, no longer able to follow through with its attack. By the time it restored its posture, Adel had already reached its belly.

“Take this!” Adel shouted as she kicked with all her might. The Divine Beast’s massive form lifted off the ground, then slammed into the sandbank on its back.

The eyeballs of Chloe’s knight escorts nearly popped out of their heads.

“She’s handling one of Eminent Elciel’s Four Guardians like it’s nothing!”

“Just how powerful is she?!”

Under normal circumstances, the fight would not be so one-sided. The effects from Ki Possession were still active, as evidenced by Adel's tail and beastly ears. She couldn't use black fire with Cerberus so exhausted, but her physical capabilities were still greatly enhanced.

Without the boost from Ki Possession, it would have been impossible for Adel to take an attack from Seiryuu head-on, and she wouldn't have even attempted it. Just like when she'd faced Byakko, she would have opted to dodge and evade.

"Where is your master?! Where is Elciel?!"

Adel very much wanted to settle her fight with Elciel for once and for all, ensuring that the Saint could never appear before Euphinia again. However, the Divine Beast refused to answer. Instead, it opened its mouth wide, spewing a dazzling white snowstorm that threatened to swallow up everyone in the area, including Chloe and Euphinia.

"Oh no you don't!"

Another blade sprouted from Salamander Tail's handle, with the two of them rapidly extending in length. By spinning the weapon, Adel turned the spelltool into a shield that protected everyone behind her. The disk of blue flames and white snow completely blocked her view. The standoff lasted for a while until the snowstorm suddenly let up, allowing her to see—through her flames—the dragon whirling around and leaping into the river.

"Hah!"

Adel lunged forward with a stomp so powerful that it shattered the riverbed rocks underfoot. A split second was all it took for her to close the distance to Seiryuu. At the same time, Salamander's Tail snaked forward as a whip, constricting the dragon's body. Adel had successfully caught the Divine Beast at the last moment before it could escape into the water.

"You're not getting away! I need you to lead me to Elciel!" Adel shouted, pulling on her spelltool to drag Seiryuu back. However, she felt no resistance on the whip.

"Elciel...is always with us," the Divine Beast growled, as its form collapsed into

a shadow that quickly dissipated.

“Was that...”

“Big Sis Elciel must have returned it to her shadow.”

“So she sensed it being in danger?”

“I guess. It probably only attacked us because the opportunity was there, not because it expected to win.”

“You mean, she might be somewhere nearby observing our fight!”

“You may be right! Everyone, spread out and look for Big Sis Elciel! If you find her, signal right away!” Chloe watched her knight escorts run off into the night, then turned to Euphinia. “Your Highness, please maintain this Sanctuary. It’s so large that my knights can go as far as they want.”

Euphinia nodded, looking serious. “Of course, Eminent Chloe.”

“We should go too, Adel!” Mash called out. “Melulu, you stay here with Her Highness!”

Adel and Melulu nodded and voiced their affirmation, but Chloe stopped them.

“Hold on a minute!” she said, directing sharp eyes at Mash. “Do you have...the head of a monster?”

She had not forgotten. Mash had hoped to sweep the earlier revelation under the rug by distancing himself from Chloe in the hubbub of the search for Elciel, but apparently Chloe was not going to let him go.

“Well, uh...yes.”

“Show me again!” Chloe closed in on Mash, but changed her tone to a softer one. “I mean, please show me.”

“Y-Yes, Saint.”

Mash obediently pulled his hood back, baring his face once again.

Anger filled Chloe’s eyes. “I knew it! This is...”

“E-Eminent!” Euphinia interrupted. “Despite his appearance, Mash is gentle

and very capable! He's more than worthy as a knight escort!"

The princess stepped in front of Mash protectively, her face scrunched up in concern that Chloe would take issue with his position. Birthed from miasma in profane land, monsters were indeed threats to humanity that Saints needed to fight and erase. Even if Euphinia and Theodora had accepted Mash, it wasn't a surprise that there were those who wouldn't. Moreover, Chloe was the granddaughter of Cardinal Navarra, the very man who had given Mash his monster head. Adel and Mash had kept their guard up this whole time precisely because they had no way of predicting how Chloe would react.

"Oh, um... I'm sorry, Princess Euphinia. I'm not angry. Rather, I'm thankful that you have such a big heart. I mean, think about it. Most people would be so repulsed by what he's become, they wouldn't even dream of employing him. Even those in Alderford aren't much better."

"Oh, no, I'm hardly... Wait, why are you thanking me?"

"Because I'm pretty sure this is the handiwork of someone I'm related to."

Euphinia looked puzzled. "As in, someone from your family?"

"Yep." Chloe turned to Mash. "Uh, Mash, right? Was the person who did this to you my shitty grandfather? Cardinal Navarra? At the Moving Coliseum of Navarra?"

"Yes on all counts," Mash replied. With everything already out in the open, there was no point in any further obfuscation.

"Good on you for getting out alive. I know he would never willingly let go of a subject."

"It was all thanks to Adel. If it wasn't for her, my men and I might have died by now."

"Died?!" Euphinia exclaimed. "Wh-What *is* the Moving Coliseum of Navarra?!"

"A giant experimental lab run by my grandfather," Chloe explained. "He gathers people through human trafficking and kidnapping, and performs unspeakable experiments on them. For example, he'll swap a part of their body

with a monster's, like Mash here. These guys are extremely lucky to have gotten away. For every one of these who have escaped, there are hundreds...no, thousands of victims who died from failed experiments."

"What?! And you're saying Adel and Mash were in a place like that?!"

"Weren't you guys a roving band of mercenaries?" Melulu asked.

"Sorry, Melulu," Adel apologized. "We only said that because it was the easiest way to explain ourselves at the time. We had only just escaped and were being chased by Elciel."

"I-I see. No wonder you guys don't have the air of a mercenary group. They're usually more organized than you lot."

"B-But Eminent," Euphinia asked, "why is a cardinal of the Church allowed to conduct such atrocities? It seems so wrong!"

Chloe shook her head in defeat. "The higher-ups at the Papal Office pretend to not know about it. In other words, they're giving it tacit permission. The Church is by no means a completely righteous organization; like everything else, it has its shadows. Take it from me, an Eminent."

"I can hardly believe it..." Euphinia lamented, hanging her head.

Adel knew that Euphinia would be hurt by this revelation, considering how kind she was. However, she and Mash had no intention of keeping their true origins a secret forever. This was as good a time to clear the record as any.

Abruptly, Chloe turned toward Adel and Mash. "I'm really sorry!" She even went down on her knees before bowing her head.

"What?!" exclaimed both Adel and Mash.

"I knew what my shitty grandfather was doing, but made no attempt to stop him! What's more, I'm pretty sure the spelltools that he uses for his experiments in the Coliseum are my inventions."

Adel and Mash exchanged bewildered looks.

"I-In any case, please raise your head, Saint Chloe," Adel said.

"Yeah, what Adel said," Mash agreed. "Please."

When Chloe lifted her face, there were tears in her eyes. The sight finally brought Adel and Mash around to the possibility that she might be different from Cardinal Navarra. Maybe, just maybe, she was someone they could trust.

“I won’t ask for forgiveness. Instead, please let me make it up to you! Give me a chance to restore your head! I’m begging you!”

Once again, Chloe brought her head to the ground.

“W-We hear you, Saint Chloe. But please get up first. Right, Adel?”

“I agree. We have no interest in making you bear responsibility, Saint Chloe.”

“Th-Thank you! When the Summit is over, please let me examine you, Mash. I have to first understand what was done on you to reverse it. Your current state is almost a miracle, actually. Most people wouldn’t survive having their entire head swapped out.”

Chloe stood up, wiping her eyes. A hint of excitement, so faint that it might be imagined, seemed to be mixed into her smile.

“S-Sure, when the Summit is over. Thank you. Uh, Adel, can I really trust her?”

“I...guess? Probably.” Adel nodded reassuringly, then knelt before Euphinia. “Princess, what you just heard is the truth. I, Mash, and our men are escaped gladiator slaves from the Moving Coliseum of Navarra, not a roving mercenary band. I am willing to accept any punishment for the crime of falsifying our origins! I am deeply sorry!”

When Adel looked up, she saw an intense look on Euphinia’s face, one that hinted that she was holding something in. Adel had never seen her make this face before; at least, not in this timeline. The princess had radiated the same aura often in the previous timeline when she had been running around the world trying to bring an end to the Great War. Perhaps she had been making this face then. Sadly, Adel would have never known without being able to see.

Silence filled the air, as Euphinia continued staring at Adel. It was Adel who finally spoke up.

“A-Are you angry, Princess?”

“I am.”

“Then punish me, please!”

To Adel’s surprise, Euphinia suddenly pulled her head into an embrace.

“I could never! I’m angry at myself, not you! I’m so sorry for ordering you and Mash around all the time without having a clue how badly you were hurting! I’m so sorry for being unable to help you!”

Wet drops fell onto Adel’s face one after another. She knew these warm tears all too well. They were the exact same ones she had felt when Euphinia showed up at the Moving Coliseum and saved all the gladiator slaves, deeply moved at their plight. Just like in that timeline, Euphinia was once again crying on Adel’s behalf.

“Ohhhh, Princess! Princeeeeeeeess! I’m so sorry! Please don’t cry on behalf of this unworthy servant! Princeeeeeeeess!”

Now Adel’s vision was blurred by tears. Without thinking, she hugged Euphinia back. The two of them cried their hearts out, clinging tightly to each other. Once again, Adel renewed her resolve to serve her beloved liege for the rest of her life. She would dedicate everything that she was and everything that she had to ensure that Euphinia would live out a long life filled with happiness and joy.

Euphinia giggled. “You’re crying more than me, Adel. Are you okay?”

“Y-Yes, Princess!” Adel replied in between sobs. She continued crying for quite a while longer, with Euphinia patting her back. When she finally calmed down, it was too late for her to join the search for Elciel.

A short while later, Chloe’s knight escorts returned, all of them empty-handed. In other words, Elciel had slipped through their fingers. However, it was now confirmed that Chloe was a trustworthy person, and Adel had finally managed to tell Euphinia what she wanted to. All in all, it had been a fruitful night.

Chapter 3: The VIPs

It wasn't long before Adel's group learned to coordinate with Chloe. Additionally, Claire and the Saints stationed at Wendill Palace were also dispatched to further bolster security. There was no way of telling if that had been the cause, but no further incidents occurred, and the G4 Summit was now just around the corner. The VIPs from other countries were arriving.

The Torustan delegation arrived first. Upon laying eyes on the welcoming party at the city gate, the man on the horse in the lead burst into a smile.

"Saint Adel! It has been too long!" cried Tristan, the crown prince of Torust, as he leaped out of his saddle and rushed over. "Oh, seeing you brings back memories! I trust you have been well?"



Adel felt like they hadn't been apart long enough for it to have been "too long." In fact, the incident at Sidel had been merely two months ago.

"Prince Tristan. I have been well. Thank you for asking."

"I-I am glad. You are as beautiful as ever."

It looked like Tristan was having trouble speaking clearly, but there was something else far more important that Adel wanted to ask.

"Your Highness, may I inquire why you are accompanying your delegation? We were not informed."

There was no doubt that Tristan was a good fighter, but Wendill couldn't very well assign him to security duty. Instead, he was an extra person who had to be protected at all costs, which was going to be a further drain on resources. Security was already stretched thin, and Wendill most certainly did not want to deal with any unforeseen complications.

"That's because...well...I-I wanted to see you again."

"Huh? That's the only reason?"

"I-It's an important reason!" Tristan protested, looking both in a fluster and a little sad. "I'm quite sure I informed you in my letter. Have you perhaps not read it yet?"

"What? Ah, now that you mention it, I might have received something. I think."

After finding Seiryuu, Adel had become even busier. She'd had no time at all for reading letters.

"I am deeply sorry, Your Highness. In any case, please remain wary. We're keeping this under wraps, but there is a possibility that Elciel is lurking around."

"Whaaaaat?! She is?! Didn't she pass away?!"

"That's what we thought, but apparently she somehow managed to survive. We found Seiryuu, one of her Four Guardians, hiding in the Erule River the other day. She might be planning an assault on the G4 Summit."

In the previous timeline, Tristan had been Mad Emperor Tristan, the culprit

responsible for starting the Great War. However, Adel now knew that he was originally a righteous and good-natured person. His transformation should have been circumvented, as the expedition to profane land with Elciel—where it presumably would have happened—had been called off. That said, there was no guarantee that he wouldn't still end up the same if he came into contact with Elciel at the G4 Summit.

The Watcher had told Adel that a certain force worked upon the fate of humans, making it hard to change their futures in any significant way. In other words, Adel was worried that Tristan and Elciel meeting at all could pose a great risk. And now that she'd seen the man he used to be, she would have trouble fighting him with the same fervor as before even if he really became the Mad Emperor again.

"Elciel is dangerous, especially to Princess and Your Highness. As such, I honestly wish that you had not visited in person."

"So, you are speaking out of concern for my safety?"

"I suppose. If I may be candid, in my humble opinion, Your Highness is far too forthright a character. You are exceptionally susceptible to those with wiles and cunning."

"Thank you very much! Thank you for thinking so highly of me!"

For some reason, Tristan was beaming upon hearing this.

"Um..."

The prince seemed to be focusing on the wrong part of Adel's words. She was warning him so that he would be vigilant against Elciel's approach, but he didn't seem to have gotten the message. His strangely elated state cut a sharp contrast to his normally prudent manner. Adel hadn't the faintest idea why he seemed so happy even though it hadn't been that long since they had last met.

A short, older man still brimming with vigor popped up behind Tristan. He swiftly approached Adel and started circling her.

"Oho! I see, I see, you must be the Saint Adel whom I have heard so much about! Why, you are a fetching lass indeed!"

When Adel gave the man a puzzled look, he nodded to himself, as if he had been convinced of something.

“Word has it that you are both a Saint and a master with the sword—a swordmaster Saint, if you will. And indeed, your legs and abdomen are well-developed indeed. Wonderful, wonderful. A healthy body harbors a healthy life!”

“Um, I’m sorry?”

As Adel’s bewilderment deepened, Tristan jumped in.

“F-Father! Stop staring at Saint Adel so much! You’re putting her on the spot!”

““Father?!”” Adel exclaimed.

The only man who Prince Tristan would call “father” was the incumbent emperor of Torust. He wasn’t just a VIP; he was a VVIP.

“I am deeply sorry for failing to introduce myself earlier!” Adel promptly got down on one knee to pay her respects.

“Oh, don’t worry about it. Come now. Back on your feet, Saint Adel.” The emperor took Adel’s hand and personally helped her back up. “More importantly, allow me to thank you for saving my son’s life. I am deeply in your debt. Thank you.”

While speaking, the old man patted Adel’s hips a few times.

“Father! Stop taking advantage of the situation to touch Saint Adel!” Tristan cried, his face turning red as he slapped his father’s hand away.

“Interesting. You almost never speak to me that way, Tristan.”

“I’m so sorry, Saint Adel. My father’s been terribly rude. Please forgive him.”

“It didn’t bother me at all, though.”

“What?! But you— Please be bothered! Please!”

“Uh, why should I?”

Tristan could say what he wanted, but Adel wasn’t bothered by things that she wasn’t bothered by. There wasn’t much that she could do about it.

The emperor whispered to Adel, “This is the first time I’ve seen Tristan react this way. I’ve tried setting him up on a few dates, but they’ve never worked out. A tiny part of me was growing worried that he simply wasn’t interested in the fairer sex, but now my fears have been allayed. Thank you, Saint Adel.”

“You’re...welcome?”

“Do you already have a significant other or a fiancé? Since you have the Astal name, I assume you have no parent designating you a partner, but I know that Saints can receive offers from all sorts of places through the mediation of the Holy Tower Church. After all, the Church does endorse you birthing as many children as possible to create the next generation of Saints.”

“Well, I’m actually—”

It hardly needed to be said, but Adel had come back in time solely to serve Euphinia. She had zero interest in anything else. It was true that the Church encouraged Saints to procreate in hopes of thwarting their dwindling population, but Adel had no intention whatsoever of playing along.

In the first place, Adel had only acquiesced to being initiated by the Church because there was no other way for her to become Euphinia’s knight escort. Otherwise, she would have stayed well clear of the Church and opted to remain unlicensed.

“I am a knight escort before I am a Saint. Serving Princess Euphinia is my highest priority, and I have never considered such matters.”

It was true that Adel had never thought about finding a partner. Even if she did, though, it would be with a woman, not a man. Regardless of the body she was now in, Adel Astal was still a man at heart. She felt no attraction toward Mash and the former gladiator slaves, nor toward Euphinia who was both her liege and still young, but the same could not be said of Melulu. Adel couldn’t help getting flustered when her fellow knight escort barged into her bath or got all handsy, and it was a constant struggle to not stare at her bountiful chest. Adel knew that Melulu simply thought of her as a good friend of the same gender, but she couldn’t help where her own mind went.

The emperor of Torust grinned. “Oh ho, I see. A knight escort before a Saint. What wonderful loyalty indeed.” He turned to Euphinia herself, gazing at her

with the eyes of an older relative appreciating the growth of a young child. “Speaking of, I am also glad to see *you* well, Princess Euphinia. You have grown so much taller since we last met.”

Euphinia bowed with grace, elegance, and dignity. “The heavens have been kind to me. Thank you for making the journey to our wonderful Welna. We welcome you with open arms.”

This was the first time that Adel got to see Euphinia greeting important visitors, despite having been present on many such occasions in the past timeline. Being able to see it gave everything a completely different impression. The princess’s every movement and expression was polished to such perfection that it stole Adel’s breath. She wouldn’t mind gazing at it for eternity.

Tristan, too, bowed courteously. “Princess Euphinia, I apologize for my belated greeting. I thank you once again for everything that you did for me last time.”

After Tristan exchanged a few words with Euphinia, his father whispered in his ear. “By the way, have you heard? Saint Adel does not have a partner. You were desperate to know, were you not? The reason for her lack of reply to your letter wasn’t because she has someone else; it was simply her personality.”

“*Father!* I can handle that kind of thing on my own, so *please* don’t say weird things to her!”

“Now, look here!” The emperor pursed his lips. “I was giving you a hand because you were dragging your feet. Now you go and treat me like a nuisance?!”

“Man, what a ruckus. Do you know how on edge we’ve been?” sighed Chloe. She had been present from the start as a part of the welcoming party, but was only finally joining the conversation.

“It is a pleasure to see you again, Saint Chloe,” the emperor said warmly. “It has been too long.”

“Saint Chloe! I cannot thank you enough for making me Skadigard! It has served me well. In fact, it has saved me from certain death many times!”

Apparently Tristan’s beloved weapon, Skadigard, was one of Chloe’s

creations. Even Adel appreciated it as a premium spelltool. In fact, its teleportation function was so useful that Adel wanted Euphinia to have one too. The Artificer Saint truly did live up to her name.

“I don’t think you should be getting yourself into situations where you have to use Skadigard in the first place, Your Highness. Especially not ‘many times.’ You need to do a better job managing your circumstances.”

I couldn’t agree more, Adel thought.

“Ha ha ha, you have a point,” Tristan chuckled, scratching the back of his neck sheepishly. “There’s nothing I can say to that.”

“In any case, I hope you two appreciate what the Church sending me here means.”

“Indeed, we do,” the emperor nodded. “Something’s been brewing as of late. Which is why—look—we have brought our best knight.”

When he looked back, a figure stepped up. It was a man so large that his shadow completely covered his liege’s body.

“Mm?” Chloe, who was a little short even for a woman, had to look up to meet the man’s eyes. “Oh, you’re...”

“It is my pleasure to meet you again, Eminent,” said the giant knight with a low, throaty voice that carried well. He looked like someone who was a force to deal with, and his voice reflected that in every way.

“Margritte the Paladin?” Adel murmured in recognition.

During the Great War, Adel had considered Torust an enemy. It was none other than Margritte who symbolized the might of the Torustan army. Adel had faced him on the battlefield and struck him down, but of course had no idea what he looked like. She remembered his voice, however.

“Oh? The swordmaster Saint knows of me. That is an honor indeed.” Despite his words, there was a little edge to Margritte’s voice. “I am Margritte, captain of the Fifth Division. On behalf of our entire knight order, I thank you deeply for saving Our Highness Prince Tristan.”

“I was merely carrying out the orders of my liege, Her Highness Princess

Euphinia. Thank her if you must.”

Adel was now happy that she had saved Tristan, but she had been far less sure about it when the shadow of Mad Emperor Tristan had yet been fresh in her mind. There was no telling what would have happened if Euphinia hadn’t insisted so firmly that he be saved.

“You have my deepest thanks, Princess Euphinia.”

“Please raise your head, sir. Prince Tristan hurried to our aid upon hearing that our Holy Tower had broken down, so it was only natural that we lent him a hand.”

The smile that Euphinia gave Margritte was so noble and dignified, Adel started quivering with emotion.

“Oh, Princess... How splendid you are! How beautiful you are!”

“Uh-oh. There goes Adel into her own world again. When she gets like this, she completely loses track of everything else.” Melulu grinned mischievously and sidled up beside Adel to poke her chest a few times. “Can you hear me, Adel? Heeeeey! Watch out, I’m gonna touch you in weird places!”

“Uh, Melulu...”

“Join me, Mash! She won’t notice, I promise!”

“A-Are you crazy?! Like hell I can!”

“Might as well.” Chloe reached out a hand. “Whoa, these are *huge*. How does she move so well with these in the way? Don’t they weigh her down?”

Melulu nodded. “I know, right?”

“Uh, don’t you have the same problem? Yours are really impressive too.”

“Eeek! I never gave you permission to touch me!”

“Looks like you need someone to weigh in,” the emperor of Torust noted, stepping up. “Now, I—”

“Oh no you don’t, you old fart!”

“Don’t you dare! Dieeeeeee!”

Pegasus and Unicorn leaped into motion and sent the old man flying.

“Oooooof! Wh-Why are the Divine Beasts attacking me?!”

“Don’t get carried away just ‘cos you’re an emperor!”

“We refuse to bow to your authority!”

Without delay, the horses proceeded to stomp on the emperor.

“M-Mr. Pega!” Euphinia wailed. “No! Don’t do that!”

“Stop it, Nico!” Chloe shouted.

The commotion suddenly brought Adel back to her senses. Her eyes immediately registered the sight of Pegasus and Unicorn going to town on the emperor of Torust.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU PIECES OF SHIT DOING?!” Adel roared, promptly tying up the Divine Beasts with a crack of Salamander’s Tail.

“S-Sweet Adel? No, this is a misunderstanding!”

“We were trying to protect you from that dirty old geezer!”

“Huh? What nonsense is that?”

Euphinia bowed toward the emperor as deeply as she could. “I-I’m terribly sorry, Your Majesty! Our Divine Beasts were—”

Despite not fully understanding the situation, Adel interrupted to cover for her liege.

“No, Princess has done nothing wrong! The responsibility for my lack of discretion lies on me alone. I beg of you, mercy!”

“I-It’s fine. Don’t let it bother you so.”

“Father was the one who took things too far. I should be *thanking* the Divine Beasts!”

Just as it seemed like the situation was about to blow over, Margritte stepped up and shouted, “No, I cannot stand for it! Though my liege is willing to condone what happened, it would besmirch my name to overlook an assault on his being! I refuse to do so!”

“Come now, it’s clear to everyone that I was out of line,” the emperor said in a fluster. “It would be unbecoming of me to demand retribution. Stand down, Margritte.”

“Well, I can see where he’s coming from,” Adel said. If Euphinia had been the one hurt by a Divine Beast, Adel would be indignant and blame herself as well. Although, Euphinia would never anger a Divine Beast, being as irreproachable in conduct and upright in character as she was.

“You understand me, Dame Adel?” Margritte asked.

“I am a knight too, after all. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Since you’re offering, I would like to spar with you! I wish to see for myself just how capable the famous Saint Adel is!”

“If that’s all you want, I wouldn’t mind—”

“S-Saint Adel, we don’t want to impose!” Tristan interrupted, sounding worried. “On the off chance that you get hurt... Ah, not that I think you would, but—”

“In that case, allow me to ask that Sir Margritte put something on the line as well.”

“Such as?”

“Sir Margritte, if I win, I want you and your men to join our night patrols until the G4 Summit. If you accept, then I’d be happy to have a match with you.”

If Elciel really was lurking around, then it wouldn’t hurt to have even more boots on the ground. Chloe and the other Saints stationed at Wendill Palace were already helping, but it still wasn’t enough. Having the help of knights from the Torustan delegation would make a big difference.

“Our highest priority is to protect our king and prince. We can assist you, but not to the extent that it would interfere with our duty.”

“That will do. Your Majesty, does this work for you? We truly do need help with the patrols, so I want this match as much as Sir Margritte does.”

“If that is the case, I have no choice but to take you up on your generous offer.”

“What about you, Princess? Are you fine with this arrangement too?”

“I suppose. Just make sure that no one gets hurt.”

“Of course! Thank you, Princess!”

Seeing that the match was all but confirmed, Chloe sighed in resignation.

“Why are they so hot-blooded?”

Lowering his voice, the emperor replied, “Well, there’s a lot going on. Politics, you know.”

“What do you mean? You know that all this started because of *you*, right?”

“I’m ashamed, truly. I only intended to light a fire under Tristan. Never did I imagine I would end up earning the ire of Divine Beasts.”

The emperor sheepishly scratched the back of his neck, exactly how Tristan did it. The two were indeed father and son.

“So...‘politics?’” Chloe prodded. “Spill.”

“It has been decided that Tristan will be heir to my throne. That leaves the question of who would be his queen. The nobles are throwing their support behind various candidates.”

“Ah, they want to bring the future queen into their camp and have her advocate their causes.”

“Indeed. Unfortunately, none of the candidates have managed to catch Tristan’s eye. The first and only woman that he has shown the slightest romantic interest in is Saint Adel. This is an important matter for the nobles of Torust. If the seat goes to Adel, it would throw a huge wrench in their plans. Knowing this, Margritte is trying to shame her in order to throw her candidacy into disrepute.”

“Oof, this really *is* political. Does no one care what Adel wants?”

“Margritte is in a difficult place. A certain amount of guile is necessary to hold on to status and authority. What’s more, I, too, am interested in whether Tristan has a good eye for women. Naturally, Tristan’s and Adel’s feelings matter most at the end of the day, but I can’t shield them from everything. They need to stand up for themselves.”

The emperor smiled as he watched Adel and Margritte take their places. Adel lowered her center of gravity and readied Salamander's Tail in its blade form. At the same time, Margritte lifted the huge warhammer that he had been carrying on his shoulder. The warhammer looked like a makeshift weapon; it was little more than a handle attached to a plain lump of rock. However, there was an anima crystal in the handle, indicating that it was nonetheless a spelltool. For protection, Margritte was wearing a very thick suit of armor that revealed only his face. He was practically as heavily armored as Adel had been with the Armor of Lamentation.

"What's the matter, Dame Adel? Will you not summon your Divine Beast?"

Adel shook her head. "I am Princess Euphinia's knight escort before I am a Saint. Backups have no place in a contest between knights!"

"How gallant! I admit, we don't have many women like you in our country!"

"Who can say?"

Adel had turned into a woman as part of the process of traveling back in time. Forget about only searching Torust; she doubted there was anyone else like her in the entire world.

Margritte turned to a Saint among the Torustan delegation. "Excuse me, Saint. Could I trouble you for a Sanctuary?"

The woman nodded and deployed a Sanctuary, filling the space with fire anima. It was clear what Margritte's preferred element was.

"In that case, allow me." Adel waved down the Saint and deployed her own Sanctuary, which emanated anima that was significantly more powerful. She figured that this would enable Margritte to fight better. Adel's Sanctuary was nowhere near as large as Euphinia's, nor was it almighty. But if the intended purpose was to cast fire spells, hers was almost as good.

Margritte nodded in appreciation. "This is a good Sanctuary. But why are you giving me a leg up?"

"Considering that we will soon be working side by side on night patrols, I wanted to give you the opportunity to fight to your heart's content."

“Hah! That’s quite a tongue on you! Very well. Dame Adel, show me what you can do!”

“Come at me with all you have!”

Despite having fought Margritte in the previous timeline, Adel didn’t remember his fighting style. The Adel of the previous timeline was a reckless fighter who only thought about striking fast and hard. With the Armor of Lamentation, the explosive boost in physical prowess thanks to Ki Amplification, and the automatic self-healing imparted from Cardinal Navarra’s experiments, Adel had been able to focus solely on dishing out damage while any wounds closed up on their own. Adel could not rely on precision due to being blind, and so became the quintessential brute force fighter who overwhelmed opponents before they could make a single move.

Because of all that, Adel currently hadn’t the faintest idea of what abilities Margritte had and how he fought. Adel’s new fighting style was reactive, relying on technique over power. She had to be ready to deal with whatever was thrown at her.

Seeing Adel’s passive stance, Margritte decided to make the first move.

“Enchant! Grant me the power of flames!”

Red flames sprang up around Margritte’s body. He flexed his strengthened muscles and brought his warhammer down with incredible speed.

“Hraaaaah!”

For a brief moment, Adel frowned with confusion. Margritte’s blow was powerful, but he was merely hitting the ground in front of him, having made no effort to close the distance. There was no way that his attack would reach her.

What Margritte was actually doing soon became clear. When his warhammer hit the ground, its head shattered, splitting into a shower of fragments that shot toward Adel.

“What?!”

Adel bolstered her leg strength with Ki Convergence and leaped over the barrage. Despite her fast reaction, a few rocks were on course to hit her. She

quickly redirected her ki from her legs to her weapon and spun it rapidly in lieu of a shield. Thankfully, ki was a very flexible power that could be quickly adapted to react to sudden changes in situations.

“I see you’ve got speed, Dame Adel! I applaud you for dodging my attack!”

“So you use projectiles!”

No wonder Margritte had stood his ground.

“Now you know!”

During the brief verbal exchange, the area where the head of Margritte’s warhammer touched the ground was gouged out, with the rock gathering around the spelltool to restore its former appearance. It seemed he could shatter and restore the warhammer head as many times as he wanted. This meant he had access to a limitless supply of stone projectiles.

“I see, it’s practically a ballista that never runs out of ammunition.”

Adel could see this weapon being useful against multiple opponents. For example, on a battlefield or in profane land. She acknowledged Margritte as a fighter on the same level as Mash and Melulu.

“That’s right! You can’t keep running forever, Dame Adel!”

Another barrage came hot on the heels of the previous one. Adel handled it with her bolstered jumping power and weapon, but then the whole exchange repeated again and again.

“Adel can’t get close!” Melulu said fretfully.

“He’s shooting fast enough to keep her at bay,” Mash agreed.

Chloe whistled. “The world powers sure have capable knights!”

“Oh, Adel, please don’t get hurt!” Euphinia moaned, wracked with worry.

The loudest person, however, was Tristan. “Saint Adeeeeeel! You got this!” he yelled at the top of his lungs.

“I never knew you could shout so loud, Tristan!” the emperor exclaimed with surprise.

Tuning out the voices from the peanut gallery, Margritte growled, “Why

aren't you even trying to approach me? At this rate, you'll simply tire out and end up getting hit."

In the previous timeline, Adel could have simply ignored the onslaught and charged straight in, relying on the Armor of Lamentation and regenerative powers to shrug off any hits. A full frontal assault was always the way to go.

But such brute force tactics were no longer an option for Adel. Even so, it wasn't as if she had no way to close the distance to Margritte. She simply had to produce the same result using a different method.

"Since you're asking so nicely, I'll come over now!"

"I'd like to see you try!"

A fresh wave of projectiles closed in on Adel, but this time, she did not evade them by jumping. She charged straight in, even without the gifts of armor and regeneration she had lost. Instead, she gathered ki in her eyes and feet to dodge everything. All her jumping around had been for the sake of gauging the trajectories of the projectiles and working out a way to weave through them.

"Are you out of your mind?! You're jumping in and taking the full brunt of the attack?!"

"Who said I would be getting hit?"

Thanks to her ki, Adel could see each and every stone clearly. At the same time, her feet carried her through the storm with swift and sure steps. With movements that wouldn't look the slightest bit out of place in the most prestigious ball, Adel slipped through the barrage and closed in on Margritte.

"What?!"

Margritte's eyes widened in shock as he rushed to restore his warhammer's head, but it was too late. Adel was already on top of him, and he was left wide open.

"Hraaaaah!"

Making a split-second decision, Margritte let go of his weapon and threw his whole body at Adel. A full set of armor was a formidable weapon in and of itself. Unfortunately, Adel could see the attack coming from a mile away.

“You’re not laying a finger on me!”

Adel leaped up, jumped off of Margritte’s shoulder, and landed behind him. In the same movement, she extended Salamander’s Tail as a whip and wrapped it around his knees.

“Ugh! Good one, but this isn’t enough to stop me!”

Margritte figured that Adel wouldn’t have much arm strength, what with being a woman and having dainty arms. He wrote off the restraint and reached for his weapon.

“No, you *will* stop!”

Adel pulled on Salamander’s Tail as hard as she could, focusing all of her ki into her arms. She practically lifted her opponent up off his feet, thoroughly breaking his posture.

“What?! WhoooOOOaaah!”

The knight crashed to the ground with a pained grunt. He tried to get back up, but found a blade of blue flames at his throat.

Adel was looking down at him. “Now would you stop?”

“I...yes, I will. That was a wonderful fight. I yield.”

“Wonderful. Now our lack of manpower is resolved. Thank you very much, Sir Margritte.”

Adel offered Margritte a hand and helped him up.

He paused for a brief moment, then said, “The pleasure is all mine. In light of our future cooperative relationship, I appreciate this opportunity to make myself of service.”

In what seemed like a complete one-eighty, Margritte now addressed Adel in a tone filled with respect and acknowledgment. Adel was a little taken aback by the change, but she wasn’t going to protest now that he was willing to help.

“Uh, thank you. We look forward to it.”

“What a wonderful display!” the emperor gushed. “Margritte didn’t stand a chance against you!”

“I told you so, father! She’s the only one capable of making a fight look like a dance! Her movements are so refined, so breathtaking!”

“Yes, yes, I hear you. Calm down, Tristan.”

The moment the match ended, Euphinia was already rushing over. “Adel! Are either of you hurt?!”

“Not at all, Princess.” Adel twirled once. “As you can see.”

“What a relief...”

“My apologies for making you worry.”

“It’s all right. But those movements of yours were simply incredible! You were so fast and so beautiful! You were simply dashing!”

“Thank you so much, Princess!”

There was nothing that made Adel happier than receiving praise from Euphinia.

“What a show indeed,” a relaxed voice said, walking up to stand next to Euphinia while clapping slowly. “You’ve picked up a truly remarkable protector in the short time I’ve been away. I’m glad for you.”

“Wha—” Euphinia looked surprised for a second, then her face burst into a delighted grin. “Brother!”

The princess only had one sibling: her older brother, Prince Julian. This was Adel’s first time actually seeing his face. Like Euphinia, he had silver hair and gentle features.

“Hey there, Euphinia. I’m back.”

“Welcome back, brother!” Euphinia grabbed Julian in a big bear hug. Even though this was a natural gesture for siblings, Adel couldn’t help feeling a little jealous.



Prince Julian was often away from the palace for long periods of time. This time, he had been absent since before the chain of events leading to Adel's group getting employed. In the previous timeline, Adel had heard that Julian had an intense case of wanderlust. Of course, he was not wandering aimlessly; technically, his job was to observe the state of affairs wherever he went. As a tiny nation surrounded on all sides by superpowers, Wendill's survival hinged on being able to balance its own standing with its neighbors and the Holy Tower Church. Put simply, they had to get along with everyone. To do so, they needed to know everything that was going on in the entire world. And the best method was to visit in person.

There was no indication that the king of Wendill had any intention of rebuking Prince Julian, so his frequent travels were very likely sanctioned. A case could even be made that this was a necessary phase for someone who would become the future king of a country whose only lifeline was diplomacy.

Even without all the pretext, however, Julian simply loved traveling. Before the Great War in the previous timeline, when the world had been at peace, he had only dropped by Wendill Palace a few times. When he did, he had always regaled Euphinia with delightful stories of the world outside. Adel had had the opportunity to enjoy them too while waiting on Euphinia by her side.

Julian chuckled warmly. "You've grown taller again, Euphinia. I look forward to it every time I come back. How have you been?"

"I'm doing great! It's all thanks to Adel, Mash, and Melulu!" Euphinia replied, gesturing toward each knight escort in lieu of an introduction.

"Welcome back, Prince Julian," said Melulu, kneeling courteously. She had been in Euphinia's service long enough to have already been acquainted with him.

Adel and Melulu quickly followed her lead.

"It is my honor to meet you, Your Highness. I am Adel Astal. By the grace of His Majesty, Princess took me on as a knight escort not long ago. I am here to serve."

"It reassures me to have someone of your caliber protecting my sister. I have

heard what you did at Alderford. You are every bit as impressive in person.”

Julian was clearly very well-informed, which made a lot of sense for someone on the road as often as he was.

“You honor me, Your Highness.”

Mash spoke up next. “I am Mash August, Your Highness. Just like Adel, I too have been honored with the status of knight escort in service of Her Highness Euphinia.”

“August? Are you by any chance related to the August family of Malka?”

Apparently Julian was familiar with Malkan politics too.

“Uh...”

“If I recall correctly, a member of their family went missing a few years back. And that face of yours—”

“Brother, Mash is a really wonderful person!” Euphinia cut in. “He also gets along really well with Adel and—”

“Oh, it’s a whole story,” Chloe added nonchalantly. “How about putting some trust in your sister’s eye for people, Prince Julian?”

“Ah, Saint Chloe. It has been a while. Don’t worry, Euphinia. I get it. I have been sufficiently assured of Saint Adel’s character, and I’m sure that someone she considers a friend is trustworthy.”

For a split second, Adel wondered who had talked about her with Julian. But then she remembered a few names, including Theodora and her grandchildren, and considered her question satisfied.

“Isn’t that right, Katina?” Julian asked, turning around to a beautiful woman with pale chestnut-brown hair flowing down her back.

Recognition bloomed in Adel’s eyes. “Katina!”

Adel remembered Katina from way back, when they were together at Astal Orphanage. The Katina who now stood before her was exactly what she imagined that girl would look like all grown up. Being two years older than Adel, Katina always had a kind, motherly aura. Even now, she radiated a soft and

fluffy charm with bottomless compassion.

The opportunity to speak with Katina again filled Adel with both nostalgia and warmth. At the same time, however, Adel couldn't help wondering how Katina saw *her* after her gender change. She feared that Katina would claim that she wasn't the real Adel, which would be a massive problem. Depending on how things played out, Adel might even be forced to leave Euphinia's service. As trepidation filled her mind, she unconsciously braced herself.

"Adel! It really is you!" Katina happily rushed toward Adel and gave her one big hug.

"Uh, yes. It's been too long."

"It really has! After I left Astal Orphanage for my Saint training, I'd heard that you also left in a hurry! But...you seemed to have fallen off the map. I was really worried!"

"I-I'm sorry for making you worry. As you can see, I'm alive and well."

Katina was showing no signs of being taken aback by Adel being a woman. For Adel, this was disorienting in its own way.

"Oh, I've missed you and your boyish way of talking," Katina giggled, reaching for Adel's hair. "But now you look so much more like a girl, with your long hair and everything! This look suits you so well!"

"Y-You think so? Thank you."

Based on Katina's words, Adel drew the conclusion that Katina was under the impression that Adel had always been a girl. She was stunned to realize that not only had the Watcher changed her body, he had changed everyone's memories of her too.

Chloe spoke up. "Hey, Katina! Been a while!"

"Chloeeee! I know, right? I'm so happy to see you!"

"Me too. And with two of us Eminents here, we'll have nothing to fear!"

"You really *did* become an Eminent!" Adel gasped.

Adel hadn't known if Katina had achieved that status yet, but she knew from

the previous timeline that she would get there eventually.

“Sure did,” Chloe confirmed. “She’s Katina the Legion Saint. Don’t let that sweet face fool you. Sure, she *looks* like she wouldn’t hurt a fly, but she might be even stronger than Big Sister Elciel. For real.”

Counting Katina, Adel had now met four Eminent in this timeline: Elciel the War Saint, Theodora the Tower Saint, Chloe the Artificer Saint, and Katina the Legion Saint. Katina’s alias was based on a particular characteristic of one of her abilities as a Saint. Most Saints were capable of forging contracts with only a few Divine Beasts at the most, with there being only a small range of deviation. There were even those who could only have one. Although Adel only had Cerberus at the moment, she could feel that she had space for a few more.

Katina was a very special case, though, as it seemed like her capacity was effectively limitless. During the Great War, people had compared Katina’s and Elciel’s power in idle talk. One had an entire army of Divine Beasts that she could summon in the blink of an eye, whereas the other was extremely powerful as an individual fighter and was backed up by four unique top-tier Divine Beasts. These discussions had often ended with the conclusion that the two were each other’s equal, and that their effectiveness depended on the battlefield.

“I was appointed only very recently, though,” Katina protested humbly. “I’m still struggling to get used to it.”

“No, no, you’re an upstanding Eminent!” Julian insisted with pride. “She even saved me once when I was in profane land! Though she scolded me a lot for it afterward.”

“O-Of course I did! I know you were just trying to help someone, but you can’t go to the Old Capital alone! Please never do that again!”

The current age was called the Quaternary Era because the world was effectively split up among the Four World Powers. The Holy Kingdom had ruled as one massive nation over everything in the previous age, the Holy Era, where there had been much more land secured for human habitation. The capital of the Holy Kingdom, now called the Old Capital, was located beyond the current borders of humanity. This meant that the city, as well as the way to it, was in

profane land and therefore overrun by hordes of monsters. In terms of position, it was west of Rakul. During her time in Astal Orphanage, Adel had heard that the ruins still existed.

Quailing under Katina's intense stare, Julian admitted, "Y-You're right, of course! I-I'm very sorry!"

Chloe grinned. "I never knew she could be this scary."

"Saint Chloe, don't misunderstand," Adel said. "Katina *is* scary, when she's mad. And she has no qualms about killing bugs."

"That so?"

"Oh, yes. Astal Orphanage was an old building, so all kinds of pests got inside. Every time it happened, she took care of it with her bare hands and a nonchalant face."

The reason that Katina always summarily dealt with the intruders was that she was worried about them biting the younger kids. Whenever Katina had gotten angry at Adel, it was always from a place of concern. Everything that Adel had gone through since helped her gain a better understanding of Katina's efforts to protect her and the other children back then.

"Adel, did you really have to share that?" Katina said with a dark smile.

"Ugh! S-Sorry..."

"Eminent Katina! I am very sorry for all the trouble that my brother caused you. I am Euphinia, his younger sister. It is my pleasure to meet you."

The princess stepped forward to offer both her greeting and apology.

"Ah! My apologies for not introducing myself earlier. I am Katina Astal. I grew up alongside Adel at Astal Orphanage."

As Euphinia and Katina were exchanging greetings, Adel spotted the arrival of another delegation.

"Is that Rakul?" Adel murmured.

"Yes, it is," Katina replied. "I am currently one of the Saints stationed at Rakul."

Katina had had the same assignment in the previous timeline. She was attending this summit not as Julian's protection detail, but as a part of the Rakulian delegation.

"They were kind enough to bring me along," Julian explained. "I wanted to show my face at the G4 Summit, but someone told me not to go alone. Well, they've been letting me stay at Rakul Palace and taking care of my every need, so you won't see me complaining. And Katina's cooking is simply sublime."

"Oh my! Thank you so much for taking such good care of my brother, Eminent Katina!"

"I merely did it to thank him for saving children from Astal Orphanage who had been kidnapped by brigands. It was reckless, but I was really grateful, especially since I came from the Orphanage myself."

"In that case, please allow me to express my thanks as well, Your Highness," Adel said.

"Oh, don't let it bother you. I only did what anyone would have. Social inequality is quite severe in Rakul, so the knights definitely weren't about to save common-born children. I could do something about it, so I did."

Chloe nodded slowly. "Yeah, that checks out for Rakul."

Like Julian and Chloe said, Rakul was indeed a country with severe social inequality. Wendill had its fair share too, especially with the royals, the nobles, and knights, but the separation of classes was much more strongly entrenched and enforced in Rakul. Orphan children were practically invisible, even to normal citizens. The situation described by Julian was the norm there. He had decided to take action precisely because he understood the local culture.

Thanks to being so well-traveled, Julian knew a lot about the other countries. Despite his mild manner of speech, he was a realist with the ability to dispassionately analyze things. In the previous timeline, he had purposely waited for the Four World Powers to wear themselves out first before restoring Wendill. Unfortunately, his pragmatism had been at odds with Euphinia's idealism, as she wanted to end the Great War as soon as possible to save the most lives. As such, the two of them had never joined hands. However, the love between the siblings was true. When Julian received news of Euphinia's death,

he had wailed with grief and lamented his own choices.

As Adel was taken out of the moment by her bitter memories, Chloe turned to Katina.

“It’s tough working in Rakul, isn’t it? How’re you doing?”

“That’s not— It is an honor to serve the country that I grew up in.”

“Now, now,” Julian chided, “let’s leave the deep questions for another time. I worked hard, so I have the right to enjoy Katina’s cooking! You should join me, Euphinia. I promise you, you’ll love it.”

“Prince Julian, I hope you haven’t forgotten that I am an Eminent, yes?” Katina gave another of her intimidating smiles. “How many times are you going to treat me like a cook?”

“What? So you *won’t* cook for us?”

“That’s not what I said. I’d love to cook for Princess Euphinia. And Adel, of course.”

“Oh, that brings me back. I’d love that very much.”

Katina was indeed good at cooking, and she had a maternal personality, so she often cooked for the whole orphanage. For Adel, the taste of Katina’s cooking was the taste of home.

Euphinia giggled. “Adel, look. The two of them get along so well!”

“But of course,” Julian replied. “She’s the most beautiful girl I’ve ever met. And I’m not just talking about her looks.”

“Oh gosh, what are you saying, Prince Julian?! Not in front of everyone!” Katina pounded Julian’s back, her face blushing like fire. Obviously, she was just trying to hide her embarrassment. The gesture most definitely counted as an affront against a prince, but at the same time, it was proof of how close the two were.

“That’s hardly fair, is it? All I did was tell it like I see it. Ow ow ow! That hurts, Katina!”

“Oh, ha ha ha ha!” Euphinia filled the air with peals of happy laughter.

“More importantly, don’t forget to greet everyone else too, Prince Julian,” Katina said. “Look, the Torustan delegation is over there.”

“Oh, you’re right. Heeeeey! Tristaaaan! How’ve you been?”

Now even Adel was smiling. Some things were different in this timeline, but some things had remained the same. Previously, Katina and Julian had been deeply in love with each other, so much so that they had plans to host a wedding ceremony after the end of the Great War. The attraction that they had felt toward each other was alive and well. Adel wanted to change Euphinia’s fate, but Katina and Julian were perfect the way they were.

When Adel took a step back to let the royals and Saints greet each other, Melulu stood beside her.

“Maybe Saint Katina will become our queen one day.”

“Could be,” Mash agreed, nodding. “Wendill would definitely benefit from having an Eminent as a queen.”

As the two of them watched Julian and Katina supportively, Adel heard a voice.

“Man, why can’t he just drop dead?”

Since Adel was the only one who had heard the comment, the speaker must have been a Divine Beast. She turned around and saw that it was a white horse with a horn. *Ah, Nico’s emerged from Chloe’s shadow unbidden again.*

“Shut up. It’s none of your business.”

Unicorn’s contract partner was Chloe. There was no reason for him to be jealous of Julian.

“You don’t get it, lady! This is a matter of life and death for us!”

This voice came from another direction, which meant it was Pegasus.

“How? In any case, stay quiet. And don’t come out without being called,” Adel growled, turning to the second speaker. To her surprise, it wasn’t Pegasus, but another white horse with a horn.

“What?!”

Chills ran down Adel's back at the thought of there being two Unicorns. The two were so alike she couldn't tell them apart. All that she could safely say was that they were two white, horned horses.

"Goddammit! And we thought we contracted the perfect Saint!"

"Things are gonna turn bad real soon. We're gonna lose our home!"

Off to the side, Adel saw two *more* Unicorns.

"Whaaaat?!" There were now a total of four Unicorns in Adel's view. "Wh-What's going on?!"

"What's wrong, Adel?" Melulu asked. "Wait, there are so many Nicos!"

"It's a whole herd?!" Mash exclaimed.

"I-Is that you guys?!" cried a voice from high up in the sky, who turned out to be the actual Pegasus.

"The hell're you doing here?!" demanded a fifth Unicorn. This was Nico, the one contracted with Chloe.

"Is that Pega, that bastard?!"

"And that's Nico!"

Judging by what was being said, the first Unicorn who had showed up close to Adel wasn't Nico.

"I thought you'd died in a ditch somewhere after we chased you out of our herd!"

"It's the fake donkey and the crybaby donkey!"

"Oh no you didn't!" Pegasus gasped. *"Don't lump me in with your stupid species who can't do jack shit unless you're acting as a whole!"*

"Says the one who completely adopted a Unicorn's way of living!" Nico snorted.

"You got exiled from the herd too, idiot! Even though you're an actual Unicorn! That makes you even more pathetic!"

"Shut up! Forget us, why the hell are these dipshits here?!"

Pega and Nico put a pin in their argument and turned to look at the herd of Unicorns.

"We're here with our Saint, duh."

"I'm more surprised you two found Saints willing to contract with you!"

"I bet your Saints are nobodies anyway!"

The accusation sent Pegasus into indignant rage.

"I won't take that sitting down! My Saint is a princess AND has more talent as a Saint than anyone else in the whole fucking world! Look at her!"

Naturally, he flicked his head toward Euphinia. Hot on his heels, Nico indicated toward Chloe.

"And my Saint is an Eminent! Bow before her greatness!"

An awkward silence filled the air as the herd of Unicorns exchanged looks, until they burst into raucous, derisive laughter.

"A brat and a squirt! You two really had to scrape the bottom of the barrel!"

"This is why we chased you out, you dumbasses! The most important thing about a Saint is her looks! Look at our Saint!"

All the Unicorns turned to Katina.

Eyes wide with surprise, Adel told her companions, "Apparently all these Unicorns are contracted with Saint Katina."

"All of them?!" Melulu exclaimed. *"That's incredible!"*

"Ahh, that explains why she's called the Legion Saint," Mash said.

"Do you two get it now? Not only is our Katina incredible, she's also cuter than a button and has the most shapely body ever! She is literally perfect!"

Euphinia was still a child, and Chloe was on the slim side. There was no denying that Katina had a much better figure than either of them, and pretty much all Unicorns preferred women with sizable assets.

Pega and Nico ground their teeth in frustration.

"Adel, sweet Adel! Please do something!"

“Oh, hey! Adel’s got a hot bod too! Let’s claim her as our Saint!”

When the two Divine Beasts sidled up to Adel, however, she trussed them up with Salamander’s Tail.

“Shut up! I don’t want to hear another word!”

Not only were Pega and Nico absolute headaches to deal with, they were also huge cowards. They refused to stand at the forefront of any fight, and were always the first to run away. Adel honestly couldn’t find a single thing to praise them for. In comparison, her Cerberus seemed like a gentleman.

“NOOOOOOOO!!!!!!”

Suddenly, Katina’s Unicorns all shrieked in distress. They were watching Katina deep in conversation with Julian, Euphinia, the emperor of Torust, Tristan, and members of the Rakulian royal family. The problem was that Julian’s hand was now resting on Katina’s shoulder. Their conversation was too far away to hear exactly what was being said, but it looked like they were enjoying themselves.

“How dare he?! Get your hands off Katina!”

“You are so dead, you lecher!”

“Oh shit oh shit oh shit! We’re seriously gonna get kicked out if we don’t do something!”

Adel could tell right away why the Unicorns were raising such a fuss. All Unicorns loved chaste girls, and they only ever contracted with virgins. Katina had clearly met this requirement, and so the Unicorns had been having the time of their lives until Julian showed up. If the relationship between the two of them developed any further, they would eventually do the deed, which would effectively evict all the Unicorns by force. From that perspective, could Adel truly not feel sorry for them?

Of course not. All of them were base and vulgar to the extreme and thus very bad influences on Euphinia. If anything, Adel wished from the bottom of her heart that they would be banished back to the world of Divine Beasts this very moment.

Similarly catching on, Pega and Nico exchanged a look, then burst into crowing laughter.

“Wa ha ha ha ha! I can’t believe it! Have you all forgotten the most important thing about being a Unicorn?!”

“That’s what you get for contracting with a girl with boobs for brains who shakes her ass at men! Talk about a land mine! You donkeys really have the best eye for Saints!”

“Grrrrrrr!” went Katina’s Unicorns. It was now *their* turn to grind their teeth in frustration.

“S-Say, pink-haired bouncy girlie over there!”

“You’re a pretty good Saint too! In fact, you might be even more well-endowed than Katina!”

“When we have to leave Katina, can you contract with us instead?!”

“SHUT! UUUUUUUUP! I SAID, NOT A WORD MORE!”

Unable to stand listening to the crowd of Divine Beasts a moment longer, Adel hog-tied all of them in the blink of an eye.

“Um, won’t you get in trouble for doing this?” Melulu asked apprehensively. “Don’t these Unicorns belong to Saint Katina?”

Mash chuckled wryly. “So you don’t like Unicorns either, huh.”

“This is the best course of action!” Adel declared emphatically. “Ugh, dealing with these guys tires me out like you wouldn’t believe.”

She was of the opinion that even the former gladiator slaves were superior in character to these beasts. As she fought back a wave of dizziness from fatigue, a familiar voice addressed her from behind.

*“My, oh my, looks like *someone* is having fun.”*

It was a calm voice with a bit of a drawl. When Adel turned around, she found herself facing a gentle-looking woman with gorgeous features and luscious black hair.

Adel gasped. “Angela August!”

The speaker turned out to be Mash's older sister, Angela, a commander of the Republic of Malka. This was the very person who had instigated Melulu's father, Wolff Sedis, into making an attempt on the life of Prince Tristan in Sidel not long ago.

Both Mash and Melulu were immediately on their guard.

"Sister! What are you—"

"You have some nerve showing your face again!"

However, Angela feigned surprise.

"Whatever could you be talking about? This is a conference for important people from all four countries. I'm a member of the Malkan National Army, and I'm here to guard our representatives. What's wrong with that?"

If word of the assassination attempt orchestrated by Malka had spread, chances were high that war would have broken out between Torust and Malka. Because Tristan didn't want humans fighting other humans, he had insisted that the incident be hushed up. Apparently, his people had done a good job.

For all intents and purposes, nothing had happened, so Angela could raise her head high and boldly go wherever she wanted. If Adel's group jumped Angela now, they would be accused of assaulting a blameless Malkan commander. This would be such a huge international issue that Adel's group could never shoulder all the responsibility themselves; in fact, it would be sufficient pretext for Malka to invade Wendill. Knowing this, they had no choice but to stay their hands.

Angela returned the three glowering gazes and giggled. "Let's get along, shall we? We're all here as guards, and the task is tough enough as it is. Let's give it our all!"

She smiled one last time, then walked past the group.

"This is gonna be a problem," Mash murmured as he stared at his sister's retreating figure.

Melulu nodded. "So now we have to worry about her too, on top of Saint Elciel..."

"Be even more vigilant," Adel said. "Be prepared for anything."

“Will do.”

“Time for me to make up for all the trouble I caused you guys last time.”

Unlike before, Adel was no longer fighting alone. She believed that she was stronger now with comrades-in-arms at her side. Or at least, she *wanted* to believe it.

In any case, there was nothing for the group to do but to apply themselves with even greater ardency. The tragedy from the previous timeline would never happen again. Not with Adel present.

Chapter 4: The G4 Summit

Adel faintly recalled receiving piggyback rides from someone. The person who had carried her—no, him—was another child only a little older than himself, someone with a back that still felt somewhat unreliable.

“Waaaaaah!”

“Shh, don’t cry, Adel! Teach already forgave you. You can’t cry about the noogie hurting if you were the one up to no good! That’s uncool.”

“Hngh, mmm... If you say so, Katina.”

“You can call me ‘big sister,’ you know?”

The moment Katina tried to put on a sisterly air, however, she slipped and fell.

“Hngyah!”

After all, Katina was still a child herself, barely two years older than Adel. She barely had what it took to carry Adel and mother him. And when she took a spill, so did Adel. Adel even hit the ground head-first.

“OWWWWWW! Katina, you dummy!”

“Ow, ow, ow. Sorry, Adel!”

Adel wasn’t sure if this was an actual incident that had happened, but she was willing to bet it had. Dreams had a funny way of bringing back forgotten memories. A split second later, Adel found herself at Princess Euphinia’s current age.

“Come on, scoot over!” Katina said while crawling into Adel’s bed.

“Wh— Don’t just come in, Katina!”

“Where’s the harm? I’ve been putting you to sleep since forever!”

“That was ages ago!”

“So, what’s with that bruise on your face? Where’d you go and what’d you do

to get it?”

“...”

“Hellooooo. You listening?”

“...”

“What, you can’t even tell your big sister?!”

“I...don’t want to make you worry, big sister.”

“Wh— Oh, heh heh heh. Guess there’s no helping it, then. Hey, I have snacks. You want some?”

Both Adel and Katina were orphans with no memories of their parents, but Katina loved Adel like he was her younger brother. As orphans, they held a strong yearning for family. That’s why Adel understood even at this age why Katina was so happy to be called “big sister.”

“Don’t eat in the bed, you’ll get it dirty.”

“Mm? Fwat fwid fwu fay?”

“Seriously?! I *told* you not to get my bed dirty!”

Around this time, Adel was frequently getting into scraps with a group of less-than-savory characters making their base in the slums where Astal Orphanage was located. Unfortunately, they were backed by a corrupt noble, and Adel found himself fighting way out of his depth several years down the line.

“Please forgive him, milord! I beg you! He had no ill intentions! I’ll make sure he never does it again! Please!”

Katina was on her knees, grinding her head against the ground.

“Stop it, Katina! Why are you debasing yourself to this trash?! They don’t deserve it! It’s dangerous here, so go home already!”

Despite the bravado in Adel’s voice, he was surrounded by several men and his hands were tied behind his back. These men were hoodlums from the slum, but they were currently in a high class residential area far from the slums. Behind the group of gangsters was the noble who they had been paying their dues to. Because Adel’s rampages in their territory had made them late on their

payments several times, he'd become a problem that needed to be solved. When Adel stole the latest delivery, it proved to be the last straw. They caught him by threatening to crush Astal Orphanage if he resisted. And now, Katina had come to plead for his release.

"You say that, but he stole the money my men worked hard to gather and spread it all over the streets. That goes far beyond a mere childish prank, wouldn't you say?"

The well-dressed man standing before Katina sneered. Even though he looked the part of a nobleman, his expression and aura were no different from those of the gangsters. A man's character was by no means defined by what he wore or where he lived.

"Y-You are right, milord! But I beg you, please show mercy!"

"Well, there *is* something that you can do for me. In fact, with your good looks, I could lift you from poverty. What do you say, orphan?"

The noble lifted Katina's face by her chin as his other hand reached for her clothing.

"Katina! No, run away!"

But no matter how loudly Adel screamed, Katina stayed still.

"I-If this is enough to earn your forgiveness..." she said in a quivering voice, putting up no resistance.

"KATINA!"

"Heh heh heh. Yeeees, good girl."

The noble tore Katina's clothes off with one violent tug, baring her fair skin for all to see.

"Whoooo! Just looking at her is making me feel things!"

"You the man, Boss!"

"Can we have a go after you?!"

"Ha ha ha! Be patient. For now, make sure you hold that brat down properly."

"Yes, sir!"

“NOOOOOO! KATINA! KATINAAAA!”

Just as the nobleman was about to mount Katina, with Adel’s shouts filling the air...something burst into the room with a deafening boom.

“Oof!” the noble grunted as he was dashed against the wall.

This wasn’t Adel’s handiwork. A large beast with red and black fur had sent the man flying. The creature stood tall and proud, enveloped in sublime brilliance and radiating an aura of overwhelming power.

“I-Is that a Divine Beast?!” Adel exclaimed, half in surprise from seeing one for the first time and half out of disbelief that one would show up to save him and Katina.

“Huh? A-Aren’t you the one I met the other day, outside the city?” Katina looked up at the Divine Beast with the same amount of surprise. “What? Me? ...Y-Yes, I suppose. I don’t mind, but...”

Apparently Katina could understand the Divine Beast, as she began to converse with it. A short while later, the creature turned to bubbles of light that rushed into Katina’s chest. Now, Adel understood that this had been an instance of a Saint forming a contract with a Divine Beast.

“Y-You can control Divine Beasts?! So you are...a S-S-S-Saint?!”

This time, the noble’s voice was the one quivering. He immediately hit the ground and prostrated himself, even lower than Katina had.

“I-I have been insolent to the utmost without knowing! P-P-Please don’t turn me in to the Holy Tower Church! I swear I will never lay hands on you or your friends! I beg you! Please!”

All Saints were under the protection of the Holy Tower Church and commanded status far beyond that of most nobles. Even if the Saint was a poor orphan from the slums, her identity as a Saint took precedence over all else. Katina was now learning this in person.

“Ummmm... O-Okay. Let’s head back, Adel.”

“R-Right.”

Katina was so dazed that her knees had given out. Adel had to carry her home

on his back.

“Are you listening to me, Adel?! We got lucky this time! Promise me you won’t do anything so reckless again! I was worrying and worrying and worrying and—”

Adel was about to go deaf from Katina shouting directly into his ears. “Okay, I get it already! I’m thankful that you care about me so much, but you need to stop being reckless too! You jump into too many situations without a second thought!”

“And whose fault is that?! It’s yours! You’re the one always causing trouble!” Katina grabbed Adel’s neck and started shaking him violently.

“M-Maybe, but I do all that because I care about *you*!”

“Wh...!”

“So, please don’t do that again, big sister.”

“That’s... Okay, let’s promise each other, then. You won’t be reckless, and I won’t be reckless. Swear on it?”

“All right, I promise.”

It wasn’t long before word got out about Katina’s Saint abilities, and she was forced to leave Astal Orphanage. The warmth and gentle scent Adel remembered from back then seemed to envelope her even now. It was so comforting and soothing. Maybe this was what it was like to have a mother.

Adel slowly opened her eyes. She found herself in a bed illuminated by the soft glow of morning light. Katina’s arms were wrapped around her head, pressing her face to her bosom. Last night, Katina had insisted on sleeping with Adel for old times’ sake, so she’d ended up spending the night in Adel’s room in the knight escort quarters. The room that had been assigned to Katina was much bigger and had much fancier trappings, but she apparently preferred Adel’s.



The downside to sleeping together was that Adel woke up in such close proximity to Katina that she could hear her heartbeat. It was Katina's fault for hugging Adel, but Adel couldn't help feeling a little guilty about the situation. It seemed that Adel's return to the past had altered Katina's memories, as she now thought Adel had been a girl all along. This was why she didn't hesitate to sleep with Adel. However, Adel still had the mind of a man. She felt like she was taking advantage of her gender change to do something inappropriate.

That said, Adel suspected that Katina would have done the same thing regardless. Well, she hoped not, especially since Katina now had Julian. But it was hard to tell with Katina sometimes.

"Katina? Come on, wake up. It's morning."

Katina relaxed her grip, finally freeing Adel from pillow duty. Her eyelids fluttered open, and she yawned. "Good morning, Adel."

"Sorry for waking you. I have to get to my duties, so I need to prepare. Would you mind, um, letting go of me?"

"What do you— Oh, ha ha ha! Sorry. It just felt so nostalgic. Because we were sleeping together, I dreamed of our time in Astal Orphanage."

Smiling, Adel got out of bed and started getting changed. "I did too. I remember when you fell down trying to give me a piggyback ride. You made me cry so much!"

"Hey, that's what I saw too! Ha ha ha! Now that *really* takes me back!"

"It's not funny! It really hurt! It was a pain dealing with you always trying to act mature."

"I was, wasn't I? How about we chalk it up to youthful indiscretion? Ha ha ha," Katina giggled, tickled by the memory. Then she had what looked like the most satisfying stretch ever. "Mmmmm! Thanks to you, I slept great. I've been having trouble sleeping lately."

"Really? Is it because you're tired?"

"Not more than usual, I don't think. But maybe you're right. It *is* a big deal protecting all these important people attending the G4 Summit."

“That could be it. Those people seem to live in a world so very different from our orphanage.”

Adel threw off her nightwear, then splashed her face with some water from the bucket. With casual motions, she did up her knight escort uniform, ran a quick hand through her hair, and—

“Wait a minute, Adel. What’re you doing?”

“Hm? I’m getting ready for work.”

“That’s not what I mean! You have to do things properly! Come, sit here. First of all, don’t just throw away your clothes like that!”

“Um, I’m sorry?”

“Now, where’s your comb?”

“Comb? I don’t know. I haven’t used it in quite some time.”

“*USE IT!* Jeez! You’re wasting your good looks! I’ll just use the one that I brought, then!”

“Uh, sure. Yes, please.”

Without further ado, Katina started running her own comb through Adel’s long hair. Her touch was so soft and gentle that even Adel had to admit that it felt good.

“You’re...good at this, Katina.”

“Not more than anyone else. It’s just that you’ve always had short hair, so this is the first time I get to do this for you.”

Suddenly, the slightly proud look on Katina’s face disappeared and her comb slipped through her fingers. She wobbled a little, then fell to her knees.

“Ugh!”

“Katina?! Are you all right?! Katina!” Adel propped Katina up and helped her get back on her feet.

“Th-Thank you. I’m fine, I was just dizzy for a brief moment. This happens every once in a while recently.”

“Since when? It’s not a good sign if it lasts too long.”

“A little before I set off for the Summit, I think? It’s fine, I’m all right now.”

“Have you seen a doctor yet?”

“I did. The court physician at Rakul Palace examined me, but they said there’s nothing wrong with me. I think it’s just fatigue.”

Katina picked up the comb and resumed combing Adel’s hair.

“I see. Just in case, I’ll ask Princess to arrange for a physician here to take a look at you too.”

“Oh, Prince Julian already did that yesterday. They confirmed that I’m in perfect health.”

Apparently Julian was already one step ahead. He was proving himself to be a rather capable man. Adel was happy that he was taking good care of Katina.

“I see... I guess there’s nothing else to do but keep an eye on things. In any case, don’t push yourself too hard. If there’s anything at all that I can do for you, just tell me.”

“Of course. Thank you, Adel. Okay, I’m done.”

“Thank you. Whoa, my hair feels softer to the touch than usual.”

“You’re going to meet up with Princess Euphinia, right? I’m thinking of coming along to give her my greetings.”

“Good idea. Let’s go together.”

And so, Adel and Katina made themselves presentable and headed for Euphinia’s quarters. It was normally a coin toss whether she would still be asleep at this hour. Today, however, she could be heard in cheerful conversation with Julian deep inside her labyrinth of packed bookshelves.

“Wow! This book sounds so interesting!”

“Isn’t it? I thought you’d like it.”

“Thank you for bringing it back even though it’s so heavy!”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. Seeing how much you love it makes it all worth

it.”

Adel and Katina navigated the shelves to find Euphinia sitting in between Julian’s legs as the two of them enjoyed a wonderful moment. The heartwarming sight of the two siblings getting along so well was a scene beautiful beyond words. Adel couldn’t help feeling a little jealous.



“I’m supposed to look like I’m vigilant and highly on guard. How is *this* supposed to convey that?”

Two days later, Adel was staring at the reflection of herself in a dress that matched her hair color. The dress was adorned with welnafare flowers, the national flower of Wendill. Her hair was done up in a different style than usual and was held up by, again, a welnafare. Not only did her dress have a revealing neckline, it was also giving her breasts a push-up effect. Her appearance was simply breathtaking, to the point of being bewitching. In fact, she was so transfixed at the sight of herself that she couldn’t tear her eyes away.

She wordlessly poked her own chest. A unique sensation of softness blended with elasticity shot through her finger like lightning. The next moment, she was racked with guilt as she asked herself what on earth she was doing.

“Adel? Are you done changing?” Melulu poked her head into Adel’s partition.

Adel yelped in surprise. “Don’t just barge in, Melulu! You’re supposed to call out first!”

“But I did!” Melulu protested. “You just didn’t hear me.”

“Oh, is that so? Sorry, then the fault is mine.”

“What, were you lost in your own looks? Not that I don’t get it. You look simply out of this world!”

“D-Do I? Thank you, I suppose...”

“Aww, come on, Adel. You usually look so sharp and self-assured, but then you get all shy when you wear pretty clothing. You should be more confident! Show off what you’ve got!”

Melulu placed her hands on Adel’s shoulders and began giving her a massage.

“I-It’s not like I can help it. I’m not used to this kind of thing.”

It was only normal for an adult man to be mortified and distressed when walking out in public in a cute dress. And that was exactly Adel’s current situation.

“Don’t say that! Princess is attending the welcoming party for the Summit’s guests. As the one standing by her side and protecting her, you also have to wear something that suits the occasion.”

“Then why don’t *you* wear this and take my place?”

A banquet was being hosted on the night before the launch of the G4 Summit to welcome the VIPs gathered in Welna. As the host country, Wendill wanted to receive them with the highest degree of hospitality. To that end, it only made sense for Euphinia to attend decked to the nines. And it was Adel’s job to stand next to her and keep a close eye on her immediate surroundings. However, she also needed to dress appropriately to avoid ruining the atmosphere.

Mash and Melulu had been assigned to stand guard at the doors, so they were wearing their usual uniforms.

“Because everyone’s happier with you doing it.”

“What does *that* mean?” Adel tilted her head in confusion.

“Oh man... A-Anyway, I’ll leave it to you.”

Melulu circled around and hugged Adel from behind. Melulu’s shapely breasts were squished against Adel’s back, giving her a very good sense of their softness. Having no way to ignore the sensation, Adel became very flustered.

“C-Come on, Melulu. What’re you doing?!”

Adel turned around and found Melulu’s face mere inches from her own. They were so close, she could nearly feel her breath. For some reason, Melulu’s gorgeously beautiful face glowed with a strange allure.

Melulu giggled softly. “Now that I think about it, I’m not so sure I want some guy to own you. It would make me very...jealous.” She brought her face even closer, and brushed a finger over Adel’s cheek.

“M-Melulu?!”

There was a strange red gleam in the girl's eyes, and the faint contour of bat wings could be seen behind her back.

"No, you're Lilith! Stop possessing Melulu and using her to play pranks on me!"

Adel gave Melulu a good shaking. She returned to her senses with a gasp.

"Uh, what was I... I feel a little out of it..."

Melulu's eye color reverted to normal and the bat wings disappeared. At the same time, a young girl with bat wings poofed into existence above her head, floating in midair. This was Lilith, the new Divine Beast who had formed a contract with Euphinia not that long ago.

Lilith giggled. *"Sorry. Did I surprise you? But the two of you are just so cute! It made for a...breathhtaking composition."*

"Oh, it's Lilith. Hey."

"No more jokes, Lilith. I mean it."

Lilith was a saint compared to a Divine Beast like Pegasus, but she was still a prankster. Every once in a while, she used her ability to possess and control Melulu to tease Adel. For example, she would make Melulu walk into Adel in the bath and, under the pretext of giving a massage, make her fondle Adel all over. According to the Divine Beast, she had great affinity with Melulu. Perhaps she had gotten accustomed to her after being forced by a Sealing Plaque to stay inside Melulu for an extended period of time during the Sedis incident.

"Oh, it doesn't really bother me," Melulu said. "I'm gradually starting to remember what she does while possessing me. It actually makes for good training."

By "training," Melulu was referring to fighting with Lilith possessing her. While possessed, Melulu's strength was greatly increased. The difference was not as stark as Adel's Ki Possession, but the effect was similar. Whereas Ki Possession relied on ki and was a technique that Adel could turn on and off at will, Lilith's possession relied entirely on her ability as a Divine Beast.

When Lilith possessed someone, she could bring out more of their strength

than they themselves normally could. This—and the Armor of Lamentation—was the secret behind the astonishing power that Melulu had displayed when she was forced to make an attempt on Tristan’s life in Sidel. During recent group training sessions, Melulu had been exploring how to fight while possessed by Lilith. Thanks to this, she was gradually developing the ability to retain memories of when she lent Lilith her body.

“Uh.../ mind, though,” Adel said.

Adel was always the butt of the pranks that Lilith pulled off in Melulu’s body. But then again, Melulu teased Adel quite often anyway, so there wasn’t that much difference.

“Aww, I’m so jealous that you can actually hear what Lilith says!” Melulu said, looking at the Divine Beast who merely smiled back.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door, and Euphinia entered. Her hair was done up in a different style than usual, and she was wearing the most adorable sky-blue dress. A welnafare in her hair was the finishing touch on the definitive depiction of an angel.

“Adel! Oh, wow! You look so good! You’re so pretty!”

“Princess! Ohhhh, how wonderful you look! You’re adorable beyond words!”

When Euphinia and Adel saw each other, their faces both lit up. In that instant, the two of them looked like sisters, not master and retainer.

“Look, Adel! Our hair ornaments match!”

“You’re right! What an enormous honor it is! Thank you, Princess!”

If dressing up made Euphinia this happy, Adel wouldn’t mind doing it again. Being able to sport the same hair ornament as her liege was another privilege that came with having turned into a girl.

“If someone told me when we were still living in Astal Orphanage that Adel would serve someone so earnestly one day, I would have laughed,” Katina giggled. “It’s like she’s become a completely different person.”

Katina was also wearing a dress patterned after the welnafare. The soft muted color of her dress was the perfect shade to bring out her chaste and

maidenly charm.

Adel puffed out her chest. “It is human nature to change upon meeting the person they are destined to serve. Thanks to Princess, I have been born anew.”

“Is that so?” Katina turned to Euphinia. “Thank you, Your Highness, for helping Adel grow so much.”

“Oh, no, I didn’t do anything, Eminent! From the start, Adel’s been strong, gallant, and so very kind. I’m the one who’s always being helped by her. My heart overflows with gratitude every day for having such a wonderful knight escort.”

“Princeeeeeess! I am not worthy of such high praise!”

Upon being complimented in person, Adel became so touched that her vision was obscured by tears.

Katina’s peals of laughter rang out. “But it’s true that I’ve never seen Adel like this. It’s proof of how much you’ve touched her heart, Your Highness. You two are perfect for each other.”

“And that makes me very happy.”

Euphinia’s angelic smile brought a fresh burst of tears to Adel’s eyes. She wanted to burn the image into her brain, but her body was making it difficult for her to see. What a dilemma.

“Eminent Katina, what was Adel like as a child?” Melulu asked.

“As a child... Well, to put it into a word, she was a boy. Her hair was cut short like a boy’s, she was as good at fighting as any boy, and was always covered in mud and scrapes.”

“Oh my!” Euphinia exclaimed.

Melulu laughed. “Yep, that’s a boy all right.”

“I-I couldn’t help it!” Adel objected. “Please leave it at that, Katina.”

Adel *had been* a boy, so it made sense that she’d had short hair and often got covered in mud. But even then, she’d been exceptionally rowdy. Apparently, Katina’s memories of Adel had remained largely the same, just with an

understanding that she had actually been a girl all along. That probably made Adel seem like the most rambunctious tomboy of all time.

“She never listened to a word I said, and skipped cooking and cleaning duty all the time. And guess who had to cover for her?! Ahhhh, this is bringing up so many memories. I’m starting to remember so many talks that I should have had with you, Adel. Should we find the time?”

“I-I’m sorry! I’ll make up for all the trouble I caused you! I promise!”

“Will you really?” Katina stared right into Adel’s eyes.

“Yes. Definitely.”

“The fact that you can say that shows how much you’ve matured, I suppose. I’ll wait, but I won’t hold my breath.”

“I’m sure there will be plenty of opportunities,” Euphinia chimed in with a smile. “After all, we’ll soon be seeing each other every day, won’t we?”

Adel looked puzzled. “But Princess, Katina is a Saint stationed at Rakul.”

“Yes, but she’ll eventually move in with us. Right, Eminent?”

Catching onto what Euphinia was implying, Katina blushed a little. “I hope so.”

In other words, Katina would eventually marry Julian, assume the throne with him, and live in Wendill Palace as the future queen consort of Wendill. Euphinia was bringing this up to imply that she approved of their relationship and was eager to accept Katina to the family.

“I’m looking forward to it, Katina,” Adel grinned, then gave Katina’s shoulder a pat. “Make it easy for me to pay you back, please.”

“Wh-What are you saying, Adel?!”

“We’ll be waiting for you, Eminent Katina.”

“Not you too, Your Highness! P-Prince Julian has taken an interest in me only because I’m an oddity who has become an Eminent in spite of my origins as an orphan.”

“That’s not true!” Euphinia gripped Katina’s hands. “My brother might come across as aloof, but I’ve never heard him talk to another girl the way he talks to

you! He usually likes going off on his own, but now he listens to you and has brought you home with him. That's because he wants to be with you, and because he wanted to introduce you to us."

"Do you really think so?"

"One hundred percent! So please, believe in him!"

"I...will do just that, then."

Moved by the earnest look on Euphinia's face, Katina nodded in acceptance. For a moment, the magnanimity of Euphinia's heart made her seem older than Katina. She radiated a calmness and kindness that enveloped Adel, Katina, and everyone present.

"Princess, did you invite Saint Katina to join us in wearing a dress so she can show it off to Prince Julian?" Melulu asked.

"Yes! I'm sure he'd love it!" Euphinia replied enthusiastically. "I actually invited Eminent Chloe too, but she said no."

"I can just imagine her saying, 'That's not me!'" Melulu chuckled.

"That's exactly what she said!"

"Well then, it's about time we made our way to the hall. Are you ready, Princess?"

"I am. Adel, Eminent Katina, are you ready as well?"

"I am right behind you, always!"

"Of course, Your Highness."

As Euphinia and Melulu left the room, Katina turned to Adel. "You have chosen a wonderful person to serve, Adel."

"And it's all thanks to you, Katina. Thank you for everything you did for me when we were young." Again, Adel patted Katina's shoulder. "That's why it's now my turn to pray for your happiness. Don't worry. All the effort that you've made will pay off. I just know it."

Even if there were slight deviations, the fate shared by two people couldn't easily change. Just as it had been thus far for Adel and Euphinia, the same

would come to be for Katina and Julian.

“Aww, thank you, Adel. I’ll take your word for it.”

“You do that. Now, let’s go.”

“Hey, wait a second. Does anything look out of place on me? My hair ornament isn’t crooked, is it?”

Standing in front of the mirror, Katina gave herself a once-over one last time. She looked restless and fidgety. Adel didn’t remember seeing her like this all that often. *So this is what love looks like*, she thought.

Smiling at the heartwarming sight, Adel said reassuringly, “You’re fine. Everything looks good. You look good. Just be confident.”

“Y-You think so? Yes, I’m sure you’re right.” Katina nodded to herself, then sighed. “It’s my first time doing something like this. I can’t help feeling anxious.”

“That’s just how these things go.”

“Have you ever been in love, Adel?”

“O-Of course not! I’m a m— I’m my liege’s knight escort. I have no interest in anything else.”

“Really?”

“All you have to do is stand tall and smile. You’re Prince Julian’s girlfriend.”

“Am I, though? He’s never actually said what we are...”

“What? Are you not? Has nothing ever happened between you two?”

“Um, that’s...” Katina’s cheeks turned crimson, indicating that a memory had surfaced. “Uh, would you promise not to tell anyone?”

“Of course.” Adel nodded.

Katina brushed her lips softly. “We...you know. Just once.”

“Huh.” Adel wasn’t sure what to do with that information, but she was glad to hear that the relationship was progressing. “In any case, what Princess said about Prince Julian is right. He might not look like it, but he’s quite reliable. You can put your trust in him.”

“R-Right. I mean, I already know that, but...”

Another sigh. Lovesickness was quite the ailment indeed.

Melulu popped her head in and beckoned furiously. “Adel! Saint Katina! Come on!”

“Apologies. Let’s go, Katina.”

“This is it.” Katina exhaled, then slapped both sides of her face to psych herself up. “Let’s do it!”

When Adel closed the door to the room, she heard voices coming from within.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit!”

“Katina’s really falling for this guy!”

“Goddammit! Isn’t there anything we can do?!”

“Bwa ha ha ha ha ha ha! AHHH ha ha ha ha!”

“Hee hee hee hee! Whooo ha ha ha ha ha!”

“Pega and Nico, shut your traps!”

“We’re gonna fucking tear you apart!”

It was a completely worthless conversation, not worth even a second of anyone’s time. Adel chose to ignore it completely.

“Hm? Did you hear something?” Katina asked, turning around.

Adel clamped her hands over Katina’s ears and turned her head back. “It was nothing, Katina. Come on, we have to get going.”

This was an important moment for Katina, and Adel did not want any daft Divine Beasts ruining it.



“I am deeply pleased to welcome all of you to this banquet again this year.” Standing in front of everyone, the king of Wendill looked at each nation’s delegation with a big smile. “The Holy Kingdom of Rakul. The Torust Empire. The Republic of Malka. The Lords’ Coalition of Teeling. May our five nations join

hands and, under the protection of the Holy Towers, guide the world to a better place! Cheers!”

Everyone present raised their cups and shouted “Cheers!” together. But Adel’s cup was filled with fruit juice, not wine. It wouldn’t be appropriate for Princess Euphinia’s knight escort to get drunk while on duty. It certainly didn’t help that, after turning into a woman, Adel’s tolerance for alcohol had taken a nosedive.

Past Adel had also accompanied Euphinia to a G4 Summit. He had been very good at holding his liquor. Furthermore, because he attended in the intimidating Armor of Lamentation, he actually became a target for attendees looking for an opponent to have a drinking contest with. He ended up outdrinking every single challenger in what turned out to be a surprisingly lively affair. Due to this, he’d become quite proud of being a heavyweight.

The current Adel had lost this superpower. As such, she couldn’t risk taking even a single sip. Even though the banquet was supposed to represent peaceful cooperation and the event was all glitter and dazzle, there was no telling what could happen. Adel was determined not to let her guard down for a single second and to dedicate her full faculties toward protecting Euphinia and the venue.

For better or for worse, the patrolling knights had never found Seiryuu again, even with help from Margritte and his men. Without knowing exactly what Elciel’s aim was, it was impossible to rule out the possibility of something happening on this night. In the previous timeline, Elciel’s actions had ended up splitting the Four World Powers into two factions that clashed in one gigantic world war. If she had something planned for tonight, chances were high that it would be part of a scheme meant to induce the same catastrophe.

Adel kept a sharp eye on the surroundings as VIPs started approaching Euphinia to greet her and chat. As each delegation came up, Adel closely examined the members’ faces and mentally assessed how susceptible their respective countries were to being manipulated into starting a world war.

The simplest way to cause a global pandemonium would be to kill the heads of state who had gathered for the G4 Summit. To complicate things, Angela

August—the woman who had made an attempt on Tristan’s life—was here too. There was no way that Angela had been acting on her own discretion, so it was only logical to assume that her country had been behind her maneuverings. This meant that not only was Malka a country with intentions of swallowing up the other world powers to rule over the entire world, it was willing to take concrete steps toward realizing that goal.

Among the three other countries, the Holy Empire of Rakul had the longest history. It prided itself on being the legitimate descendant of the Holy Empire that had once dominated the Holy Era. Given the chance, it would most certainly annex what it considered unruly breakaways to reclaim its original glory. Even though it wouldn’t take direct action like Malka was doing, the two were quite similar at their core.

Going by the personalities of Tristan and his father, the Empire of Torust seemed wholly uninterested in attacking other countries. Based on the fact that Tristan had even hushed up his own attempted assassination, it seemed safe to conclude that Torust was the most peaceable country. Adel was curious whether Tristan had given his father a doctored version of events, or if he had revealed the full details before they jointly agreed to keep a lid on it. Either way, Tristan was a far cry from Mad Emperor Tristan.

The Lords’ Coalition of Teeling was a country that refrained from interacting with the others as much as possible. Put simply, it had a very weak international diplomatic presence. This was because, as its name implied, it was really a bunch of city-states gathered under a joint parliamentary ruling system. It took them ages to make decisions on anything, but when all of the lords made a concerted effort, the power that they could bring to bear was nothing short of incredible. During the Great War, Teeling had contributed greatly to the League of Southern Nations’ victory. That said, it was prudent to expect that a few of these lords cared nothing for maintaining the status quo and would leap at the chance to carve into other countries to expand their own domains.

Even without the appearance of Mad Emperor Tristan, there were plenty of sparks that could be fanned into the Great War.

The banquet was now well underway, but nothing of note had happened yet. After dealing with the last person who came to her, Euphinia heaved a sigh of

relief.

“I’m a little tired.”

“Would you like a brief rest, Princess?” Adel held out a cooled down cup of Euphinia’s favorite black tea. “Here, for you.”

Adel found sight to be extremely helpful in telling when Euphinia was feeling thirsty or hungry or in need of something. In the previous timeline, it had been hard to sense these things without being told.

“Thank you, Adel.” Euphinia took a sip to soothe her throat, then looked at the center of the hall. A smile blossomed on her face. “Oh my! Adel, look at that!”

Everyone had their eyes on Julian and Katina, who were dancing to the music. Katina’s movements looked a little awkward, but that was understandable. She’d never had the opportunity to learn dancing while living in Astal Orphanage. The Holy Tower Church had probably taught her a little, but dancing wasn’t a necessary skill for Saints. Katina wasn’t even all that athletic in the first place. At the end of the day, the most important aspect to being a Saint was forming contracts with Divine Beasts and drawing on their power to erect Holy Towers and deploy Sanctuaries.

Where Katina was lacking, however, Julian was doing an astounding job backing her up. Even when she accidentally kicked him or stepped on his foot, he kept a smile on his face and continued to gaze encouragingly into her eyes. Katina looked nervous, but she also looked really happy being supported by him.

“The two of them really do get along so well,” Euphinia sighed dreamily with sparkles in her eyes. “It’s wonderful.”

Euphinia, whose hobby was reading, naturally had experience perusing stories with romance. Perhaps Julian and Katina’s dance was reminding her of a particular scene from a novel. Katina was an Eminent now, but she had once been an orphan. Hers was a rags-to-riches story, with a romance that crossed between wildly different social classes. Adel was pretty sure that Euphinia had a few books just like that on her shelves.

“A love across social boundaries! A love that cannot be severed even by interference from a mean mother-in-law and sister-in-law! Oh, Saint Katina, yours is a briar-rose path, but please hang in there!”

Euphinia was unconsciously voicing her thoughts. Just as Adel suspected, she was confusing Katina for a romance novel protagonist. Although Euphinia was a living saint, being pure in heart, upright in character, and prettier than an angel, there was a part of her that was just a rosy-eyed girl.

After reading a romance story that she loved, Euphinia had used to gush all about it to her unseeing knight escort, who listened patiently while musing over the girl’s unusual state. Adel had loved those moments. And now, not only could she hear Euphinia’s ecstatic voice, she could also see the stars dazzling in her liege’s eyes. It was a very heartwarming sight, but she had a question.

“Princess, wouldn’t that make *you* Katina’s sister-in-law? That means she wouldn’t have a mean sister-in-law, would she?”

Euphinia gasped. “So I have to hide her dresses and tell her to get out and shower her with verbal abuse?!”

“Come to think of it, you’ve been doing the complete opposite of all those things.”

Not only had Euphinia ordered a tailor-made dress for Katina, she had even reassured Katina when she was feeling uncertain about her relationship with Julian. She couldn’t be more different from the stereotypical mean-spirited sister-in-law.

“You’re not capable of doing such things, and that is why I choose to stay by your side. There might not be as much drama as there is in your books, but isn’t this wonderful too?”

“Aww, Adel... I suppose you’re right!” The smile that Euphinia gave was so angelic that Adel felt her heart being cleansed.

Just then, Julian called out. “Euphinaaaaa! You and your retainer should join us! Come on and dance!”

“Brother dearest! I’d love to! Let’s go, Adel!”

“I shall accompany you, Princess!”

As Adel was pulled by hand toward the circle of dancers, she felt grateful for having a new body. Before, Adel had been so much bigger than Euphinia that it would be extremely awkward for them to dance together. Now, Adel was the perfect height.

“Wow, you’re so good at this, Adel!” Euphinia exclaimed, impressed with Adel’s footwork and the way she carried herself.

“Thank you! However, I’m really just copying what I see everyone else doing.”

Adel was using Ki Convergence to bolster her eyesight and fervently stealing the techniques of Euphinia, Julian, and all the other good dancers in the hall. This was the secret behind how Adel seemed to have turned into a master in the span of mere minutes. She would never forgive herself if she embarrassed Euphinia by stepping on her foot or otherwise messing up this dance. This called for one hundred percent effort!

“Oh my! How lovely they are!”

“Her Highness and her retainer are both such incredible dancers!”

“I couldn’t agree more. Just looking at them brings a smile to my face.”

Adel and Euphinia had become the new center of attention in the hall.

Julian danced closer. “Hey, you two are really good!”

“Adel, dancing? You really aren’t the Adel I remember!” Katina complained, pouting a little.

The next moment, Katina accidentally stepped on Julian’s foot.

“Ow!”

“Ah! I-I’m so sorry, Prince Julian!”

“I-I-It’s fine, don’t worry about it. The most important thing when dancing is to have fun. So, just focus on having a good time, Katina. Tune out everything happening around you.”

Katina reciprocated Julian’s supportive smile with a thankful one of her own.

“All right. When I tell you to, could you jump for me?”

“What? Um, sure.” Katina nodded without really understanding.

“Okay, get ready. One, two, three, jump!”

Matching his timing, Katina jumped as high as she could, and Julian swooped her up even higher. She shrieked at suddenly finding herself so high up. This move wasn’t in the repertoire of the other dancers. It was novel and showy, so it evoked impressed “ohhh”s from the room.

“Ha ha ha, how was it? Are you having fun?” Julian asked when Katina came back down.

“M-My heart nearly jumped out of my chest!”

“Really? It was fun for me, though.”

As the prince bashfully scratched the back of his head, Adel picked up a few comments from those nearby that warmed her heart.

“Look how intimate they are!”

“Ah, youth.”

“Adel! Adel!” Euphinia called excitedly, bringing Adel’s attention back.

“Yes, Princess?”

“I want to do that too!”

“You mean, you want me to lift you up?”

“Yes, please!”

“Very well! Hang on tight!”

“Thank you, Adel! One, two...”

“Three!”

Adel hoisted Euphinia high up into the air. The princess chortled with delight, looking down with eyes...that suddenly turned golden. Her gentle sky blue irises were now golden lamps, and the smile on her face faded into an expressionless mask.

“Um, Princess?”

This was the same phenomenon that had occurred in Alderford during the

fight with Elciel when Adel learned how to use Ki Possession.

“Princess! Princess, what’s wrong?!” Adel lowered Euphinia and peered into her face.

“Stay with me...here...for a while.”

“‘Here’?”

The music had fallen quiet. Looking up, Adel realized that the crowds of people all around had disappeared without a trace. The very venue itself, with all its extravagance and resplendence, had been replaced by an empty space occupied solely by Adel and Euphinia.

“Wh-What’s going on? Princess, where is this? What happened to everyone else? They’re all gone.”

“This is the same place and yet, at the same time, a different place. It is the paradox dimension where Divine Beasts live, albeit a simple, temporary one that I created on the spot. Hence, its appearance and form reflects where you just were.”

“What on earth is...”

The only ones capable of creating a home for Divine Beasts were Divine Beasts themselves, or the deity who had supposedly created this world. In other words, the ultimate being. Of course, to Adel, “the ultimate being” referred to Euphinia, but she most certainly did not have the ability to produce this phenomenon.

The golden eyes and blank face brought to mind the boy who had called himself a Watcher and sent Adel back in time. The hooded figure was nowhere to be seen, but there was little doubt that he was affecting Euphinia in some way.

“Why are you doing this? Mash and Melulu would be worried out of their minds at Princess’s disappearance. It would be a huge commotion.”

“Because it is dangerous.”

“What’s dangerous?”

“It is approaching. Something terrible is—”

“‘Something terrible’?! So Elciel really *is* scheming something! Or is it Angela and Malka?!”

Euphinia shook her head quietly. “Hence, we should take refuge here, until things settle down. It is safe here.”

“But Princess! If Elciel or Angela are up to something, I need to intervene and crush their plot! Every second we stay here, we’re leaving Prince Julian and the heads of state in danger! Mash and Melulu may be there, but they need help from either you or me!”

Without a Sanctuary, Mash and Melulu wouldn’t be able to use any spells and therefore would be fighting at a fraction of their full strength. Melulu owned a spelltool, but the difference between being able to cast spells or not still made a world of difference. Chloe and Katina were attending the banquet too, so they might be able to provide the Sanctuary, but Adel still couldn’t just leave everything to them while sitting here twiddling her thumbs.

“Adel,” Euphinia called out in an authoritative tone.

Adel straightened her back and knelt before her liege. “Yes, Princess!”

“What is your calling? Is your highest priority not protecting me and keeping me safe?”

“It is.”

“Then let us stay here. Stay with me.”

“P-Princess...”

Euphinia gently laid a hand on Adel’s slumped shoulder.

“Don’t let this burden you. Think only about fulfilling what you came back in time to achieve.”

Adel’s head shot up. “Did you just—?!”

The princess’s eyes were still the same golden glow that seemed to see through everything. Her face was expressionless, absolutely devoid of her characteristic warmth and winsomeness. Adel had never told Euphinia that she had come back in time. The fact that she spoke of something that she should have had no knowledge of could only mean one thing.

“Young man! Where are you?! I know you’re here!”

As Adel suspected, the being who claimed to be a Watcher was speaking through Euphinia’s mouth. And for some reason, he was trying to harbor Adel and Euphinia in this strange place.

“There is no one else here but us, Adel.”

“No, there is! He must be close by, Princess! Excuse me. Young man! Let me speak with Princess!”

Adel grabbed Euphinia’s shoulders and shook her vigorously while calling for her. The next moment, her eyes reverted to their normal color.

“A-Adel? Wh-What was I...”

“Princess! Oh, what a relief! You’re back!”

“Um... Where is this? Where is everyone?”

Euphinia looked around and tilted her head quizzically. Unsurprisingly, she had no memories of what had just happened.

“This is a place that a Divine Beast created for us to take shelter in.”

“Take shelter? Did something happen at the party?”

“I have no idea. All I was told was that ‘something terrible is approaching.’”

“‘Something terrible’?! So Eminent Elciel or Malka are making a move?!”

Euphinia was making the same assumptions.

“Perhaps. However, that unknown Divine Beast reminded me that my top priority is to keep you safe, and that the best way to do so is to stay here with you. He spoke to me through you just now.”

“What?!”

“I’m sorry, Princess. I doubted him and tried to wake you up. That’s why—”

“There’s nothing to apologize for! You did the right thing. It is true that as my knight escort, your greatest duty is to protect me. But that only applies when I am someone worthy of your protection.”

Euphinia gathered herself and looked at Adel with conviction.

“Someone who cowers alone in safety while others are in danger is undeserving of your service. Please bring me back to my senses if you ever think you need to! Scold me, slap me, do whatever you must!”

“Oh, Princess! However, please promise me you won’t be reckless. I will take on all your enemies myself.”

“That’s fine. I’m sorry for always making you put yourself in danger.”

“Please don’t worry about it! It is my pride and joy to fight for you!”

“Thank you, Adel. Now, let’s look for a way to leave this place.”

“At once!”

Despite the zest of Adel’s response, she had no idea where to look. However, if this place had the same characteristics as the Divine Beasts’ homeworld, then asking a Divine Beast seemed like a good place to start.

“Cerberus!”

The red-and-black beast materialized from Adel’s shadow and shuddered once. *“Hmm... I am caught up on your situation, my Saint.”*

“Saves me the trouble of explaining, then. Is there a way out of here?”

“Unfortunately, there is nothing that I can do. We Divine Beasts travel between your world and ours through cracks in space. I don’t see one here.”

“Is it possible to forcibly create one?”

“I cannot. But maybe he can.”

“Who?”

“Pegasus. He is the mount that the deities of old used to travel between worlds.”

“I see. Thanks for the information. Princess, did you hear him? Can we ask Pegasus for help?”

“Of course. Mr. Pega!”

Pegasus appeared in answer to Euphinia’s call. Only, he was lying on his side and snoring loudly. Apparently he had been sleeping in her shadow.

He woke up with a snort. *“Wh-What’s going on, Euphinia?”*

The white horse’s languid mannerisms irked Adel so much that she wanted to kick him, but she held herself back, remembering that Euphinia was present. Not to mention, she now had to ask him for help, as Cerberus had confirmed that there was no other recourse. As much as it killed her, she had to be nice to him.

“Mr. Pega, we want to leave this place and return to where we were! Can you take us?”

“Huh? Wha— Ohhhh, this is the Divine Beast Realm. Ah, but it’s a slapdash job done in a hurry. Still pretty damn impressive, though; I can’t make one. But that means this isn’t connected to your world. Okay, I see how things are.”

The Divine Beast actually sounded serious for once as he examined their surroundings.

“So, *can* you bring us back?” Adel asked.

“I mean, I can, but I sense real bad news on the other side. You sure you don’t wanna stay put a little longer?”

“We can’t!” Euphinia declared emphatically. “If something terrible is approaching, we have to stop it! Mr. Pega, please take us!”

“Ugh... Okay, fine. But remember: I can’t fight, okay? Like, at all! The instant we get there, I’m going into hiding!”

Despite looking scared, Pegasus still nodded his acquiescence.

“That’s where I’ll come in,” Cerberus snarled, his eagerness sounding quite reassuring considering the situation. *“If Elciel and her Four Guardians are all there, I’ll finally have the opportunity to pay them back for everything!”*

“I’m in full agreement with you, partner,” Adel grinned. “All right, let’s go.”

“Then Euphinia and Adel, get on my back. And you’re too big, so get back into Adel’s shadow for now.”

“Hmph, very well.”

Cerberus returned to Adel’s shadow as Adel and Euphinia mounted Pegasus’s

back.

“Oh man, sweet Adel’s ass really is the best! It’s so squishy and big! I can’t get enough of how bouncy—”

“Get going already!” Adel growled, raising Salamander’s Tail threateningly.

“Eeeep! Okay, here goes!”

When Pegasus pushed off the ground and flapped his wings hard, everything around blurred into horizontal lines.

“Wh-What is this?!”

“I don’t know; I’ve never seen it either!”

“We’re crossing the wall between dimensions! If you feel sick, close your eyes!”

The distortion reached a fever pitch, then everything disappeared. And suddenly, the world started returning to normal.

When Adel’s and Euphinia’s eyes adjusted, they found themselves in a place that was both familiar and foreign. It looked like the banquet hall in Wendill Palace, but only barely. Everything was dyed in red. Numerous fires dotted the venue, and large puddles of blood covered the floor. Dishes and cups were scattered everywhere, their contents spilling all over. Among them lay many motionless shapes that were clearly human corpses.

“How can this be?!” Euphinia exclaimed, her face turning pale and tears welling in her eyes. “This... This is dreadful!”

“What on earth happened here?!” Adel quickly looked around to take stock of the situation.

Mash and Melulu were nowhere in sight. The same was true of Katina, Chloe, Julian, Tristan, and all the foreign dignitaries. There was no telling what had occurred, but it was clearly over. Adel scanned the faces of the dead, but she didn’t recognize—

“Margritte!”

A large figure was face down on the ground right in front of a corridor to

another room. Adel and Euphinia swiftly dismounted and rushed over.

“Sir Margritte!” Adel cried, shaking him vigorously. “Sir Margritte! Pull yourself together! Are you all right?!”

Margritte’s eyes opened a sliver. “I-Is that you, Dame Adel? I...am ashamed you have to see me...like this. His Majesty and Prince Tristan...they got away. I leave them...to you.”

“O-Okay! Good! But who did this?! What happened here?!”

Sadly, no answer was forthcoming. Margritte had expended his last breath entrusting his lieges to Adel’s care.

“Sir Margritte! No!”

Be it Elciel or Angela, whoever it was that had wreaked havoc here was going to pay.

“Adel! Look there!”

There was a figure walking slowly in the room on the other side of the passage filling up with flames. They were still on their feet, which meant they were still alive.

“Let’s go, Princess!”

Adel grabbed Euphinia’s hand and started running. The figure wavered due to the heat, but the two soon got close enough to identify them. It was none other than Commander Angela August of the Republic of Malka.

“Cerberus, protect Princess! ANGELA! I WON’T FORGIVE YOU!”

Without a second thought, Adel summoned Cerberus and tasked him with taking care of Euphinia. At the same time, she brandished Salamander’s Tail as a double-bladed sword of blue flames and charged forward.

Letting Angela escape during the Sidel incident had been a huge mistake. Adel now deeply regretted not dedicating all her efforts toward capturing Angela back then. This time, she would not repeat the same mistake. She would cut off the snake’s head with her own hand!

Strangely, Angela made no move to raise her guard. She simply stood there.

When Adel got close, she turned and smiled.

“ANGELA!”

“Where did you go? You made *me* do all the work... That’s hardly fair.”

“What?” Adel responded with a confused frown.

Angela’s body burst into a spray of blood, spattering everywhere and onto Adel’s face and clothes.

“Wha— Angela?! ANGELA!”

Angela sank into the puddle of her own blood, no longer speaking. Her wide open eyes were devoid of life. She was gone.

“Dammit!”

Clearly, Angela wasn’t the culprit responsible for this calamity. In that case, just what had Angela been fighting against?

Euphinia, who was now on Cerberus’s back, prompted the Divine Beast to approach Adel.

“Is she...?”

Adel shook her head. Without saying anything, she reached out and closed Angela’s eyes.



“Now we know this is Elciel’s doing. I’m sorry, Princess. I thought I had finished her off, but clearly I was wrong. I am still too inexperienced!”

“It was not your fault, Adel. In any case, our priority now is to look for everyone!”

“Of course. I don’t see Mash or Melulu around. They must be protecting His Majesty and Prince Julian!”

Margritte and Angela had likely been the rear guard, tasked with buying time for the VIPs to make their escape. As proof, the walls and floor bore signs of fighting. A crucial part of being a bodyguard was bringing one’s charge as far away from where the action was happening as possible. In that case, the front line was currently moving farther and farther away from where everything had begun.

BOOOOOOOOM!

A deafening crash rang out somewhere in the distance, shaking the floor briefly.

“Outside!”

Adel and Euphinia happened to be next to a wall in the direction where the sound had come from.

“I give you permission to break the wall, Adel!”

“Yes, Princess!”

Adel thrust Salamander’s Tail into the wall, then cut out a large opening. A gust of air rushed in, whipping her hair around. The wind was hot. When Adel peered through the hole, she realized that the palace was also on fire.

“No! Our palace!” Euphinia cried in dismay, staring in a daze.

“Dammit!”

The sight reminded Adel of when Wendill Palace had burned down in the Great War. Adel had been blind at the time, but surely this was how it had looked. The same tragedy was occurring, and she had failed to stop it again.

“No, it’s not over yet!”

Adel shook her head and changed gears. The boom just now implied that the situation was still developing. There was no time to stop and wallow in regret.

When she looked closer, Adel caught a flash close to a steeple on the other side of the castle courtyard. That steeple was a watchtower usually manned by castle guards.

Is that a spell?

The next moment, a boom even louder than the earlier one rang out. The steeple that was under attack was on the verge of collapse.

“There! Princess, let’s go!”

“Yes!”

Adel also hopped onto Cerberus’s back. “Go!”

“Very well. Hang on tight!”

Cerberus shot through the hole in the wall like a bullet. He dashed down the wall, crossed the courtyard in the blink of an eye, and swiftly climbed the roof of the building on the other side. They now had a good view of the situation at the steeple.

“Mash! Melulu! Prince Tristan!”

Mash, Melulu, Tristan, and knights of the various countries were all in a clump in front of the tower, fighting shoulder to shoulder with several Divine Beasts. They were desperately preventing anything from getting into the tower, where the heads of state must have taken shelter. In all likelihood, the enemy had managed to trap them in there before they could escape through the castle gates.

The enemy in question were massive wolflike Divine Beasts covered in red and black fur. They were Cerberi, and they outnumbered Mash’s group many times over.

“Cerberi?! And in such numbers?!”

“How can this be?! Have so many of my kin fallen into Elciel’s clutches?!”

“Okay, let’s not panic! If this is Elciel’s doing, then we just have to find her and

kill her! We can make her pay for her crimes once more!”

Adel searched desperately for Elciel, ready to shoot forward at a moment’s notice and dispatch her like a clap of lightning. Adel wouldn’t stand for anything less than complete annihilation of the person who had robbed Euphinia of her life in the previous timeline.

“Hmph! A simple way of putting it, but I like it!”

Mash, Melulu, and Tristan were fending off the brunt of the Cerberi’s attacks while everyone else maintained a perimeter. However, a few Cerberi had managed to circle around the resistance and were directly bathing the tower in flames. Mash’s group couldn’t leave their positions, but the others did not have the strength to stop the Cerberi. The only thing protecting the tower from the Cerberi’s assault was a thin membrane of light, but there was no telling how long it could hold. The powerful flames were slowly but steadily burning through. If even a few more joined the fray, the equilibrium of the fight would collapse.

Screams and shouts could be heard coming from the tower as a few more Cerberi slipped past Mash and Melulu to join those working on bringing the structure down.

“We can’t let them get any farther! I’ll stop them and block the flames! Cerberus, you work on messing up their ranks!”

“Got it!”

“Princess, excuse me.”

Adel grabbed Euphinia and leaped off Cerberus’s back, plummeting into the group of Cerberi breathing fire on the tower while spinning Salamander’s Tail at high speed. The blue flames formed a shield that held back the concentrated assault. Cries went up as Adel’s arrival was noticed.

“Adel! Princess! You’re safe! What a relief!” Mash shouted.

“Where did you two goooooo?! I was so worried!” Melulu sobbed.

Even Tristan said, “I’m glad to see the two of you alive and well!”

Rooooooar!

Pudding, the Cerberus contracted to Adel, charged into the group of enemy Cerberi, sending many of them flying and stopping the stream of flames.

“Good! Princess, please take shelter in the tower!”

Adel stepped up to join Pudding. Although his surprise attack had been a huge success, the enemy were Cerberi just like him, and they had an overwhelming numerical advantage. If they managed to regroup, he would stand no chance. As such, the only chance Adel and Pudding had of winning was to immediately press the attack. As for Euphinia, Adel figured that she would be safest inside the tower. Pegasus couldn't be counted on, but Lilith would protect her.

Just then, Chloe's head popped out from the entrance. “Princess Euphinia! I'm relieved to see you unharmed! Please come this way, I really need your help!”

The Artificer Saint was alive. She was probably the one behind the light protecting the tower.

“Princess! Please do as Saint Chloe asks!” Adel shouted.

“Let me know what you need me to do!” Euphinia replied straightaway.

“Adel, Mash, Melulu! Stay safe!”

All three knight escorts shouted, “Understood!”

Chloe beckoned furiously. “Prince Tristan! You come here too! Leave the fighting to Adel's group!”

“I wish to fight alongside Saint Adel, though!” Tristan protested. “The more swords at her side, the better!”

“Think of your position! If anything happens to you, all the blame would fall on this country and the Church! You would be troubling even Adel! That's what it means to be a crown prince!”

Chloe was right, of course. On the off chance that Tristan was killed by Elciel here, Wendill would be held accountable as the host of the Summit. It was hard to say exactly what that would entail, but at the very least, it was certain that the G4 Summit would never be held in Welna again. In fact, there was a good chance that the Summit would never happen again, period. The Middle Kingdom would no longer have its status as the mediator between the Four

World Powers. And if it was no longer useful, then it was only a matter of time before one of the superpowers attacked and annexed it. Such was the fate of a tiny country.

At the same time, if Elciel was indeed behind this whole incident, all of the countries would sour on the Holy Tower Church at once. It could even lose its privileged status as the national religion of all the nations.

In short, Tristan's death could shake the very world.

"Curses! At times like these, I really do hate who I am!"

Tristan was actually a very good fighter. He could hold his own as well as Mash or Melulu, and was reliable in a pinch. He was also a very loyal friend who couldn't sit still when those he cared about were in danger, which was now making it really hard for him to step away.

"Prince Tristan, I just saw off Sir Margritte," Adel said as she gracefully ducked under the claws and fangs of two attacking Cerberi.

"Wait, do you mean...?"

"He entrusted you and your father to my care. Please, I ask that you honor his final wish!"

Another Cerberus lunged at Adel right after she had evaded the first two. She did a backflip that barely cleared the top of its head. This left her unprotected in the air, and the first two leaped up to take advantage. However, she had expected it and carefully calculated the height of her jump.

"Yah!"

Just as the Cerberus from the back passed under her, she kicked its backside, sending it crashing into the two who were approaching from the front. All three hit the ground in one tangled mess.

"Don't worry about the rest. I will avenge him!"

In the brief moment of breathing room that she had created, Adel turned to look at Tristan and gave him a nod.

"If that is the case...then I have no choice. I will comply." Tristan narrowed his eyes, as if looking at Adel was like looking at the sun. "You really do shine the

brightest in the middle of battle, Saint Adel.” He nodded, then turned to Chloe.
“Saint Chloe! Princess Euphinia! I will come with you!”

“Let’s hurry, Prince Tristan!”

“Come on, this way!”

The three of them quickly disappeared into the tower. A small part of Adel noted that Euphinia’s safety was even more assured now that Tristan was with her.

“Mash! Melulu! Was it the Cerberi who set the palace on fire?!”

“It was!” Mash confirmed.

“They ran all over the place setting fires and attacking everyone!” Melulu added.

“So my kin really are responsible. The fools, falling for Elciel’s wiles!”

“We won’t let them do any more damage! We’ll stop them!”

“Of course!”

“Let’s do this, Adel!”

The three knight escorts charged forward, their fighting spirit renewed.



When Euphinia entered the tower, she found all the foreign dignitaries gathered within. Among them was her own father, the king of Wendill, as well as Tristan’s father, the emperor of Torust.

“Euphinia!”

“Father!”

“Thank the heavens you’re safe! I was so worried when you disappeared all of a sudden!”

“Father, where is Julian?”

“He isn’t here. I can only pray that he is unharmed, but—”

“No, that can’t be!”

Chloe interrupted. “I’m *really* sorry, Your Highness, but we have no time!”

“R-Right! I’m coming, Eminent!”

Around Chloe were several ringlike spelltools embedded with anima crystals. These were the small portals linked to Pegasus Gate that she had thrown into the Erule River before. Whatever entered these small portals would come out through Pegasus Gate, effectively crossing long distances. There were lines of people in front of each portal. When those who reached the front stuck their hands into the portals, their bodies gradually turned transparent and disappeared.

“What’s going on with these people?!” Euphinia exclaimed.

“This is how it looks when something is sucked into Pegasus Gate’s small portals.”

“So, they are...”

“Yep. I had Pegasus Gate set up outside the city just in case something like this happened. We’re now trying to evacuate everyone, but...”

It was taking quite a while for each person to disappear fully. With the walls about to be broken down at any moment, the wait felt like an eternity.

“Understood, Eminent Chloe!”

Euphinia concentrated, then deployed her Sanctuary. All of Chloe’s spelltools were built with a function that boosted their capabilities at her command with a spell. However, she needed another Saint’s Sanctuary to use this spell. The more powerful the anima in that Sanctuary, the more effective her spell was. Euphinia had immediately picked up on the help that Chloe needed, and was ready to give it all she had.

“You catch on fast, Princess! All right, here goes!”

Chloe signed with one hand and thrust it toward the portals while keeping her other hand on Euphinia’s shoulder.

“We’re in a hurry, so I’ll be drawing even more anima than last time. It’ll be tough, but please bear with it!”

“Don’t worry about me. Go for it!”

“Okay!”

Euphinia suddenly felt a huge weight on her shoulder where Chloe was touching her. That sensation quickly spread to her entire body, making it hard to breathe.

“Ugh!”

“I’m sorry, Your Highness! Please hang in there!”

“U-Understood... Ugh!”

The effect of Euphinia’s contribution could be seen right away. As the burden on her increased, the portals turned incandescent. People were disappearing practically the moment they reached within, instantly being teleported to wherever Pegasus Gate was located.

“Whoa!”

“It’s instantaneous now!”

“I’ve heard stories of Princess Euphinia’s power, but this is even more remarkable!”

Everyone in the hall cheered.

“Everyone, hurry through!” Chloe urged. “Quickly, quickly!”

“Right, of course!”

“You have my gratitude, Saint Chloe and Princess Euphinia!”

Pushing through the heavy weight and the suffocating sensation, Euphinia called out to her father.

“Father, you too! Please hurry!”

“But Euphinia—”

“Mother Superior Claire, please take father through!”

The woman who had taught Euphinia everything she knew about being a Saint was also present, standing a step back, ready to protect the Wendillian king at a moment’s notice. Upon receiving Euphinia’s order, she immediately complied.

“Understood, Princess! Your Majesty, we have no time to waste.”

“How can I abandon my daughter when she’s clearly suffering?!”

Chloe said, “I know you love her, but she’s everyone’s lifeline at this moment. She needs to stay. I promise to return her to you safe and sound, so please go on ahead!”

The king nodded, though he looked very unhappy about it. “Ugh... V-Very well!” When he passed by Euphinia, he gave her a tight hug. “You’ve grown up into a splendid Saint, and I’m proud of you. Make sure you save everyone.”

“I will, father. I’ll also find Julian and bring him back too!”

Her father nodded, then stepped into a portal. Claire and the other Saints stationed in Wendill followed right after.

“Prince Tristan, it’s your turn now! Please make sure that everyone is safe on the other side, and protect them!”

“Understood, Saint Chloe! Princess Euphinia, stay safe!”

“You too, Prince Tristan!”

Tristan escorted his own father through, then stepped in. After that, the number of people left in the tower dwindled quickly. The last person got out just in time before Euphinia collapsed.

“And that’s all of them!” Chloe declared. “You did amazing, Princess.” She dispelled the spell that she had been maintaining and rubbed Euphinia’s head roughly.

“I’m just glad...that I was useful,” Euphinia replied while trying to catch her breath.

“There’s no need to be humble. You are incredible! It’s thanks to you that everyone made it to safety. You just might become an even greater Eminent than me or Grandma Theodora.”

“At the same time, we’re all still here thanks to Adel, Melulu, and Mash protecting us. I hope they’re okay.”

“The fact that the wall hasn’t been broken through means they must be still

holding the Cerberi at bay.”

“Then we ought to help them! Also, I still haven’t seen my brother or Eminent Katina. We need to look for them too!”

“Katina? She’s...” Pain flitted across Chloe’s face as she hung her head.

“No, don’t tell me...”

In Euphinia’s eyes, Katina had been a gentle, dependable adult. She and Julian both had stunning features, and whenever they were together, the two of them looked picturesque no matter what they were doing. Most importantly, she had made Julian happier than any other woman had. Euphinia had been sure that the two would be happy together forever. She had instinctively felt that one day, Katina would become her sister-in-law. As the cherry on top, Katina had even been a childhood friend of Adel’s, someone who Euphinia sometimes saw flashes of her own mother in.

Each new facet of Katina had made Euphinia love her more. Fate was cruel indeed to strike her down of all people.

“It’s probably not what you’re thinking,” Chloe said, shaking her head.

“What do you mean?”

“Listen closely.”

The Eminent stared directly into Euphinia’s eyes with a grim look on her face.

Chapter 5: The Legion Saint

FWOOOOOOM!

Several Cerberi breathed red-hot fire at Adel's face.

"Ugh!"

Adel could spin Salamander's Tail to block the attack, but doing so required her to stop and hold her ground. She could also jump over it, but this would leave her wide open the moment she landed.

"Use me as a shield!" Pudding barked as he assumed position in front of her. Just like their opponents, he could control fire and his body was extremely resistant to flames. In other words, both he and his opponents would do little damage to each other. He charged forward, the enemy's raging fire roiling harmlessly over his red and black fur.

"Thanks!"

Taking advantage of the opening that her Cerberus had created, Adel darted right up to the enemy Cerberi who had stopped to breathe fire, and tied them all up using Salamander's Tail.

"Now!"

She pushed ki into her arms for a brief moment of superhuman strength. The Cerberi were nearly lifted off the ground, but they braced themselves all at once and just managed to stop it. That was, until Pudding joined in.

"Don't you think you're taking on just a few too many at once?" He clamped his jaw on the whip of fire and pulled with Adel.

"Thanks for the help! Let's send all of them flying!"

"My pleasure!"

Saint and Divine Beast combined their strength to throw all the bound Cerberi into the air. The group shot over Mash's and Melulu's heads to a spot beyond, where more were clustered together. The idea was to stop them from

spreading out so that they could be taken care of in groups. As long as Euphinia was still inside the tower, Adel would do everything she could to prevent the Cerberi from resuming their assault.

“It worked!” Adel ran after the Divine Beasts to join her fellow knight escorts, who had done an exemplary job so far against the nimble Cerberi. “Mash! Melulu! Are you hurt anywhere?”

“I’m all good!” Mash replied.

“Me too!” Melulu said. “We won’t let a single one get through until Princess and Saint Chloe are done!”

“Good attitude! We’ll maintain—” Before Adel could finish her sentence, five or six more Cerberi showed up behind the ones she had thrown. “Damn Elciel!”

To think she still had this many in reserve!

“No, Adel.” Mash shook his head. “This isn’t Elciel’s doing.”

“The person controlling these Cerberi is...”

There was no need to hear the rest of Melulu’s response. One more Cerberus appeared from the direction of the burning main building, and on its back was Katina, smiling.



“Is that Katina?! That’s impossible! Wait, does that mean all these Cerberi are contracted with *her*?!”

Around a dozen more Cerberi joined Katina’s side, amplifying Adel’s shock. In total, the pack numbered in the dozens. Maintaining a contract with this many Divine Beasts was impossible, even for Elciel. The person responsible for everything that was going on had to be the Legion Saint.

“That’s right.” Mash sighed. “Right after you and Princess Euphinia disappeared...”

“Saint Katina suddenly brought out all these Cerberi and ordered them to attack everyone,” Melulu finished.

“Why did she do that?!”

Katina’s fate was to be with Julian. They were supposed to live through the Great War and be joined in happy union. *This* wasn’t supposed to happen at all.

“Katina! Why?! Why are you doing this?!” Adel cried.

The Legion Saint smiled. “Nobles and royals are all the same; they couldn’t care less about orphans like us. They treat those of us with low status as if our lives mean nothing. Don’t you agree?”

Immediately, Adel shook her head. “No, I don’t!”

Euphinia was a royal, yet in the last timeline, she had wept when she had found Adel in the Moving Coliseum of Navarra. She had held out a saving hand, despite knowing that doing so could alienate her from her peers. She had then taken Adel on as a knight escort, though he was uneducated and blind. She had read aloud to him, invited him to join her in discussions, and fed him tea and snacks. There had been no end to the list of things that she had done for Adel, and every item on that list spoke to her warmth and humanity.

In a way, Adel had been able to see things much better when blind, and all the credit lay with Euphinia. It was precisely because Euphinia had changed Adel’s life so completely that he had come back in time to serve her, even if it meant becoming a woman. Euphinia was a princess, a member of a royal family. Every fiber of Adel’s being disagreed with Katina’s assertion.

“Princess Euphinia sheds tears even for someone like me! What you’re saying might be true in Rakul, but not all royals are like that!”

Katina had grown up in Astal Orphanage in Rakul and was now a Saint dispatched to Rakul. It was true that social inequality was very ingrained into Rakulian culture. Now that her own status was so high, Katina might have seen a lot of things that she didn’t like. Maybe it had been bad enough to drive her to the edge, given her kind personality.

However, Katina had overcome all that in the previous timeline, most likely with Julian’s help. So, why was she going on a rampage now? Was Julian no longer with her?

“Think about it! Prince Julian is a royal too, isn’t he?! Didn’t he save the children of Astal Orphanage?!”

Katina herself had shared the story of how, when children from Astal Orphanage got kidnapped by bandits, Julian had taken action after seeing that the country and its knights had no intention to. In all likelihood, that incident was what had drawn Katina to him in the first place.

“You’re right, Prince Julian alone is different. That’s why I’m using my power to make him king over the Four World Powers. The world needs only one king, and that’s him.”

“That’s sheer nonsense! There’s no way he asked you to do this!”

“It’s the only way to create a kinder world. Once he understands this, I’m sure he’ll come around. I will bring us back to the Holy Era.”

What Katina was saying was outright impossible. Julian was a realist, but he was neither ambitious nor scheming. At heart, he was gentle and kind like Euphinia. He was definitely not the kind of person who would start a massive war to seize more power. And Katina had to know that. In the first place, Katina herself shunned conflict. If anything, Adel was much more warlike. Katina was the last person anyone would have expected to cause this tragedy and say such things.

“What’s happened to you, Katina?! This isn’t like—!”

Abruptly, Adel realized that the aura of the person approaching her was

entirely different from Katina's. It was a crushing darkness, an intimidating air that clung to Adel's skin and made it harder and harder to breathe as Katina got closer. Adel recognized this aura.

"What?! But how?!"

This is Mad Emperor Tristan's aura! There's no mistaking this madness and its intensity. What is going on? Why is the aura I felt from Prince Tristan in the previous timeline now emanating from Katina?!

In this timeline, Tristan was good-natured and courteous almost to a fault. He was so different from Mad Emperor Tristan that Adel had suspected that he was someone else when she met him for the first time. And now, Katina was so different from the person Adel had grown up with, it was as if *she* was someone else.

Is there some other power at work here? Something that changed Tristan last time and is changing Katina now? Is this dark aura the cause of that change? If so, where is it from? The person who had been at Tristan's side before the Great War was...

"Was it Elciel?! Did Elciel do this to you, Katina?!"

There had been no sighting of Elciel herself around Welna, but Seiryuu had been found in the Erule River. It wouldn't be surprising if Elciel was the one behind Katina's turn to violence. In fact, it actually made sense.

Mash gasped. "You're right. I could see Elciel having the power to manipulate someone's heart and mind."

"She's the only person I can think of who would do something like this," Melulu agreed. "It's like Saint Katina is a completely different person from yesterday."

But to everyone's surprise, Katina shook her head.

"I am myself. I won't allow anyone to get in my way, and I don't take orders from anyone. Adel, I will remove even you by force if you try to stop me."

"Don't say that, Katina! That's not like you at all!"

"I said, I don't take orders from anyone!" Katina held a hand up high.

“Everyone, attack!”

All the Cerberi surged forward as one, filling the air with their howls and roars. Their overwhelming numbers vividly illustrated how terrifying the true power of the Legion Saint was. In the blink of an eye, they surrounded Adel and Pudding, who happened to be standing a little too far up front.

“Watch out behind you!” Mash shouted as he launched a bird of fire, beating back the Cerberus who had been about to attack Adel from the rear.

Unfortunately, all Cerberi had high resistance against fire. The exploding bird only succeeded in sending the attacking Cerberus flying without hurting it much. It got back up right away.

“This side too!” Salamander’s Tail didn’t fare much better. Adel repelled the next assault with similar results.

“And here!” Melulu slammed Sylphid’s Spear into a third Cerberus, dealing the most damage so far.

However, in the time it took the three of them to deal with the first three attackers, more than a dozen rushed forward to take their place. There was nowhere to run. It didn’t matter how well Adel could see her opponents’ movements if there was physically no space for her to evade them. The sheer numbers of the Cerberi and their density severely limited her movement. To make matters worse, Mash and Melulu were with her too. She didn’t only have herself to worry about.

“Cerberus, return!”

“Okay!”

Catching on to Adel’s intention, Pudding dived into her shadow. All Saints sensed the Divine Beasts that they contracted as unique presences within their chest. Adel now jabbed a hand to that part of herself and shoved all her ki at it.

“Ki Possession!”

With a whoosh, Adel’s body was enveloped in a pillar of fire that rushed into the sky. When she came back into view, she had Cerberus’s ears on her head and a big, bushy tail behind her back.

“Mash! Melulu! Gather to me and get down!”

The next moment, the twin blades of Salamander’s Tail flared with the black flame from the legends passed down among the Cerberi. What Adel needed against such numbers was brute force, and the black flame was the very illustration of sheer destructive power.

“Scatter!”

Adel spun Salamander’s Tail over her head faster than the eye could see, mowing down all the Cerberi within range. Those that the blades touched were blasted far away and slammed into the ground with shuddering force. Seeing this, the rest pulled up sharply and maintained a wary distance.

“Nice one, Adel!” Melulu cheered. “You got a lot of them!”

“Not quite, I’m afraid,” Mash said.

The Cerberi who had been sent flying were already getting back up and joining the others in probing for an opening. They looked a little wobbly on their feet but were otherwise none the worse for wear.

“That didn’t hurt them at all?!” Melulu exclaimed.

Even Pudding was surprised. *“That can’t be! We may be resistant to fire, but this is the black flame from our legends! How can they be fine after taking a direct hit?! Which pack are these Cerberi from?!”*

Inside her head, Adel asked, *So you don’t know these Cerberi?*

“Indeed I do not. I’m not familiar with any of them.”

Are they stronger than you, then?

“Absolute nonsense! That’s impossible!” Pudding replied without skipping a beat. *“That said, this situation is not normal. Even we Cerberi should not be impervious to black flame!”*

Is it Katina’s doing, then? Is it possible that she makes them stronger when she manipulates them?

Adel knew that the range of a Sanctuary and the strength of the anima it produced depended on the ability of its Saint, but she had never heard of Saints

having the ability to strengthen their contracted Divine Beasts. To her knowledge, the strength of Divine Beasts was entirely their own, but she couldn't rule out the possibility that the power that made Katina the Legion Saint came with other perks.

"That technique of yours is definitely a threat. Guess I have to do something about it," Katina murmured, then snapped her fingers.

"Awoooooooooo!"

Promptly, groups of three Cerberi made circles with their noses nearly touching and howled as loudly and as powerfully as they could. The next moment, their bodies became enveloped in blinding light that merged together.

"Wh-What are they doing?!" Adel asked in alarm.

"That's... Have they gone mad?!" Cerberus gasped. *"Why are they going that far?!"*

When the light faded away, each group had turned into one Cerberus that was much larger than before and had three heads instead of one.

"What happened to them?!"

The Cerberus contracted with Adel was basically a giant dog with red and black fur and *one* head. However, there were historical accounts of three-headed Cerberi. There were even books in Euphinia's library with illustrations of them. Adel had thought that those depictions were simply exaggerations made to signify Cerberi being high-ranking Divine Beasts. Clearly, she had been wrong.

Your species can combine like that?

"Yes, but it's forbidden! If we stay combined for a long time, our minds become muddled. Eventually, we lose our sense of self and turn into mindless beasts that attack even our own kind. It's completely different from becoming one with a Saint through a contract! I don't understand why Katina's Cerberi did it without a shred of hesitation! They can't be in their right mind!"

They're clearly doing it because she ordered them to. Maybe she's controlling even their minds.

There was no way to tell if Katina herself possessed the ability to control the

minds of Divine Beasts, or if it came from the uncanny presence emanating from her that Adel remembered sensing from Mad Emperor Tristan. The Mad Emperor had indeed been dramatically stronger than Tristan originally had been, so it made sense to think something similar was happening here, but this was all mere speculation.

What Adel did know for sure, however, was that Katina wasn't the kind of person who would rob Divine Beasts of their will and force them to do what they considered forbidden. There was definitely something wrong here.

"Adel, is there anything we can do? Can we not save them somehow?"

I've no idea, but I guess we can start with not killing them. Let's try to stop them without hurting them too badly. That sound good to you?

Adel wouldn't hesitate to cut down a herd of Pegasi or Unicorns, but these were Cerberi, the same species as her partner. She couldn't help but worry for them and want to help them out. Pudding himself was loathe to kill his own kind too.

"Very well! I shall abide by my Saint's will!"

"Adel!"

"Incoming!"

The three-headed Cerberi tentatively prowled into the open circle around Adel's group.

"Oh no, you don't!"

Once more, Adel spun Salamander's Tail with all her strength. However, the black-flamed blades that had effortlessly sent normal Cerberi flying were now being stopped by the variants' fangs.

"What?!"

Two Divine Beasts were biting down on each blade, firmly locking it in place.

"Watch out! When my kind is combined, we're several times more powerful!"

"So it seems!"

The powerful resistance that Adel was getting from Salamander's Tail told her

that the Cerberi were not only stopping the black flames, but were seriously trying to pull her to the ground. If she hadn't lowered her center of gravity and planted herself firmly, she would have been dragged off right away. Though the Cerberi were working together, it was still astonishing that they were proving to be an equal match to Ki Possession, a power that had mopped the floor with one of Elciel's Four Guardians.

Unfortunately for Adel, there were at least four of these three-headed Cerberi. The remaining ones formed a line in front of Adel and inhaled deeply. As they did so, black flames flickered inside their mouths.

"Black flame?! How?!"

Adel's hands were occupied with holding Salamander's Tail. The Cerberi were pulling on it just as hard as she was, which meant she couldn't let up for even a second.

"In that case..."

Adel focused her mind on the space in front of her. A black fireball fizzed into existence, then quickly grew in scale. In the blink of an eye, it had ballooned to a size bigger than Adel herself. She was limited in how much black flame she could use, but this was a do-or-die situation.

BOOOOOOOOM!

When the Cerberi unleashed their black streams of fire, Adel launched her fireball too. The two sides clashed in a massive explosion that shot up into the sky and gouged the ground. The resulting shock wave slammed into everything around them. The ground fell out underneath Adel's feet, making her lose her balance. She was blown away like everything else.

"Whoaaaaaaaaa!"

"Ahhhhhhh!"

Mash and Melulu met the same fate. All three shot toward the tower where Euphinia's group was holed up.

"Mash! Melulu!"

Adel turned herself right side up in midair and snatched her friends' bodies in

time. Instead of crashing into the tower wall, she kicked it in a controlled way that allowed them to land back on their feet. The membrane of light covering the tower softened the blow enough that the structure merely shuddered but remained standing.

“Are you two okay?” Adel asked.

“I am,” Mash replied. “Apologies, I got caught off guard.”

“Thank you, Adel!” Melulu smiled.

There was now a giant crater in the ground where the two sources of black flame had met. Hissing steam rose here and there, marking patches of superheated dirt.

The fight had effectively been reset, with the two parties returning to their respective sides. However, Adel’s group had lost a lot of ground and were now backed up to the tower.

“Princess is inside! We can’t let them advance another step!” Adel growled, prompting resolute nods of agreement from her friends.

There were now fewer Cerberi because they had fused with each other, but the ones that remained were bigger and several times stronger than before. Additionally, they still outnumbered Adel’s group, and they were nearly impervious to Salamander’s Tail. Even so, it surprised Adel that they had succeeded in pushing her back when she was using Ki Possession.

She was currently much stronger than she had been in the previous timeline, when she had managed to kill Mad Emperor Tristan. And yet, she was now struggling against Katina and her hordes of Cerberi. In other words, Katina was proving to be a much bigger threat than Mad Emperor Tristan had been.

Suddenly, two people rushed out of the tower.

“Wh-What’s going on here?!” Euphinia exclaimed.

“We heard the explosion even from inside.” Chloe smiled wryly. “I see you guys are going at it hard.”

Adel’s eyes widened. “Princess! Saint Chloe!”

Euphinia rushed up. “Adel! I heard from Eminent Chloe. Is this really Eminent

Katina's doing?" she asked, sounding conflicted and doubtful.

"It... It is," Adel admitted begrudgingly, then quickly added, "but she's not her usual self! Clearly, something's taken over her mind and is controlling her!"

"Does that mean we can save her if we purify whatever it is?"

"Yes, Princess! I'm sure!"

However, Chloe shook her head. "You're right, Adel. But it's not enough."

"What do you mean?"

"I'd love to explain it properly, but Katina's not gonna give us the time." Chloe shot a look toward Katina, who was slowly advancing on the group.

Mash stepped forward. "I'll buy time for all of you to work out a strategy!"

"Oh no, you're not taking all the credit for yourself." Melulu joined him, then turned around. "Princess, please have Lilith possess me!"

Euphinia nodded. "Okay!" She summoned Lilith and ordered her to enter Melulu's body.

Mash and Melulu were already great fighters. With Lilith's aid, Melulu would become even more capable. Even so, Adel worried about leaving the front line to the pair. In the previous timeline, when Euphinia finally showed up at the Moving Coliseum of Navarra several years down the line, the two of them had already passed away. This knowledge made Adel anxious about sending them out on their own.

In a loud voice, Katina ordered, "Everyone, ready your breaths!"

"Incoming!" Mash barked. "Melulu, we're getting closer to divert their attention! Adel, you're our rear guard!"

"Sure...but *she's* already gone to sleep," Melulu replied in an alluring voice distinctly different from her usual lively tone. Her eyes had a bewitching red glow, and the faint outline of bat wings could be seen behind her back.

Adel nodded. "Okay! Buy us as much time as you can, you two!"

The formation now had Mash and Melulu up front and Adel staying back to protect Euphinia and Chloe while being ready to step up to provide support at a

moment's notice. Adel was still anxious, but there was nothing she could do about it. Rather, she told herself that worrying meant she didn't believe in her fellow knight escorts. There was no time for that. Right now, she had to put her trust in them and work together.

"All I have to do is break up their ranks, right?"

Melulu's eyes gleamed even redder as she charged at the three-headed Cerberi. Her speed was nearly on par with Adel's when she gathered ki at her legs, but her trajectory was razor straight, which made her approach easy to read. Of course, the Cerberi had to pounce on the opportunity.

"ROOOOOAAAARR!"

Their fangs and claws rained down on Melulu all at once, but she leaped up beyond reach. The jump was fast and high up, making it clear that her aim was to slip past the front rank.

"No, that's a bad idea!" Adel blurted, reflexively trying to reach out using Salamander's Tail.

Even if Melulu got through, there were more Cerberi waiting beyond. By jumping so high up, she was making herself a prime target.

Sure enough, several Cerberi followed Melulu into the air, swiping with their claws, while others took up position where she would be landing, their mouths wide open in readiness. It was nigh impossible for her to avoid both sides.

But then, to everyone's surprise, Melulu seemed to float for a brief moment, which completely altered her trajectory. The Cerberi trying to catch her in midair missed their swings, and she landed a ways behind the ones lying in wait.

"She's good!"

Melulu had been in complete control of her time in the air thanks to the wings faintly visible on her back. The seemingly reckless charge and attention-grabbing jump had all been on purpose.

"What are all of you doing?! Calm down and take a good look at—"

As Katina berated her Divine Beasts, Melulu made a beeline her way. She was making no effort to hide the fact that she wanted to take Katina's head to end

the fight in one fell swoop. Against such overwhelming numbers, this strategy was so foolhardy that even Adel wouldn't have chosen it.

"Melulu, no!" Adel cried.

At the same time, Katina shouted, "Don't underestimate me!"

All Cerberi under her command rushed toward Melulu. They showered her with so many attacks that there was physically no way for her to escape. However, the moment the flames landed, she...faded away.

"What?!" Katina whirled around in confusion.

A bewitching voice next to Mash giggled and called out, "Over heeeere!" Everyone looked over to find Melulu standing there, completely unharmed.

Adel laughed appreciatively. "So it was an illusion!"

Lilith, the Divine Beast controlling Melulu's body, had the power to create illusions. It wasn't the real Melulu who had just charged at the Cerberi. That explained why the figure who did had been able to take such great risks. And now that the cat was out of the bag, Katina had no choice but to take countermeasures. While she did so, her Cerberi wouldn't be able to go on the offensive.

Once again, Melulu started running toward the Cerberi. However, no one could tell if this was the real one or merely another illusion.



“Don’t let her get close! But it may be another fake, so keep looking for her real self!”

Katina’s hands were now tied. She couldn’t afford to ignore the Melulu before her eyes, because it could be real. If it wasn’t, then she had to strike down the real one before she managed to sneak up on her.

Kieeeeeeh!

Just as the Cerberi finished setting up a perimeter around Katina and started spreading out, a bird of fire suddenly rushed at her face.

“Wha—?!”

Her face turned pale with fright, but a variant Cerberus intercepted the attack in time. The bird exploded upon contact, but left no visible damage on the Divine Beast’s fur. All that it did was throw the Cerberus off-balance for a few seconds.

“That won’t work on me!”

“I didn’t expect it to!”

Mash launched a few more birds of fire. Instead of flying right at Katina, however, they started circling her. In response, Katina was forced to deploy Cerberi to protect her from all directions. Even some of those who had been tasked with stopping Melulu had to be drawn away. This strategy did nothing to defeat Katina and her Divine Beasts, but it was great for buying time.

Seeing that Mash and Melulu were doing a good job holding their own, Adel turned around. “Saint Chloe, it looks like we have a little breathing room. So, what are we to do?”

“Nico agreed that something’s possessing Katina,” Chloe said. She forced out her Divine Beast for confirmation. “Right, Nico?”

“Waaaaaaah! Don’t call me out at a time like this!” Unicorn wailed, trembling like a leaf.

“This is no time to be a coward!” Chloe snapped. “Take a good look at Katina! What do you see with your eyes?!”

“Nothing’s gonna change with me out here! She’s possessed by something terrifying! It’s like a crazy-powerful evil spirit or something! It’ll eventually destroy her mind if it stays in there!”

Adel’s eyes narrowed. “So you’re saying that an evil spirit is controlling her right now?” *And it had probably done the same to Tristan back then too.*

“Mr. Pega!” Euphinia called, similarly summoning her Divine Beast.

“Gaaaaaaaah! Nooooooooooooo! Eeeeeeeeeeep!”

“Shut up! Calm down!” Adel grabbed Pegasus by the neck and forcibly silenced him.

“Mr. Pega, can you confirm what Mr. Nico is saying?” Euphinia asked. “Do you sense the same thing?”

“O-Oh damn, yeah. That’s very bad news. It’s like, a super-duper powerful evil spirit, or a really dense cluster of curses. I very strongly recommend running away! Like, seriously! You do not want to mess with it!”

“Can’t you purify it like you did the Armor of Lamentation?” Adel asked.

“That’s waaaaay beyond me. My purification power is something I learned from the Unicorns. I’m nowhere near as good as they are. I hate to admit it, but you’d have to ask them instead.”

As Pegasus had displayed earlier when breaking Adel and Euphinia out of the space created by the Watcher, his innate ability was to travel between worlds. Purification was little more than a pastime he had picked up while living with Unicorns. It had probably only been possible in the first place because the two species were so similar.

“Hah! You donkey! So you finally accept your inferiority! I knew it, there’s no way that a Pegasus is better than a Unicorn!” Nico smirked, radiating smugness from every inch of his body.

“You’re completely right,” Pegasus agreed. *“I really hate doing this, but I’ll have to let you deal with this problem. So, I’m outta here!”* He promptly dived back into Euphinia’s shadow.

“Wait, no! You can’t just shove everything on me and run away!”

The next second, Salamander's Tail was wrapped around Unicorn's neck like a collar. "You're not getting away! You're going to help us save Katina!"

"Eeeeeeeep!" Nico was so terrified that tears sprang to his eyes.

"Man up, Nico!" Chloe said encouragingly. "Remember, your friends are contracted with Katina too! You have to save them, don't you?"

"I couldn't care less about those assholes!"

To no one's surprise, Nico was a coldhearted coward. However, Adel's group had to get him to cooperate, regardless of how he felt about it.

"Then save them so you can make them forever in your debt!" Chloe growled. "Just saying, if you run away now, I'll end our contract right away! Do you know how much I've given up for you?! I'm still staying single for your sake even though I'm already in my twenties!"

"Wait, what?!" Adel and Euphinia whirled to look at Chloe in surprise.

What they were surprised at was Chloe's age. Her slender and short figure had made the two of them think that she was around Adel's and Melulu's age, if not younger. And yet, it turned out that she was older than even Katina. Come to think of it, her usual calm demeanor did hint at someone with more life experience.

Chloe shot them a look. "What's wrong?"

"Um, it's just that you're...uh...older than I thought."

"You're even older than Katina? That's...wow!"

"You're only single because you're not popular with the guys."

"I dare you to say that again." Chloe glared daggers at Unicorn.

"I-I'm sorry! Okay, fine! But don't forget that I'm really weak! You gotta set everything up so that I can stay still and focus entirely on purifying! You have to have the situation completely in hand!"

Chloe nodded. "That's fine. We'll do our part, and you do yours."

"By the way, Eminent Chloe, what were you saying before about it not being enough?" Euphinia asked. Apparently the question had been on her mind the

whole time.

“Well... You two think that everything will be resolved if we get Nico to purify Katina, right?” Chloe looked at Katina, who was looking over the battlefield from the back of a Cerberus. The way she was tightly surrounded by Cerberi on all sides made it look like she was their queen. “Sadly, reality’s not so kind. We can tell that she’s being controlled, but there’s no evidence of it. On the contrary, there are countless people who saw her attacking everyone. Even if she manages to regain her real self, she would have to be punished for her actions. It’d be impossible to get her entirely off the hook for everything.”

Shock colored Adel’s and Euphinia’s faces. They shuddered to think what crimes Katina would be charged with.

“Elciel’s incident could be treated as an internal Church affair because it had happened inside Alderford. Katina, however, has attacked dignitaries representing each of the Four World Powers. This is such a disaster that it could easily destroy the Church’s relationship with all those countries.”

“Saint Chloe, are you saying that there’s no point in saving Katina?” Adel asked as Euphinia made a small sound of despair.

What Chloe was saying was true, though. Even if Katina returned to herself, she would be forced to take responsibility. For what she had done, her punishment would be nothing less than death. The end result would be no different than if Adel’s group killed her here and now.

Chloe shook her head. “If there was no point, then I wouldn’t be pushing Nico like this.”

Sure enough, she was helping to come up with a way to free Katina from the influence of whatever it was that had a hold on her. Adel was now confused about what her intentions were.

“What I’m trying to say is, there’s simply no way for things to completely return to normal. If you really want Katina to continue living, we’ll have to let her run far away and live in hiding while we claim to have killed her. And no one can know.”

The Artificer Saint pulled out what looked like a dagger or a spearhead

attached to a very short haft. Clearly, this was one of her own creations. At the tip of the blade was a horn with an embedded anima crystal. The color and texture of the horn seemed very similar to Nico's, which hinted at the fact that this spelltool was related to the Unicorns in some way.

"Unicorn Wall!"

When Chloe plunged the spelltool into the ground, a tall, thin, triangular pyramid of light appeared around the group. This was the same light that had protected the steeple where the heads of state had taken shelter.

"There's no one left in the palace but us. So, I can do *this*!"

Chloe drew anima from the Sanctuary that Euphinia was still maintaining and signed a spell toward Unicorn Wall. It was the same one that she had used to boost the function of the Pegasus Gate portals. Right away, the light of the barrier increased greatly in intensity and size. Eventually, it grew to envelop the entirety of the burning palace.

Euphinia's eyes turned into saucers. "That's huge!"

"But, Saint Chloe, how is this supposed to protect us?" Adel asked, looking puzzled.

Chloe shook her head. "This isn't to protect us. What this does is isolate the space within it. That way, people outside can't see what's happening in here. This will allow us to let Katina escape after we bring her back to her senses."

"I see, so this is for concealment."

"After everything's over, we'll tell everyone that we killed her. This is the only course of action we can take, and this is our only chance to do it." Chloe looked at Adel and Euphinia with completely serious eyes. "It hardly needs saying, but if anyone finds out, we'll have hell to pay. All of us will be accomplices. Are you fine with that? Are you sure you want to do this?"

With this, Chloe had laid all her cards on the table. Just as she said, this was the only way, and it had to be now. Aiding the escape of someone who would get sentenced to death was no small crime.

Adel realized how thoughtless she had been. It wouldn't bother her all that

much if she was doing this alone, but getting Euphinia involved was a totally different story. She wanted to save Katina, but if doing so meant possibly putting Euphinia into danger, she couldn't help but hesitate. At the end of the day, Euphinia was the one she loved and respected the most. It was Euphinia who she had decided to make her *raison d'être*.

"Y-You're right, Saint Chloe. I hadn't thought that far."

It was hard to say whether this was the right thing to do. What was true, though, was that Adel did not yet have the insight to see the consequences of her own choices and the resolve to see them through.

On the other hand, Chloe was trying to save Katina in full knowledge of what she was doing. She had removed all possible witnesses under the pretext of evacuating them to safety, then set up Unicorn Wall to ensure that none of them could come back in. All this proved that she had both a compassionate heart and a sharp mind. She was indeed worthy of the respect due to an Eminent.

"I need you two to think about it and decide now. What do you want to do? If we're killing Katina outright, there's no need for Princess Euphinia to stay close to me. In fact, it would be best if she hops onto Pegasus's back right now and gets as far away as possible."

"One vote for that!" Pegasus piped up.

"M-Me too!" Nico added.

"You shush, Nico!" Chloe snapped.

"Mr. Pega, you too!" With a serious face, Euphinia declared, "I'm not leaving! I'm staying to help Eminent Chloe!"

"B-But Princess, I can't make you take such a big risk for my sake."

"You're not making me do anything, Adel, because our answers are the same. In fact, I was thinking about what to say if you wanted to stop me. I can't force someone else to go along with something like this, after all."

"Princess..."

"There is nothing to worry about. Let's focus only on saving Eminent Katina!"

“As you command!”

Adel now had her resolve. The only thing left to do was to direct the full force of Unicorn’s purification toward Katina, freeing her from whatever it was that was possessing her.

“I’ll go tell Mash and Melulu and change up the front line!”

Just as Adel was about to dash off, however, Mash wobbled on his feet, then fell to his knees with a grunt.

“Ugh! Hng... Urk.”

He had gotten dizzy from casting too many spells too quickly. The number of fire birds in the air said it all: it had taken a great toll on his body. And now, he was wide open in the middle of a fight.

“Mash! On your left!”

A Cerberus closed in from the left side, keen to take advantage of the opportunity. Its massive body was on a collision course with Mash. Adel promptly reached out with Salamander’s Tail, but she wouldn’t make it in time.

Melulu rushed over to stand in front of Mash. For a brief moment, it looked like she wanted to protect him with her own body, but then a figure slipped out of her and took form. Lilith was the one in control, and her plan was to protect both Melulu and Mash. To no one’s surprise, her small figure was blown far away, even bouncing off the ground a few times before finally coming to a stop.

Melulu, who had regained her senses, cried, “Lilith!” at the same time as Mash.

Wracked with guilt, Mash further groaned, “I’m so sorry!” He watched through tears of frustration as Lilith’s figure melted into a black puddle that swiftly joined Euphinia’s shadow.

“Thank you, Lilith!” Euphinia placed a hand on her chest. “There’s no need to push yourself any longer. Rest all you need.”

Lilith was hurt, but not dead. Since Divine Beasts healed at an accelerated rate when resting within the Saint they were contracted with, it seemed she was going to be fine.

For someone who pranks me and tries to seduce me so often, she sure is kind, Adel thought. *What a far cry from Pegasus. Now she's a Divine Beast worthy of serving Princess. Let's make sure we don't waste her sacrifice.*

"Mash! Lilith is fine! Melulu, fall back with him. I'll take over!"

"R-Right, will do."

"Got it, Adel!"

Adel stepped up, taking Mash and Melulu's place. "Katina, I'm coming to help you now!"

"Help me?" Katina scoffed. "In that case, will you help me kill all those kings in my way? I'll need to form an order of knights to keep our countries in check. You'd be a wonderful leader for them."

"Enough with the nonsense! I'm not talking to you! I'm talking to the *real* Katina, the one you're possessing and controlling!"

Even in this situation, hints of the love that Katina had for Adel could be glimpsed here and there. Rather than having a completely different personality, it was like her original personality and thought processes were being warped in an extreme way.

"In the first place, who even *are* you?! I know you're something with a will who's manipulating Katina!"

"Ha ha ha, what're you talking about? I'm me."

"If you don't want to talk, fine!"

"Yep. Looks like it's time for us to part. Goodbye, Adel."

When Katina waved her hand, the three-headed Cerberi, who were now deployed in a wide line, howled and surged forward as one.

Keeping a steady eye ahead, Adel shouted, "I'll create an opening! Saint Chloe, get Unicorn ready!"

"You sure you can handle them all?!"

"Trust me!"

After the brief exchange, Adel also started running forward, with

Salamander's Tail in the form of a single blade of black flame. The flames grew in size with every step she took, until she was practically holding a giant pillar of fire.

From the back, Chloe exclaimed, "What?! How big can it get?!"

Even with Ki Possession active, Adel could gather ki for one big attack. It was still very exhausting and she needed a lot of time to build up to it, but she could shrug off the former and all the time strategizing just now had been enough for the latter.

With this in hand, she was going to blast a way through!

"YAH!"

Adel brandished her giant blade of black fire at all the Cerberi before her, carving a deep rut in the ground where it made contact. Despite their massive bodies, every beast hit by the blade was sent flying all the way to Unicorn Wall.

It was fortunate that the wall was there, because it ensured they couldn't go after the people who had managed to evacuate outside the castle walls. It was also fortunate that the Cerberi didn't die, because Adel's intention was to free them, not kill them. Their innate resistance to fire was indeed remarkable, considering that this same attack had erased Elciel in one blow even as just blue flame. She could afford to be a little rough with them.

"Wh-What is that power?!" Katina's jaw dropped as she looked at the large gap in the ranks of Cerberi that now left her wide open.

"Saint Chloe! Now!"

"Go, Nico!"

"F-FOR VALOOOOOOOOR!"

The Divine Beast charged straight toward Katina, his horn shining brightly with the power of purification. In contrast to his usual vulgar character, the light seemed holy and cleansing.

Everyone's hearts were in their mouths watching him. He was going to do it. He looked so gallant and so sure of himself, there was no way he could fail!

However, Pegasus popped out of Euphinia's shadow and groaned, "No, that's

not enough!"

Whoosh.

The Cerberus that Katina suddenly summoned and mounted took a step to the side, and Unicorn rushed harmlessly by.

"Ah!"

Then he promptly tripped over a rock and clinched a beautiful dive to the ground.

Awkward silence filled the air. Honestly, even Adel didn't expect him to miss. He deserved kudos for listening to Chloe and mustering up the courage to charge in, but there wasn't much point if he didn't land the shot.

"He was the clumsiest one in our entire herd!" Pegasus explained. *"That's why they made fun of him and exiled him! He wasn't exaggerating when he said that you have to set everything up! He needs to be able to literally walk up and perform the purification!"*

"You're an eyesore." Katina shot Unicorn a look as red flames started building up in the mouth of her Cerberus.

"Eep!"

Fwoooooosh!

Flames descended on the Divine Beast lying prone on the ground. However, at the last second, his body slipped out of the way at high speed.

"Wh-Wh-What?!"

Unicorn's surprise made it obvious that he hadn't moved on his own. No, he had been forcibly pulled into the air by a whip of red fire wrapped around his body.

Katina's eyes widened. "Adel! Already?!"

Right after hearing Pegasus's explanation, Adel had started running forward at top speed. She now manipulated Salamander's Tail to swing Unicorn back down.

"All right, I'm doing as you asked!" she said. "Don't worry about moving. Just

focus on using your purification!”

“O-Okay!”

Unicorn closed his eyes tightly, and his horn started glowing once again. As Adel yelled with fighting spirit, the Divine Beast quickly closed the distance to Katina. She tried to get out of the way, but Adel compensated by making adjustments to the trajectory of Salamander’s Tail.

Finally, the tip of Unicorn’s horn reached Katina.

CRACKLE!

A giant barrier sprang up, stopping him with mere inches to go.

The force of the impact jolted Adel off Pudding’s back. “What?!”

In contrast, Unicorn got blasted high up into the sky with the whip of fire still tied around him. He screamed at the top of his lungs until the whip was extended to its full length and pulled taut. He choked for a brief moment, then resumed screaming as he fell back down to earth. Thankfully, Adel was waiting to catch him. The force of his falling body was considerable, but she handled it with no problem.

“Adel! You saved me!”

“Well, I *am* responsible for throwing you at her. Are you hurt anywhere?”

Adel had honestly been conflicted on whether to save him or not. But the height and speed of his fall would have severely injured him, and all because he’d listened to her plan. So, she couldn’t bear leaving him to his fate.

“Oh, thank you! Thank you! Dear, sweet Adel, thank you!”

The Divine Beast adopted a fawning tone and tried to bury his face in Adel’s chest, but she grabbed him by his horn and kept him at arm’s length.

“Stay away. You’re creeping me out.”

“No, you can’t do this to me! You can’t keep me from touching your melons when they’re right in front of me!”

“Shut up! More importantly, how did it go? Did your power work?”

“Uh, I dunno. I felt something repelling me, so something must have been

triggered."

"Katina!" Adel shouted. "Are you back to your senses?! Katina!"

Katina, who had also fallen off of her Cerberus, slowly sat up, smiling. "I told you, didn't I? I am me. I don't need to return to my senses."

"Dammit!"

"It didn't work!"

"Let's do it one more time! Nico, get ready!"

"Oh no, you don't!" Katina wagged a finger as more Divine Beasts materialized from her shadow. They were Cerberi yet again, and they numbered as many as the entire first batch.

"What?! You still have this many more?!"

In other words, Katina had been fighting with only half of her force this whole time. Just as Adel hadn't been seriously trying to kill Katina, Katina had also been holding back. With such astonishing talent and capacity, her power as a Saint seemed on par with Elciel's. She was quite possibly an even bigger threat to the world than Mad Emperor Tristan.

"You guys, get out here too!" Katina cried.

Right away, the herd of Unicorns that Adel's group had met before appeared as well.

"Wait, guys?! Are you serious?!" Nico exclaimed.

Instead of answering, the Unicorns simply stared back with glittering eyes. An inane verbal fight filled with provocations and swearing should have started up, but there was no sign of it happening.

All members of their species shared very similar personalities—they were only interested in Saints of their preferred body type, and their only merit was an aversion to violence. And yet, Katina's Unicorns seemed to have lost all of those characteristics. They would have fled right away if they were in their right mind, but instead, they were maintaining rank and file and directing hostile glares at Adel's group.

“What’s going on, guys?! Say something! What happened to all your stupid retorts?!”

The change unsettled Nico greatly. It was now clear that Katina was indeed exerting some form of mental control over her Divine Beasts.

Inside Adel’s head, Cerberus asked, *“What do we do?! Soon enough, the ones that we kicked far away will be coming back too! Even we can’t fight such numbers!”*

“Ugh!”

Cerberus was right. The three-headed Cerberi that had been banished to the edge of Unicorn Wall weren’t dead. When they made it back, Adel’s group would be facing three times the numbers from the start.

There was only one way left to resolve the situation. It was direct and simple. But Adel really didn’t want to use it.

“But...”

Just as Adel was frozen with hesitation, Euphinia called her name in her bell-like voice. “Adel, it’s too early to give up! There’s still one thing we can do!”

“What do you mean, Princess?!”

Chloe beckoned furiously. “Adel! Nico! Come back!”

“Understood!” Adel leaped into the air, pulling Nico along with Salamander’s Tail, and retreated all the way back to Euphinia and Chloe’s position. “What is your plan, Princess?! I’ll do anything to save Katina! Please just give me the word!”

While Adel was at her wit’s end, Katina regained her composure and shouted, “I’m done pulling my punches! Everyone, kill them all!” Her hand fell down, and all the Cerberi and Unicorns under her command rushed forward like a wave.

There wasn’t even a second to spare. If Adel’s side really did have a plan, they needed to enact it now.

“Listen carefully, Adel. I’m going to void my contract with Nico. Take my place and contract him instead, then switch to unifying with him. That way, you’ll gain powers of purification many times stronger than what he has on his own. And

use it on Katina!”

In other words, Chloe’s idea was for Adel to use Ki Possession on Unicorn instead of Cerberus.

“M-Me and Adel?!”

Chloe nodded. “Yes! Just for this fight!”

“Um, but...” Adel saw two problems. The first one was that Katina’s army of Divine Beasts was already practically on top of them. There was no time for her to stand still and focus on forming a contract.

Chloe took something out of her pocket. “Don’t worry! I’ll buy you the time you need!”

“Is that another Unicorn Wall?!”

“Yep! This second one will protect us!”

The Artificer Saint jabbed the spelltool’s horn into the ground, and it deployed a triangular pyramid of light around their group. However, it was doubtful whether the barrier could truly hold out against the numbers bearing down on them. Adel could imagine it falling apart with a single fireball of black flame cast with Pudding’s aid.

Roaring fiercely, Katina’s Cerberi lunged at Unicorn Wall. The barrier bent under the impact alone, looking awfully close to breaking apart.

Adel frowned. “Saint Chloe, this isn’t—”

“I know!” Chloe started signing. “Princess Euphinia!”

“Understood, Eminent!” Euphinia nodded to give permission. When Chloe put her hand on her shoulder, her body was enveloped in light as she groaned with pain. “Aaaaagh!”

“Princess?! Are you all right?!” Adel rushed over.

“I-I’m fine! Go on, Adel!”

“Princess...”

At the cost of Euphinia’s agony, Unicorn Wall underwent a transformation. Its light grew much brighter as complicated markings appeared on the barrier,

which also thickened considerably and gained several more layers in a spiral pattern. This time, Chloe was strengthening the wall instead of expanding its area. Now, it didn't budge an inch under the combined assault of all the Cerberi and Unicorns.

"Looks like it'll hold for a while!" Mash said approvingly.

"It's like night and day!" Melulu exclaimed. "You're good to go, Adel. Quickly!"

"U-Understood." Adel had no choice but to do as suggested. She couldn't very well let Euphinia stay in pain forever.

"Okay, I'm separating from Nico now!"

"O-Oh...?"

Unicorn's figure was enveloped in light that burst and disappeared. Apparently this was what it looked like when the contract between a Saint and a Divine Beast was voided.

"There you go, Adel! You know what to do, right?!"

"Yes, Saint!" Just like she had done with Cerberus, Adel opened her heart and brought Nico to her chest. "Let's do this! Lend me your strength!"

"R-Right!"

Adel closed her eyes and concentrated on forming the contract. For several seconds, the only sound was that of the Divine Beasts pounding on the barrier from the other side.

"If brute force is not working, use fire!" Katina said. The Cerberi started bathing the entire area in fire, once again casting doubt on how long the barrier could last.

"Why's it taking so long?!" Adel demanded. "Hurry up!"

"I'm trying!" Nico protested.

It wasn't going well. And once again, another stream of fire rushed at the barrier. When Adel opened her eyes, all she saw in front of her face was the color red. The light of the barrier was still glowing brightly, but there was no

telling how much more it could take.

Chloe advised, "Calm down. Try to become one in mind and heart. Accept each other's presence."

"I'm doing all that!"

"Same here. Though I do have to say, I'm really enjoying the sensation of Adel's squishy breasts on my face!"

"Get rid of those unnecessary thoughts! Focus!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

It was because they made vulgar comments like this that Adel couldn't bring herself to like Unicorn and Pegasus. She wouldn't have minded as much if she was dealing with them alone, but given their proximity to Euphinia, she saw them as negative influences. That was why she was always on their case.

In all likelihood, that dynamic was a big reason why the contract process wasn't working. To form the contract, it was important for both sides to trust each other. This was the second issue that had occurred to Adel when Chloe brought up her plan. Not only were they short on time, Adel didn't even like Unicorn in the first place. That said, she understood that this was the only way out.

She had tried to suppress her personal opinion, but there was no way to lie to her subconscious. Contracts with Divine Beasts were inconvenient like that.

"Hnngg..."

Euphinia had her eyes closed tightly and was clearly struggling. Just looking at her upset Adel, who wanted to resolve the situation as soon as possible.

"That spelltool of yours is incredible," Katina said, sounding impressed. "I've always looked up to you, Chloe."

"It's only thanks to Princess Euphinia here. We're often praised for making history being selected as Eminent at our ages, but the next generation's already here. This girl is going to surpass us one day. I won't let you kill her here!"

"The nail that sticks out has to be hammered down. A world with one

powerful king doesn't need a Saint more powerful than me."

Large figures gathered to Katina. The three-headed Cerberi were back. As expected, they had largely shrugged off the earlier attack. The fact that the first group got turned into three-headed variants but the later group didn't indicated that the former were better at fighting. But then again, this was only relative; each individual Cerberus was a force to reckon with.

"Welcome back. Now, join in!"

All the Cerberi inhaled as one.

"Incoming, Princess Euphinia! I'm sorry, but it's going to get even tougher!"

"U-Understood, Eminent!"

"Oh, Princess!"

"A-Are you sure we're safe here, Chloe?!"

"We don't have a choice, do we?! Stop worrying about us and do what you have to do!"

FWOOOOOSH!

Chloe's reprimand was drowned out by the sound of a torrent of black and red flames ramming into Unicorn Wall.

Adel groaned. "We have to hurry! They're counting on us!"

"R-Right! Let's do this!"

Adel clutched Nico's head to her chest with more strength. She felt a little closer to forming the contract, but the powerful response and conviction that she had experienced with Cerberus just wasn't there. She remembered it being much easier then. Perhaps she just had better chemistry with Cerberus due to being similar in character.

"Look, the barrier!" Mash exclaimed.

"It's buckling!" Melulu confirmed.

Unicorn Wall was once again starting to bend and creak.

"We're nearly through!" Katina crowed. "Everyone, wring out every last drop

of power you have!”

Craaaaack!

“No, it won’t hold!” Adel let go of Nico and assumed position in front of Euphinia mere moments before the barrier’s collapse. This way, she could use her own body as a shield. Allowing the princess to get hurt first was simply out of the question. She was already moving before she knew it, spurred by her instincts as a knight escort. She grabbed her liege with one hand as her other held up Salamander’s Tail in double-blade form.

“Everyone, behind me!” she shouted. Moments later, the barrier shattered and the flames rushed in. Adel spun her spelltool at high speed to fend off the onslaught.

“Hrngh!”

However, the combined attacks of dozens of Cerberi was not so easily stopped. Adel would have been knocked off her feet if she hadn’t lowered her center of gravity and planted herself firmly.

“Fall back! Into the tower!”

Adel couldn’t block this forever. The tower could at least provide a modicum of cover.

“Got it! Melulu, Saint Chloe, come on!” Mash retreated inside, making sure to stay in Adel’s shadow.

While suppressing the flames with one hand and holding Euphinia in the other, Adel quickly ducked inside as well. Unfortunately, the structure could only put up token resistance against flames that had the force to knock Adel down when she had Ki Possession active. Seconds later, the tower was breached and collapsed on Adel’s group. The resulting shock wave and blast of hot air sent all of them hurtling.

They screamed from surprise and terror, but this was still miles better than being burned alive. Adel managed to keep Euphinia safe by hugging her close, practically burying her face in her bosom.

“Princess! Are you unhurt?!” Adel asked anxiously while pulling Euphinia back

to her feet.

The two of them had been sent quite a distance backward. All that remained of the tower were large chunks of rubble laying all around.

“I-I’m fine. Thank you, Adel.”

“That’s all that matters!”

Thankfully, Mash and Melulu had ended up close by. They were already getting back up, but looked a little wobbly on their feet. Just like Adel, the shock wave had hit them hard but also helped them avoid the flames.

“I’m sorry, Adel. For failing to maintain the barrier.”

“No, don’t think like that. Thanks to you, we’re still alive and standing!”

“Give me one more chance! I’ll buy the time you need!” Euphinia looked around, shouting, “Eminent Chloe, please activate Unicorn Wall again!”

Adel quickly spotted Chloe lying ahead of them, roughly where the tower had stood mere moments prior. However, she was not responding. Her figure was partially hidden behind some rubble, making it hard to discern her condition. To make matters worse, Katina’s Unicorns were thundering straight toward her.

“Neeeeeeigh!”

As the Cerberi’s fire ceased, the Unicorns shot past in an enactment of a two-pronged attack. They held their horns steady in front, picking up speed with every step.

“Eminent Chloe!” Euphinia screamed.

Adel ran toward the Saint, but the Unicorns were going too fast. They were normally a disorderly rabble that would scatter at the first hint of fighting, but under Katina’s control they had been converted into an excellent force with very high mobility. At this rate, Adel was going to be one step too late. Chloe was going to be run through by the horns of a whole herd of Unicorns.

That moment, a figure stepped in between the two sides.

“Chloe?! GUYS, STOP!” It was Nico, Chloe’s Unicorn. He was trying to use his own body as a shield. And sure enough, the horns of his kin pierced him like so

many spearheads. *“Kuaaaaargh!”*

A few drops of flying blood landed on Chloe’s cheek, rousing her. “Nico? What happen—”

“Now you get BACK!” Finally making it onto the scene, Adel sliced off all the horns of Katina’s Unicorns with her blade of black fire. They reared back, screaming, then quickly backed away warily.

“Nico! Stay with me! Nico!” Chloe desperately tried to pull out the horns embedded in Nico’s body, but there was no time. The enemy Cerberi were closing in fast.

“Good save,” Katina smiled. “But now you’re cornered.”

“Ugh!” Adel grunted. She had failed to contract Nico, and Unicorn Wall was no longer usable. She was truly down to only one recourse.

“Adel!” Mash shouted. “We have no choice!”

“It’s the only way!” Melulu agreed.

As Euphinia’s knight escort, Adel’s highest priority was to ensure her safety, no matter the situation. She knew this well, but she really didn’t want to kill Katina to do so. Unfortunately, the powerless did not have the luxury of choice.

“KATINA!”

Just then, someone appeared from the direction of the burning castle, shouting Katina’s name in a voice wracked with pain and sorrow.

Alarm flashed across Katina’s face. “Prince Julian?! Why are you here?!”

“Brother!” Euphinia cried with relief. “You’re alive! I’ve been so worried!”

The tone in Katina’s voice indicated that she had no intention of harming him, but he had missed his opportunity to escape.

“I failed to stop Katina and was being held underground,” Julian explained. “A child wearing a hood showed up and freed me without saying anything.”

Adel’s eyes widened. She still thought that the Watcher boy’s idea of evacuating Euphinia and herself to an alternate dimension was a bad call, but freeing Julian more than made up for it. Katina was visibly flustered, and the

Divine Beasts under her control had all stopped in their tracks.

“Please stop this, Katina! Why are you doing this?! It’s not like you at all! You’re strong, strong enough to surprise everyone, but you never let that power get to your head, and you always sought solutions other than violence. It’s because that’s the kind of person you are that I—”

Adel interrupted, “Prince Julian, you’re completely right! This is entirely out of character for Katina! She’s being manipulated by something that’s possessed her!”

“What?! But...that would explain everything. I swear to you, Katina would never do something like this!”

“So, instead of remonstrating her, please encourage her not to lose to whatever it is that’s controlling her! Your voice will reach her better than ours can!”

“Got it! Katina, don’t give in! Don’t just let this thing use you and your power like this! Wrest control back!”

“Wh— U-Ughhhh...”

Katina’s body quivered violently, making her fall from her Cerberus. On the ground, she curled up into a ball and stopped moving.

Julian approached her cautiously. “Yes, Katina! Fight it! Return to yourself!”

“Your Highness... I...” Katina looked up with a slight smile on her face.



Her expression looked extremely similar to the one that Adel knew. Had Julian being in harm's way helped free her from the influence of what was possessing her? If so, all of Adel's effort to form a contract with Nico would have been a waste, but that was a cheap price to pay for Katina's freedom.

"A-Are you back, Katina?"

"No, you're mistaken!" Unicorn groaned as he raised his bloody form. "She's collapsed because she's exhausted her strength. Something really bad is about to burst out of her!"

"Nico! You've regained consciousness!" Chloe sighed with relief. Her hands were cut and bleeding due to her efforts to pull out the horns stuck inside her partner's body.

"Ugh. That was not like me at all," Nico grumbled. "My body moved all by itself."

Adel shook her head as she continued helping with pulling out the horns. "Your instinct to protect the Saint you serve is exemplary dedication. And *that's* something I do admire."

Nico's wounds were deep, but he had the incredible vitality of a Divine Beast. He was not in danger for his life.

"Thanks, I guess. Sorry that we couldn't do the contract, though. When I was banished from my herd and under attack by monsters, it was Chloe who saved me and gave me a place to belong. I can't just forget that."

"Nico...you remember that?" Chloe chuckled. "You're right, this really *isn't* like you."

"I see. I get it. I totally understand how you feel. I share the same devotion toward my own liege," Adel said as she felt puzzle pieces falling into place in her head.

The contract process failing wasn't entirely Adel's fault. His usual behavior aside, Nico trusted Chloe greatly and took pride in the fact that she was the Saint he was contracted with. It was difficult for him to switch gears and obey when suddenly ordered to cut ties with her and replace her with another Saint.

Regardless of how much he tried to force himself, his subconscious and instincts were resisting. Obviously, this sort of thing greatly affected contracts between Saints and Divine Beasts.

As it turned out, Nico wasn't just someone with a vulgar mind, but also someone who cherished Chloe so much that he would reflexively leap to her aid. Knowing this helped alleviate a lot of the revulsion that Adel felt toward joining hands with him.

"Ha ha... I'm afraid I'm nowhere near as upright as you are, though."

Just then, a light sprang up around Adel and Unicorn. It was the same light that she had seen during her moment with Cerberus.

Chloe's eyes lit up. "Oh?! It is the contract?! I think it just might work now!" Indeed, the sensation was different from before.

"A-All right! Nico, lend me a hand to protect the ones that we serve!"

"My pleasure! Make me useful!"

Unicorn turned into particles of light in Adel's hand that rushed into her chest. Now she could feel two unique presences within. The contract was a success.

"It worked!" Adel cheered.

Euphinia came up to her with a proud smile. "Congratulations, Adel!"

"Awesome!" Chloe said encouragingly. "Now, all you have to do is apply your technique on—"

"KATINA!" Julian shouted, the panic in his voice drawing everyone's attention. "What's wrong?!"

A black, sinister shimmer was gushing out of Katina's body and enveloping her.

"I...will take the crown myself! I have no need for a puppet!" she yelled, shoving Julian away with enough force to send him quite a ways back.

Katina did not originally possess such strength. Whatever had possessed her was now in full control. The sensation that Adel was feeling on her skin was a complete match for Mad Emperor Tristan's presence.

With a panicked yelp, Julian fell in the middle of the group of Cerberi.

As if demonstrating that she was truly no longer herself, Katina shouted, “Kill him!”

Fangs and claws fell like rain, but none of them nicked Julian, as his body suddenly shot into the air and out of the encirclement. There was a thin whip of fire wrapped around his waist. Adel had run over and reached him just in time with Salamander’s Tail.

“Prince Julian, are you hurt anywhere?!”

“I-I’m fine. Thank you. But what’s become of Katina?!”

“It is now certain that she has been possessed. She probably fought her hardest, but...”

“No! Are you saying that she’s...?!”

“Please don’t worry! I’ll save her!”

“You still have something up your sleeve?! I’m sorry for being useless.”

“You’ve already been a huge help. Thank you.”

Julian looked puzzled, but if he hadn’t helped buy time, Adel would never have managed to contract Nico. His contribution to the fight had made all the difference. And in turn, the Watcher boy also deserved credit for freeing him.

“In any case, please get back! I promise you I’ll help Katina!”

Adel stepped up to face Katina and her Divine Beasts as Julian fell back to join Euphinia’s group.

“I don’t know who you are, but you’re returning Katina to us!”

“You don’t have the power to kill my Cerberi. We will simply wear you down!”

Unfortunately for Katina, the situation had changed. Adel’s preparations for activating Ki Possession again were complete.

“You’re right,” Adel nodded. “Which is why... Let’s do this, Unicorn!”

“Hell yeah! Go for it, Adel!”

Adel redirected the ki enveloping Cerberus to Unicorn instead. A pillar of

purifying light burst into the sky and obscured her figure as a high-pitched, bell-like neigh filled the air.

“What?!” Katina threw up a hand to shield her eyes from the blinding light.

Within that light, Adel’s appearance changed rapidly. A stately horn appeared on her forehead in a shower of sparkles, white horse ears sprang from her head, and a long, white horse tail poofed into existence behind her back. At the same time, her red and black outfit embodying the flames of a Cerberus morphed into a chaste, white ceremonial outfit embodying a Unicorn’s power of purification. Ki Possession with Nico was a success.



“How angelic,” Euphinia sighed.

Chloe pumped a fist. “Yes! I was worried when Nico acted out of character and put himself in danger, but it all worked out in the end!”

“It’s thanks to his act of self-sacrifice that the contract succeeded in the end.”

“I admit, it doesn’t feel half bad knowing that Adel now has a better impression of Nico.”

“Th-This feels so goooood! So this is how it feels being inside sweet Adel! The squishiness is being conveyed straight to my mind, to my very being! It’s so comforting that it’s erasing all my wounds! This is pure heaven!”

The unsuppressed excitement being conveyed straight to Adel’s head made her sigh. “My impression has just been dragged back down.”

One thing that caught her attention was Unicorn’s healing speed. Ki Possession hadn’t worked when Cerberus was severely hurt. The wounds that Nico suffered were by no means shallow, meaning his powers of recovery were off the charts.

Chloe laughed awkwardly. “Well...I guess Nico being up to his usual shenanigans is a sign that he’s doing well! In any case, this is our last resort!”

“Adel, I’m sorry for always asking you to put your life on the line, but please save Eminent Katina and everyone else!”

“I am happy to do it! My greatest duty in life is to protect you!” Adel flashed a smile of reassurance and confidence, then turned and charged into the tide of oncoming enemies.

“She’s nothing! Squash her!” Katina yelled, prompting all of her Divine Beasts to rush at Adel with a deafening roar.

“Bring it on! I’ll take on every last one of you!” Adel stopped and braced herself, gripping Salamander’s Tail tightly.

The first one to reach her was a three-headed Cerberus.

“Graaaaaaor!”

It lunged at her from above, swinging down both front claws at the same

time. Bolstered by the beast's momentum, the attack boasted both lethal force and remarkable speed. However, Adel could clearly see it coming. She took three steps forward, positioning herself under the attack's trajectory by a paper thin margin. The Divine Beast's claws passed harmlessly by on either side and gouged the ground instead. However, because she had dodged forward, she was now right in front of the variant's middle head.

"Fire! Burn her!"

"Yah!"

Before the Cerberus could carry out Katina's order, Adel stabbed Salamander's Tail into its throat. No blood spewed out, and the Divine Beast didn't recoil with pain. Instead, it instantly stopped moving.

Adel pulled her blade back. Not only did she stop attacking the Cerberus, she even turned her back on it, redirecting her attention to the Divine Beast who would be reaching her next.

"Adel! Are you out of your mind?!" Mash cried.

"Don't turn your back on it!" Melulu screamed.

"It's fine!" Adel replied.

She pivoted to dodge an incoming Unicorn, her blade swinging clean through its body. Once again, the Divine Beast stopped without appearing to be injured or in pain, and she turned her back on it without a second glance.

Next, two normal Cerberi rushed at her from either side. She leaped off the back of the frozen Unicorn and brandished Salamander's Tail again. Both of her targets stopped moving, allowing her to move on.

"Why are you just standing there?!" Katina screeched in vexation. "She's wide open from the back! Cerberus! Unicorn! Attack her!"

Adel pointed her weapon at Katina. "You can save your breath! They're no longer your Divine Beasts!"

Salamander's Tail was not its usual red color. It wasn't blue, like it would be if she was using Ki Amplification, or black, like it would be if she was using Ki Possession with Cerberus. Instead, it was a dazzling white blade of light. And

coming from the other side, a whip of light extended to wrap around the horn adorning Adel's forehead. She was channeling Unicorn's power of purification through the whip and condensing it into a blade.

"Wh-What is that weapon?!"

"You're not Katina, you're just something that's controlling her. These Divine Beasts formed a contract with *her*, not you. As such, they have no obligation to take orders from you!"

The strange presence had turned the Divine Beasts' contracts into a curse that compelled them to act against their wills. But Unicorn's purification was effective against curses. This form of Salamander's Tail had the power to sever the contracts between Katina and her Divine Beasts.

"I... Were we...?"

"What were we doing?"

"Why are we in this state?"

The frozen three-headed Cerberus roused itself and split into three normal Cerberi.

"Ahhhhhhhh! Wh-Wh-What is going on?! Save meeeeeee!"

The frozen Unicorn freaked out and took off like a bullet.

When not compelled, there was no need for the Divine Beasts to fight. Adel's newfound power was proving extremely effective.

"I'll free every last Divine Beast from you!"

Adel charged straight at the enemy. She didn't even have to aim anymore. Simply by extending her blade and running among the crowd, she was freeing Divine Beasts left and right and stopping them in their tracks. In the blink of an eye, she had severed the contracts of half the Divine Beasts on the field.

Next, she set a route directly toward Katina. "And I'll have you return Katina to us too!"

"Don't let her get close!" Katina screamed, making all of her remaining Divine Beasts stand in Adel's way.

“It doesn’t matter how many there are, because I’ll free every last one of them!”

“Keep your distance and bathe her in flames! Stay away from that blade!”

This was the right call. Getting too close and taking the smallest nick from Salamander’s Tail spelled game over. However, she’d made that call a little too late.

“Just buying time isn’t going to stop me!”

Adel weaved through the flames, charging forward while showering the Cerberi with swings of her sword. Having to evade slowed her advance a little, but she had turned into an inexorable juggernaut.

“Tch!” Katina clicked her tongue loudly, her face distorted with frustration. “That’s it! All of you, get out here! Dogpile her and make sure she can’t move!”

Even more Divine Beasts climbed out of Katina’s shadow, but all their efforts to diminish Adel’s momentum proved fruitless. Her battle cry filled the air as the white light of purification swept through the battlefield like a storm.

“More! More! More! Overwhelm her with sheer—”

The stream of Divine Beasts materializing suddenly stopped. Katina had well and truly exhausted her roster.

“Curses! This can’t be... I have no choice!”

The Eminent bit her lip hard, then whirled her mount around to flee the battlefield while she still had pawns to cover her retreat.

“Wait, is that our—”

As her Cerberus took off at top speed, she turned around to shoot a glance at Adel...and realized that the storm of light had completely died down. The scores of Divine Beasts who had been freed from her control stood as still as statues, but Adel herself was nowhere to be seen.

“What on—”

A voice over Katina’s head shouted, “Up here!”

Adel had succeeded in making it through the ranks of Divine Beasts and

caught up with Katina. She was already mid-lunge, her sword of purification slicing through the air.

“That power belongs to the sovereign of all mankind!” Katina screeched. “How could you debase it by wielding it in service to the whims of a mere brat?!”

Is she referring to ki? It's true that the history books describe famous champions using it, but...

Adel shook her head. “I don’t give a damn! I don’t care what you think!”

History meant nothing to her. Euphinia was her sole reason for living, and she dedicated all her powers to Euphinia’s service. She was fine with her life being this way; no, she *wanted* her life this way.

Closing the distance in the blink of an eye, Adel brought down her sword with all her strength.

CRACKLE!

The same barrier that had repelled Unicorn earlier appeared again in fierce resistance.

“I...will push through! YAAAAAAH!”

Salamander’s Tail shattered the barrier, finally slashing through Katina.

“Noooooooo! You’ll pay for this!”

As Katina screamed with rage, something black rushed out of her body and shot into the sky. It flew off toward the west, pulling along a thin tail.

“What was that?! Is it...gone?”

Just as suspected, something *had* been inside Katina. The fight had ended with no indication as to who or what it was, but tending to Katina took top priority right now.

Katina slid off the back of her Cerberus and lay prone on the ground. That same Cerberus turned around and started licking her face with concern.

Chapter 6: The Compulsion of Fate

“Katina!” Julian cried, cradling Katina in his arms and shaking her. “Are you all right, Katina?!”

“Ugh... I...” Slowly, Katina regained her senses. “Prince Julian? W-Wait, is that...? How terrible!” She gasped as she looked around and saw Wendill Palace ruined and in flames.

“Do you not remember?” Chloe asked.

“Chloe, what do you— AHFFF!” Katina curled up, clutching her head and crying out in pain.

“Katina! I’m sorry, Saint Chloe, but she isn’t well enough to talk yet. Please let her rest—”

Chloe shook her head firmly and cut Julian off. “We don’t have time to take things slow. If you want her to live, we need to move *now*.”

Everyone had witnessed Katina summoning an army of Divine Beasts and ordering them to set the palace on fire. There was no doubt that she had been manipulated, but there was no physical proof. Even if Chloe and Julian fought as hard as they could, it would be impossible to have her absolved of her crimes.

“Prince Julian, you know better than anyone what will become of Katina now, right?”

“Wait, but...that’s...” Julian hung his head and bit his lip. He understood what Chloe was saying, but he didn’t want to admit it. It would mean saying goodbye to Katina forever.

Pained silence filled the air. Not even Adel knew what to say.

In the previous timeline, these two had survived the Great War together and gone on to live a happy life. How did things end up this way? The boy who claimed to be a Watcher had explained that there was a compulsion on the fate of humans that made it hard to alter their future. At the moment, the fates of

Mash, Melulu, and Euphinia were being altered for the better, but it seemed to be at the cost of throwing Katina's into chaos.

"I-I'm not dreaming?" Katina asked in a quivering voice. "Did I really...? To all those people?"

"Are your memories coming back?" Chloe asked.

"Y-Yes, they are. It felt like I was watching myself in a dream. But if this is all real, then I'm the one who did all this. Wh-Why?!"

"It's not your fault! Something was controlling you!"

Katina shot to her feet, brushing Julian's hand away and staggering backward. "No, Prince Julian! Please stay away from me!"

"Why, Katina?"

"I-I can't be by your side anymore," Katina said in a broken voice. "If you continue to get involved with me, you'll be condemned as well."

"Katina..."

Seeing the two of them fall silent, Chloe took a step forward. "Listen closely, Katina. You have to get away from here *now*, while no one else is watching. We'll say that you died and that your body was burned to ashes."

"What are you saying, Chloe?! If you do that and I get caught, all of you would —"

"We don't care!" Adel interrupted. "We want you to live, no matter what it takes! We can't abandon you!"

"Adel..."

"We know that you were possessed by something, but this is all we can do for you. I'm so sorry... Even so, please live. As long as you're still alive, then one day..."

After a pause, Katina smiled weakly. "Thank you, Adel. To see you so worried about me, I'm relieved that you have found a truly wonderful master to serve."

"Katina..."

"However, I can't do that." Katina shook her head firmly. "I did all this. I can't

go off to live a carefree life, avoiding my responsibility while making accomplices out of all of you.”

Her response was entirely in line with her character. But Adel couldn't accept it.

“I'm begging you, big sister!” Adel looked straight into Katina's widened eyes. “I know that this is a selfish request. Even so, I *really* don't want to lose you over this. Please live. *Please live!*”

The tears welling up in Adel's eyes prompted Katina to tear up too. “No fair. Why do you always call me ‘big sister’ only when you want me to do what you want?”

She smiled at Adel with the love of a mother looking at a wayward child. After having had a little time to calm down, she was back to being her usual self.

Chloe spoke up. “Katina? I feel like ‘don't worry’ isn't the right thing to say here, but...don't worry, you won't be living a carefree life. No place will be safe for you inside the Four World Powers. In other words, you'll have to flee into frontier profane land.”

In the current age, humans lived on land protected by Holy Towers erected by Saints. Everything beyond was called profane land, highly dangerous territory inhabited by hordes of monsters created by miasma spewing from the ground. Living in profane land was nigh impossible, which was why humans had to crowd themselves into the limited areas secured by Holy Towers.

Frontier profane land was the profane land that lay outside of the borders of all of the Four World Powers. During the Holy Era, when the entire continent had been unified as the Holy Kingdom, humanity had held control over much more habitable land. But no matter how far the Saints pushed into the frontier, all they discovered was more profane land.

Sure enough, if Katina went to frontier profane land, nobody from any of the Four World Powers or the Holy Tower Church would chase after her. After all, no one could live out there.

“Saint Chloe, are you telling Katina to go into profane land alone?!” Adel exclaimed. “It's barren land out there; all she'll find is monsters! It's practically

—”

How’s it any different from a death sentence? She’s basically telling Katina to keep fighting monsters until she drops dead!

Euphinia grabbed Adel’s arm. “Stop, Adel! Don’t say it.”

Adel turned around to see the princess shaking her head with tears in her eyes. “I... You’re right, Princess. Saint Chloe, I apologize for my disrespect.”

There was no point in blaming Chloe. That was what Euphinia was trying to say, and Adel agreed.

“It’s fine. I do understand how you feel. That said, we don’t actually know what’s out there. Maybe there really is a place that can support human life. Maybe there *are* people living out there.”

Katina thought for a while, then nodded. “I understand. That’s where I will go.” The look in her eye was a bit more settled than before. “Maybe I can even find something that proves beneficial for all mankind. If I do, I hope it will help atone at least a little for what happened today. And even if I die, well...”

She turned her back on Adel’s group with wobbly legs. “Guess there’s no point in delaying. I have to leave before I’m spotted, after all.” Her shoulders were quivering, and her back looked small and vulnerable. However, there was nothing more that anyone here could do for her.

“This might be trite to say, but I wish you well,” Chloe said.

Unlike Chloe, Adel struggled to come up with something to say. There should have been other futures that played out differently from this one. In the previous timeline, Katina’s ending had been much happier. Adel couldn’t help wondering if this was the result of all the meddling that she had done after coming back in time.

“I’m sorry, Katina. I—”

“There’s no need for you to apologize, Adel. Thank you for saving me. It’s thanks to you that I’m still here. You take care of yourself now, okay? And if you can, check in on Astal Orphanage every once in a while.”

“I will! I promise!”

This was quite possibly goodbye forever. If this was the last time Adel would ever see Katina, she wanted to burn her face into her memory. But she was struggling to.

Due to having been blind for so long, Adel often got overly stimulated by what she could see. There was no problem if she was looking at a beautiful sight, like Euphinia's smile, which invoked only positive feelings. When it came to heart-wrenching situations, however, she felt the sadness and the sense of powerlessness many times more. She hated this. Everything that had changed truly came with both an upside and a downside.

The group saw Katina off, wordlessly watching her figure shrink into the distance.

"All...righty! Time to gather myself and get to it!" Julian said in a cheerful voice that sounded out of place in this situation. He did one big stretch, then made as if he was about to start walking.

"Brother? What're you doing?" Euphinia asked.

Julian turned back to her. "Hmm? I'm going with Katina, of course. We're going to have so much fun exploring!"

Everyone shouted, "WHAT?!"

"If I know Katina, she'd refuse to let me go with her now. So I'm going to watch over her in secret, then join her when we've gone too far to turn back."

Despite Julian's grin and nonchalant explanation, this was an extremely heavy decision. In the short while when he had fallen silent, he had resolved himself to abandon his country and status to live the rest of his life in uninhabitable land where he would be constantly in danger.

Perhaps this was an illustration of the compulsion on human fate. Even if Julian and Katina did not become king and queen of Wendill, they were still going to spend their lives together. Adel sincerely hoped so.

"Euphinia, I'm sorry for foisting everything on you," Julian said, looking at his sister with chagrin and contrition. "Please tell father and everyone at the castle that you never found me."

This, too, was possibly a lifelong parting, and between blood siblings, no less.

However, Euphinia put on a brave face. “Please don’t worry about me, brother. Take care of yourself out there. I will hold on to hope that we will see each other again one day.”

She was doing her best to give her brother a push on the back and alleviate any regret that he was feeling. But Adel could tell how close Euphinia really was to breaking down. Before she had finished saying farewell, Euphinia had grabbed Adel’s hand, and her hand was now trembling. Adel could read her liege’s feelings like the back of her own hand.

Euphinia was far from calm. No, she was desolate, and she was crushed. And with Julian gone, the heavy burden of becoming Wendill’s new queen had suddenly been forced upon her. But in spite of everything, she wasn’t complaining at all. Instead, she was trying to accept it all and give her brother encouragement.



How laudable she was. How selfless she was. How strong she was.

Adel was obviously stronger than Euphinia physically, but she was no match for her liege's strength of character. Once again, Adel felt with conviction that Euphinia was a liege worthy of her lifelong service. And when Euphinia found herself on the verge of being swept away by her own emotions, the hand that she took was Adel's. This made Adel prouder than anything ever had.

While watching Julian walk away, Euphinia murmured, "Adel, please always stay by my side. Please be there for me."

"Of course, Princess! Always!" Adel replied, although she could not see her liege's face.

Euphinia giggled and took out a handkerchief. "Oh, Adel. Come on, let's wipe away those tears."

"Why are *you* the one crying, Adel?" Melulu laughed while wiping away a few droplets of her own.

"Didn't expect her to be so easily moved to tears," Chloe chuckled, even though her reaction was not much different.

"Oh, you don't know the half of it, Saint Chloe. Adel tears up all the time when Princess is involved."

"I can see how Prince Julian is our liege's brother," Mash commented, nodding in admiration. "He is indeed a truly good man."

Adel couldn't agree more. Euphinia was her one and only liege, but she could just as easily see herself serving Julian if her life had worked out differently.

As Adel stooped to let Euphinia wipe her tears, she silently called out, *Prince Julian, please take good care of Katina!*

Afterword

First of all, thank you very much for picking up this book. This has been volume three of *Sword Saint Adel's Second Chance*. I hope you enjoyed it.

Do you remember in the previous volume's afterword, I said my metabolic age was 55? After that, I dedicated myself to a regimen of daily exercise and a calorie intake of less than 1,500 kcal for four months. As a result, I lost 10 kg and my metabolic age became ten years younger. I was really happy about it, but then I hurt my back and now I have to dial back on the exercise. And where did I end up? Back at the osteopathic clinic. Sometimes, things just don't work out how you want.

Speaking of things not working out how you want, I've been dipping my toes into investing since September of last year. The money that I put into a global equities fund tied to the MSCI ACWI index is turning a profit, which is great. However, I also bought other stocks after doing a ton of research, thinking long and hard, and keeping a close eye on the market, and those have been dropping quite badly. I desperately want to go back to that September and tell myself, "Just put everything into the global equities fund!" But there's no turning back to the clock, and well, things don't always work out how you want.

I bought a new smartphone model recently, and it's a huge upgrade from what I was using before. This allowed me to finally join my wife and daughter in playing *Pokémon Unite*. It was fun and I got really hooked, but then stopped making progress after reaching Master rank. I'm practicing, but it's not helping much.

As I grow older, I feel myself losing my reflexes. Long ago, I'd spend a ton of time in arcades playing matchup games like *Gundam* and whatnot, but now I'm a shadow of my past self. This, too, is something that just doesn't work out how I want.

The best illustration of life not working out how people want, however, is the plot of this volume. Okay, fine, it's not like I was aiming for this from the start;

I'm really just drawing links after the fact. In any case, the story ended up taking a rather heartbreaking turn. I do tend to take things in a serious direction—not that it's a bad thing per se—so I want to do a better job of balancing that out with moments of levity.

A lot of revisions had to be made to this volume's first draft, so that's something that I want to do a better job at too. Once again, my editor has been a massive help. In fact, the portion of this entire series that I needed help with is rather high. This, too, is something that isn't quite working out how I want. This is my own series, so that matters the most. My work, at least, is something that I desperately want to make work out how I want.

To wrap, I want to sincerely thank my editor, N-sama; the illustrator, Unapoppo-sama; as well as everyone else who gave their all to make this book happen. Adel is once again looking very cute in this volume, as are the newcomers Chloe and Katina!

Plans for the manga adaptation are coming along, so I hope you look forward to it.

With that, I shall now take my leave.

Bonus Short Story

Lost and Found

Wendill Palace had been destroyed beyond recognition by the Divine Beasts under Katina's control, and could no longer carry out its usual functions. It was now practically a ruin.

This palace had suffered the same fate during the Great War of the previous timeline. Adel had been blind last time and therefore was unable to confirm just how similar it looked between the two timelines, but chances were that they were close enough. Reconstruction was going to take quite some time.

There was one marked difference, though.

"Hmph! Ah, hup, hup! Whew."

Adel strengthened her arms with Ki Convergence and picked up a huge boulder. She staggered a little, regained her balance, then set it down a short distance away. She then picked up the things that had been trapped underneath the boulder and examined them in turn.

"Hmm..."

She was looking for something, but it had yet to turn up. And since the sun had already set a while ago, it was getting too dark to clearly see what she was holding.

Cerberus padded up to her and asked, "*Would this help you see, Adel?*"

An orb of fire appeared with a soft *fwum*.

"Oh, thanks. That helps."

"*All good. So, do you want me to move this boulder over there too?*"

"Please and thanks. You don't *have* to do this, you know. I'm just doing it because I want to."

This particular spot used to include the quarters assigned to Euphinia's knight escorts. More specifically, this had been Adel's room. None of its former appearance remained, but Adel was still digging around for something.

While pushing aside another large piece of rubble, Cerberus replied, *"I do feel a little responsible. It was my kin who burned this place down, after all."*

"Fair enough. But what I'm doing wouldn't count for much as atonement."

The thing that Adel was looking for was a rather personal item, one she would have to mainly keep to herself. That's why she had come here after her work hours to flip over rocks.

"It matters not. It's enough for me that I'm being of help to you."

"Well, thank you. I appreciate it."

"Goodness, this exchange feels quite dull without your usual sharp wit. Let's hurry and find this thing so you can take your mind off it."

"You can keep those comments to yourself. But it's true that I need to find it today, since I won't be here anymore tomorrow."

Euphinia was staying at an inn in Welna tonight, but would be leaving the city tomorrow. Since Adel was her knight escort, she had to accompany her, and it would be quite a while before either of them came back. Adel had to finish her search today. A slight drizzle was dampening her hair and clothes, but she paid it no mind. However, she failed to find what she was looking for, even when it became completely dark out.

"I guess...it's about time to head back."

Just as Adel was about to heave a sigh of resignation, a voice called out, "Adel! Is that you, Adel?"

When Adel turned around, she found Euphinia coming her way. "Princess?! Why are you here?!"

"I didn't see you around, so I got— Ah!" Euphinia tripped over something in the dark.

"Princess?!" Adel immediately rushed over and helped her liege back up. "Are you hurt anywhere?! Do you feel any pain?!"

“I’m... I’m all right.”

“I’m deeply sorry. I shouldn’t have come out to a place like this. Come on, let us return now, before you actually get hurt.”

“But aren’t you looking for something? Can I— Oh? What is this?”

When Euphinia fell down, her hand had brushed against what turned out to be a comb with beautiful colors.

“Ah! That’s Katina’s comb! Thank you so much, Princess! That’s what I was looking for!”

Katina had forgotten it on the night she stayed over in Adel’s room. Adel had wanted it as a memento, because she might never get to meet her again.

Several days later, when Melulu happened to bump into Adel in the morning, she yawned and commented, “G’morning, Adel. Strange, I’ve noticed that lately you don’t have bedhead like you used to. Why is that?”

“Hey, Melulu. It’s because I’m combing my hair properly now.”

“Wait, you are?! Princess, did you hear that?!”

Euphinia giggled with a warm smile. “I did indeed. Adel has grown more beautiful again.”



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Sword Saint Adel's Second Chance: Volume 3

by Hayaken

Translated by Taishi Edited by Austin Conrad

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