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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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“Is that my armor?!”

There was no way to see the assailant's face,
as they were wearing a suit of pitch-black armor
that covered them from head to toe.
However, Adel recognized the armor
itself. She knew it all too well.



Tristan

The man known as the Mad Emperor and feared for being a tyrant in the previous timeline; Adel fiercely hates him for the part he played in Euphinia's death

Angela August

Vice-commander of the Silver Lion Division of the Malkan National Army; seems to have a history with Mash

Adel Astal

A formerly male swordmaster who returned to the past and turned into a beautiful girl with the abilities of a Saint, which enabled her to become Princess Euphinia's knight escort

Cerberus

The high-ranking Divine Beast contracted with Adel; personal name is "Pudding"

Euphinia

The sagacious princess possessing incredible talent as a Saint, who Adel swears absolute loyalty to



“Um, Princess?
This is a bit, um...”

“Mm... Nn...”

Euphinia’s breath was
tickling her a little,
so Adel tried pulling away.
However, this made
Euphinia hug her even tighter,
making it impossible for her to escape.

Table of Contents

1. [Cover](#)
2. [Color Illustrations](#)
3. [Chapter 1: The Profane Land Reversion Incident](#)
4. [Chapter 2: The Dullahan in Profane Land](#)
5. [Chapter 3: The City She Can't Forget](#)
6. [Chapter 4: Melulu Sedis](#)
7. [Chapter 5: The Attack on the Crown Prince \(Part 1\)](#)
8. [Chapter 6: The Attack on the Crown Prince \(Part 2\)](#)
9. [Chapter 7: The Attack on the Crown Prince \(Part 3\)](#)
10. [Afterword](#)
11. [Bonus Short Stories](#)
12. [About J-Novel Club](#)
13. [Copyright](#)

Chapter 1: The Profane Land Reversion Incident

Some time had passed since Adel was officially inducted as Princess Euphinia's knight escort. One day, she found herself in a courtyard in Wendill Palace, facing down a gigantic beast charging straight at her with fangs bared.

"Oh, no you don't!" Adel cried, leaping up to vault onto Cerberus's head when he passed by.

"Hmph!"

However, Cerberus was fast, and he reacted swiftly. The moment Adel's feet touched him, he was already twisting his head and body around. If she tried to kick off from his back, he would be able to catch her in midair on her way down.

"Yah!"

Sure enough, Adel did exactly what Cerberus expected. She stepped on him for the briefest of moments, then shot up again.

"I saw that coming, Adel!" Cerberus crowed, also leaping up in pursuit. To his surprise, however, he did not catch up with her. Despite having jumped a split second later, he started falling first. *"What?!"*

By gathering ki at her foot with Ki Convergence, Adel had boosted her jumping power beyond that of even a canine Divine Beast species known for its quickness of foot.

"Right there!" Adel cracked Salamander's Tail—her spelltool weapon of choice—in Cerberus's direction. With a sharp *snap*, the thin whip of fire stretched and wrapped around his neck. When she cried "Shrink!" the line shrunk rapidly, bringing the two of them together.

Cerberus had intentionally chased Adel into the air because he knew how difficult it was to evade in midair. Unfortunately for him, she had chosen the same strategy. On the ground, Cerberus was near impossible to catch, thanks to his overwhelming agility. By luring him into the air, she had robbed him of all movement and left him defenseless.

“Take this!” Adel used Ki Amplification to send her ki into Salamander’s Tail, bolstering its specs. She had such complete control over it, it felt like a part of her own body. What was originally a spelltool that could only produce thin whips of red fire was pushed far beyond its limits, becoming a double-bladed sword with thick blades of blue flames.

SLASH!

Adel’s swing with Salamander’s Tail landed squarely on Cerberus as the two of them landed within a split second of each other.

“You got me good, but you can’t hurt me with a blade of fire!”

Cerberus was a Divine Beast that controlled the element of fire. He was capable of producing powerful flames from his own body too.

“But a point is a point. Do you concede defeat?”

Entranced by the young girl’s cute smile, the gallery of Saints deployed at Wendill Palace erupted with exclamations of surprise and wonder.

“Oh, my! She defeated her Divine Beast with such ease!”

“What a feat!”

“Hmph. I hate to admit it, but my Saint being such a skilled swordswoman certainly brings me pride. What a complicated emotion it is.”

There was a faint smile at the corner of the Divine Beast’s mouth.

One of the benefits to being a Saint was having a ready sparring partner in their contracted Divine Beasts. As they were never apart, they could train anytime, anywhere. This was especially true of Cerberus, who was extremely powerful and more eager than Adel to improve at fighting. The way the two always challenged each other to greater mastery made them the perfect pair.

“Thanks for the match,” Adel said. “You can rest now.”

“Will do,” Cerberus said, disappearing into her shadow.

Adel then turned to Claire. “Mother Superior, we’re finished.”

Claire was the Mother Superior of Wendill, the person who led all the Saints stationed in the country. Whenever the royal family or the country needed the

services of a Saint, they had to go through her. She was both the kingdom's monitor and its contact to the Church. In general, all Saints and their abilities were managed by the Church, and they were forbidden from holding secular power. This included a ban on being directly employed by any country, but Adel had special permission to be Euphinia's knight escort.

"That...was quite the impressive display. My teacher did tell me what you could do, but seeing it with my own eyes leaves a very different impression. I shall not forget it anytime soon," Claire replied, smoothing over her expression of astonishment.

Adel had to admit, this felt quite satisfying after having to suffer Claire's nagging on all manner of topics, from how she should carry herself as a Saint to things that she ought to know. In addition to all her other duties, Claire was also tasked with being Euphinia's teacher, and therefore was quite demanding in such matters.

"Perhaps you don't actually need a knight escort of your own, Saint Adel!" another Saint gushed.

Saints made contracts with Divine Beasts to use their formidable powers. This meant that Saints themselves did not have to be good fighters. In fact, when they called forth their Divine Beasts and deployed Sanctuaries, they themselves could not cast any spells. As a result, they kept knight escorts close by who would protect them by casting spells with the anima generated from their Sanctuaries. This division of roles was normal for Saints.

Adel, however, could fight without relying on a Divine Beast's anima. Instead, she used ki, which was technically anima that humans generated themselves. The way this worked differed from all other magic in a fundamental way, and summoning Cerberus did not interfere with her ability to fight. Her fighting style was something that she had developed before she took her place at Euphinia's side, back when she had been a young man wearing a full suit of black armor and had been known to all as Swordmaster Adel. Even after she went back in time and turned into a woman, the techniques that she had mastered still stayed with her.

"You really are incredible, Adel!" Euphinia exclaimed, clapping excitedly.

“Thank you, Princess! Your praise honors me!” Adel beamed, then bowed deeply. Euphinia was the only person she would ever accept as her liege, and praise from her was the greatest reward.

Currently, the Saints were conducting a training session led by Claire. The ten or so stationed at Wendill Palace had gotten together with Euphinia and Adel, and were practicing how to sharpen their concentration while their Divine Beasts sparred with each other. It was in this setting that Adel had arranged a demonstration of her Divine Beast fighting—not another Divine Beast, but herself.

Melulu and Mash were also sparring in a corner of the courtyard.

“Mash, did you hear them? Saints don’t need knight escorts anymore. Guess we’re losing our jobs.”

“I mean, I think this is an Adel-only thing.”

“Thank goodness.”

Melulu was using the spelltool Sylphid’s Spear, whereas Mash was using a greatsword from the armory. Every time they clashed, Mash’s blade got chipped, showing the stark difference in quality between the two weapons. Melulu came from the Sedis family, a major merchant group based in another city in Wendill. Naturally, they had the means to supply Melulu with a high-quality spelltool.

“Everyone, it is about time to bring this training session to an end,” Claire called out. “Please return to your various duties.”

Echoes of “Understood, Mother Superior” and “Thank you for the opportunity” rang out as the Saints bowed to each other in a show of appreciation. Their movements were smooth and graceful, giving off an air of class and elegance.

“Oh, they’re done. We should wrap up too.”

“Sounds good. Thanks for the spar, Melulu.”

“Thanks to you too.”

The two put away their weapons and headed to Euphinia, who had been

working on honing her concentration while watching Adel. Next to her stood Pegasus, her Divine Beast.

“Melulu, Mash, you two performed wonderfully as well,” Euphinia smiled, showing her appreciation.

At the same time, Pegasus walked forward and began sniffing Melulu’s neck and cleavage, which glistened with a thin sheen of sweat. On the surface, this appeared to be a heartwarming scene of an animal being affectionate with a cute girl.

“Aha ha, that tickles, Pegasus! And right now, I’m a little sweaty.”

Sticking out his tongue, Pegasus cried, *“Don’t mind if I help myself to a cute girl’s sweat!”*

“DON’T YOU DARE!” Adel cracked Salamander’s Tail, using the whip to firmly muzzle Pegasus’s snout. She yanked on the spelltool as hard as she could, pulling the Divine Beast away from Melulu.

“Mfh! Mmm!”

“A-Adel! You can’t do that to Princess’s Divine Beast!”

“You’re only saying that because you can’t hear him, Melulu.”

Not being a Saint herself, Melulu could not hear the voices of Divine Beasts. If she had understood what Pegasus just said, she would have shrieked in disgust and sent him flying with a punch.

Even Mash was surprised. “Am I imagining it, or is Adel always rather harsh toward Pegasus?” he murmured. Naturally, he did not understand Pegasus either.



“It disgusts me just to explain!” Adel spat. “Donkey! Get back inside Princess’s shadow right this moment!”

“Before that...please strangle me directly! Please hold me between your juicy boobs!”

Adel growled and summoned Cerberus. “How about a nice hot bath of fire instead?”

“I would appreciate it if you didn’t call me for nonsense like this.” Cerberus sighed. *“So, you want me to burn him to death?”*

“Eeeep!” Pegasus yelped in fear, fleeing into Euphinia’s shadow.

“Aha ha ha...” Euphinia laughed awkwardly, unsure of how to react.

“Saint Adel, the Divine Beasts lend us their strength when we call for them because we have made a contract with them; they are *not* subservient to us. I ask that you treat them with respect and decorum,” Claire admonished.

Hearing this, Adel felt a little—no, she felt extremely hurt.

“Mother Superior! I want to talk with you about something! Please come this way!”

She grabbed Claire’s hand and pulled her away to a corner of the courtyard beyond Euphinia’s earshot. She had wanted to ask Claire a question for quite a while now, so she decided to finally do it. This too was for Euphinia’s sake.

“What is the matter, Saint Adel?”

“How is it not obvious?! Mother Superior, why do you suffer that vulgar Divine Beast to stay at Princess Euphinia’s side?! He is clearly a bad influence, no matter how you slice it. I fail to understand how you tolerate it, being Princess’s teacher in manners and class among other things. You can’t be oblivious to the way he speaks and behaves!”

“Ahhh, yes. That. I do understand your concerns, but...”

“Why, then?! Why do you merely stand by and do nothing about it?! We ought to banish him and make arrangements for Princess to contract another Divine Beast right this moment! If needed, I would be more than happy to offer

my own. Come, let's convince Princess together!"

"Princess Euphinia herself does not wish to null her contract with Pegasus. Don't worry, I have already taught her to ignore the outbursts from Pegasus that she does not understand."

"B-But that alone is—"

"It has already been several years since Her Highness contracted with Pegasus. And yet, her demeanor has remained the same. I have concluded that Pegasus's presence does not actually unduly affect Her Highness."

"Of course! Princess's character is as pure and pristine as a mountain stream! However, we can't guarantee that won't change. Are we not being too optimistic in assuming that—"

Suddenly, Adel recalled how Euphinia had been in the previous timeline. With Pegasus as her Divine Beast, she'd gotten embroiled in a fight at the town of Sidel in what was then the fallen kingdom of Wendill...and lost her life. Despite the years spent with Pegasus, she had remained wise and morally upright to the very end. In other words, even though Adel hated to acknowledge it, her worries that Pegasus would be a bad influence on Euphinia were very unlikely to come to pass.

"It will be fine. Let us believe in Her Highness."

"Urgh..."

"In the first place, Pegasi are extremely rare beings. They are held in such holy regard, some even believe they serve as the deities' steeds when they travel between worlds. A Pegasus agreeing to contract with a human is almost a miracle. Even my mentor, Saint Theodora, had never seen another case. Princess Euphinia's ability is thanks in no small part to the Pegasus she has contracted."

"I refuse to accept this! I can't simply overlook that filthy beast's reproachable behavior!"

"I am not saying that you have to overlook it. If you are capable of reforming Pegasus, nothing would make me happier. Unfortunately, he refuses to even speak with the rest of us in Wendill Palace."

As a rule, Pegasus loved only virgin girls. In all likelihood, Claire and the other deployed Saints no longer fit the bill.

“So, you are leaving it to me?”

“It is not an order. If you can do it, then I would greatly appreciate it. That said, I imagine he will leave Her Highness of his own accord several years down the line. This issue will sort itself out.”

“What do you mean?”

“Princess Euphinia is both royalty and a very talented Saint. Her elder brother will likely succeed the throne, which leaves her to marry into one of the Four Powers’ ruling families. Once she does...need I continue?”

It would be Euphinia’s duty to produce offspring, which meant she would naturally lose her virginity. Pegasus would hate this and therefore decide to leave. This was what Claire was insinuating.

Being both a princess of the Middle Kingdom and an incredibly talented Saint, Euphinia was more than qualified to stand beside the prince of any country. Add to that her own irreproachable character and deep wisdom, not to mention her breathtaking beauty, and she would be swamped with suitors in no time.

“Oh, wait! That reminds me!”

Something had just occurred to Adel: in the previous timeline, Euphinia *did* already have a fiancé. And it was someone who Adel knew very well.

“The Mad Emperor, Emperor Tristan. He and Princess...it hasn’t happened yet, right?”

The Torust Empire, one of the Four World Powers, was located northwest of Wendill. It was ruled by an emperor named Tristan, the man who had led the Northern Federation and plunged the entire world into war in the previous timeline. He was one of the key figures who had brought about Wendill’s destruction. It was through killing him—which led to the Northern Federation falling apart—that Adel had ended the Great War.

That very same Tristan had been engaged to Euphinia. Of course, said engagement was voided when war broke out and Wendill was obliterated. In

light of the fact that he had been working with Elciel the War Saint, his name topped the list of people that Adel intended to eliminate now that she had returned to the past.

“Mad...Emperor? By Tristan, are you referring to Imperial Prince Tristan of Torust?”

“Oh, sorry. I was talking to myself. In regards to Pegasus, I understand. I will do my utmost to reform him.”

Based on Claire’s response, Euphinia had yet to become betrothed to Tristan. Based on Euphinia’s current age, there were still four or five years before she would have met Adel. For all she knew, the betrothal might happen sometime soon. If Adel could prevent it from happening, the future would definitely change. The easiest way to set this in stone would be to kill Tristan. With the person who kicked off the Great War dead, perhaps the war itself could also be stopped.

Adel wouldn’t hesitate to take any opportunity to prevent Euphinia’s tragic fate. She swore this to herself once more in her heart.

Claire nodded with satisfaction. “Do as you like. Now, shall we return to our —”

“Saint Claire! Saint Claire! Where are you?!” a knight suddenly called out, barging into the courtyard.

“I am here,” Claire replied, catching his attention. “What is the matter?”

“His Majesty is urgently asking for you! Please see him posthaste!”

“Understood. Has something happened?”

“Yes, ma’am. A Holy Tower on our border with the Torust Empire and the Republic of Malka has fallen, and the territory has reverted to profane land. His Majesty wishes to confer on a response with immediate urgency.”

“Is that true?! Very well, I will head over right away!” Claire’s strict face grew even more taut as she exited the courtyard at a small run.

“Hm, profane land. Looks like they’re going to be busy.”

The main duty of Saints deployed to countries was to maintain the Holy

Towers within the borders of their assigned country. Therefore, it would be up to the Saints and Wendill's knights to deal with the current crisis. And if Claire had her hands full, she would nag Adel less about manners and whatnot. With this faint hope in her heart, Adel realized she was actually a little happy about what had happened.

Out of nowhere, Euphinia popped up. "Adel!"

"Princess! Yes, what can I do for you?"

With a deadly serious face, Euphinia declared, "Adel, we should go too!"



Adel and Claire said in unison, "You must not!" Even their expressions were the same.

"The two of them actually agreed on something! Now that's a rare sight," Melulu chuckled.

"Perhaps they are more similar than they think," Mash nodded.

Adel whirled on the two. "This isn't time for nonsense! You two, help us talk Princess out of this!"

Long story short, Euphinia wanted to accompany the force that would be heading out to deal with the profane land crisis. Profane land was territory not under the blessing of a Holy Tower. Saints had to erect Holy Towers to purify land before people could live on it. In its natural state, the land was a harsh environment filled with miasma that formed monsters. Supposedly, this world was built on top of the corpse of the Evil One. According to legend, Almaz, the goddess who created man and Divine Beast, used the last drop of her strength to cover the corpse with dirt in exchange for the world that had been destroyed in their fight.

This was called the Great Coffin Doctrine. Its veracity aside, profane land certainly did exist, and there was no way to deal with it other than a Saint purifying it with a Holy Tower.

The tower that had broken down this time was Holy Tower VII, the one closest to the border with Torust in the northwest and Malka in the northeast,

leaving the surrounding territory to revert to profane land. In response, a strike force would be formed from the knights and Saints at Wendill Palace.

Claire, who led the Saints, and Belzen, the commander of the knights, were in the middle of working out who to bring when Euphinia suddenly said she wanted to go too. This hardly needed to be said, but the trip was going to be dangerous. Allowing the country's princess to expose herself to such danger for no apparent reason was absolutely out of the question.

If Euphinia had ordered Adel to help out the strike force, she would have obeyed without question. However, she was vehemently against bringing the princess along. This was something that Adel strongly agreed with Claire on.

Melulu timidly raised a hand. "Um, Princess, I hate to say this, but I think I'm on Adel and Saint Claire's side this time..."

"Please understand how important you are," Mash chided. "If anything were to happen to you, the fallout would be incalculable. It is unwise to charge into danger that could be avoided."

The king nodded. "Listen to them, Euphinia. If harm befell you, those around you might have to bear responsibility. Knowing that, do you truly need to do this?"

"Father..."

Adel felt a pang of guilt at seeing Euphinia look so dejected by everyone's reactions. "Princess, I think I understand how you feel."

"Huh?"

"You are worried that Tower VII fell because it was affected by what happened at Central Tower, are you not? That is why you wish to resolve this crisis by your own hand."

A short while ago, when Euphinia had touched Central Tower as part of her initiation ceremony as a Saint, the structure had cracked open, spewing miasma everywhere. Ever since then, she'd been troubled by the thought that she was at fault for the incident. If Tower VII breaking was related to that, then the responsibility was hers. This was why she felt so strongly compelled to accompany the strike force.

“Y-You are right...but I guess I would only cause everyone trouble. I won’t insist.”

“In that case, Princess, please order *me* to take part.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am your loyal servant. I am your hands and feet. Everything that I achieve is what you do through me. As such, please order me to suppress the profane land territory. I will alleviate your worries on your behalf.”

Euphinia fell silent, but the anxiety in her face gradually gave way to her usual gentle smile. “Thank you, Adel.”

Before the time jump, Adel had been blind and therefore unable to see such changes in Euphinia’s expression. The thought that her words and actions had brought a smile to her liege’s face filled Adel’s heart with pride and joy.

“In that case, can you take care of it for me?” Still smiling, Euphinia took Adel’s hand. The soft and warm sensation moved Adel to tears.

“Oh, Princess! You...you honor me far too much!”

This inadvertently made Euphinia worry again, this time for Adel. She peered into the other girl’s face. “Are you okay, Adel?”

“Oh! I-I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be—”

“Your Highness, please allow me to go with Adel,” Mash interrupted, having grown numb to this exchange which happened so often.

“Nooo, that means I’m the only one who has to stay back!” Melulu wailed.

“I mean, if Adel’s going, you already have to stay by Her Highness’s side by default,” Mash pointed out. “And I’m sure the strike force could use all the fighting power it can get.”

Seeing that the discussion was coming to a close, the king declared, “It seems we are decided. Saint Claire and Commander Belzen, gather your forces with immediate urgency. Adel and Mash will accompany—”

Suddenly, a guard rushed into the audience chamber. “Reporting, sire!”

“Hm? Speak.”

“Saint Theodora is right outside, asking for an audience! How should we receive her?!”

“What?! She came here all the way from Alderford?! She must have something of import to discuss. Escort her in right away!”

“Yes, sire!”

The guard turned around and ran off again with nimble steps.

Claire turned to the king. “Your Majesty, this is opportune. If we ask, perhaps my mentor might agree to aid with the matter at hand!”

“Saint Claire, I doubt there is any need for such extremes,” Commander Belzen interrupted. “Despite our cordial relationship, Wendill and the Church are separate entities. I believe we should be careful about asking too much of the Church.”

The Holy Tower Church was the exclusive national religion of not only Wendill, but also the four superpowers that encircled the kingdom. It was clear to all that, when compared, the Church had much higher standing than Wendill did. In light of their already lopsided relationship, the knight commander was of the opinion that putting Wendill further in the Church’s debt was to be avoided if possible.

Adel agreed with not asking Theodora for help, but for a different reason. As someone who had just been appointed to participate in the strike force on Euphinia’s behalf, Adel wanted to erase the source of the princess’s worry with her own hands.

“With my teacher’s help, the process of restoring Tower VII would go much smoother. Does prestige truly outweigh that?” Claire countered.

Just then, an elderly woman with a kindly air walked into the room. She was flanked by a young boy and girl with silver hair tinted sky blue. This was none other than the great Saint Theodora, also known as the Tower Saint. Lute and Myu, the twins who served as her escort knights, were apparently also her grandchildren.

“Thank you for granting me an audience, Your Majesty,” Theodora said, graciously greeting him in the way customary of Saints. Following suit, Lute and

Myu also bowed courteously.

“Eminent Theodora! Wendill welcomes you.”

“My apologies for imposing without advance notice at such a frantic moment. Thank you for always taking good care of my disciple Claire.”

“We are more than grateful for her diligence in educating my daughter.”

“As it so happens, that is exactly who my business today concerns: Princess Euphinia.”

“You don’t say. What can be so important that you made the trip in person?”

“We have also been informed of the destruction of Holy Tower VII in Wendill. I am sure you are urgently gathering a force to deal with it, but I must ask...have they set off yet?”

“I’m afraid we ourselves have only received the news recently. We are discussing our response right now, actually.”

“What a relief. I am not too late.”

“For what?”

“Please allow me to accompany the strike force.”

Claire’s face lit up. “You will come along?! Thank you so much, Teacher!”

“The offer is a welcome one indeed!” the king said, disregarding Belzen’s frown.

“However, I have a condition,” Theodora continued. “Please allow Princess Euphinia and Adel to come with me as well.”

This time, it was Euphinia’s face that lit up. “Eminent! You would take me along too?!”

The princess looked so happy, it made Adel a little—no, quite jealous. She wanted to be the one to make Euphinia smile, but Theodora had made the princess smile the brightest.

Doing her best to hide her emotions, Adel spoke up. “Eminent Theodora, in our discussion, it has already been decided that I will be going and that Princess Euphinia will be staying behind. May I ask for the reason behind your request?”

The king nodded gravely. “As Adel says, we wish to distance Euphinia from danger as much as possible. Do you have a reason?”

“Indeed I do. I wish to use this incident as an opportunity to teach Adel and Princess Euphinia how to restore and erect new Holy Towers. After all, there is no better teaching environment than actual profane land. The two of them possess such overwhelming talent that they are sure to lead a new generation of Saints. I myself am advanced in years, as is evident. While I am still active, I wish to pass on everything I know.”

“Hmm, an Eminent personally teaching Euphinia does sound enticing...”

“You would teach me yourself, Eminent?!” Euphinia exclaimed, her face now practically radiating happiness.

Theodora smiled gently. “I would love to. You two just might be my last students.”

“Gnnnrgh!” Although she wasn’t aware, Adel was pressing her lips together in an expression filled with bitterness.

Mash and Melulu gave her strange looks.

“Why are you biting your lips with such a bitter look, Adel?”

“This is a good thing for you too, isn’t it?”

“I know it is...but still!”

Next to them, Theodora seemed to be having success convincing the king.

“Of course, I will personally ensure Princess Euphinia’s safety. I have also brought forces from Alderford who will cooperate with the subjugation effort.”

“Hmm... You, the Tower Saint, will be directly passing your knowledge on to Euphinia? Do you see that much potential in her?”

“Father, Eminent Theodora’s achievements speak for themselves. Her skills and knowledge simply *have* to be passed down! If the honor is mine, then I would gladly accept it. I’m sure it will prove helpful not only for Wendill, but the world! Please grant me this opportunity!” Euphinia bowed deeply in supplication. At the same time, she also tugged Adel’s sleeve a few times. “Adel, you have to ask him too!”

Seeing the desperation on the princess's face, Adel bowed just as deeply. "Your Majesty, with Eminent Theodora accompanying us, even if something happens, we would be more than equipped to deal with it. Needless to say, I will also give my all. In light of this, I too ask that you give Princess your permission."

If Princess Euphinia wanted this so badly, Adel naturally had no choice but to go along with it.

Chapter 2: The Dullahan in Profane Land

As soon as the roster was decided, the strike force immediately hurried north. Holy Tower VII was the northernmost Holy Tower in Wendill, located close to the border with the Torust Empire in the northwest and the Republic of Malka in the northeast—two of the superpowers that encircled the kingdom. In the worst-case scenario, the area that had been reverted to profane land might actually encroach on foreign territory, making this an international problem. This was another reason why the situation had to be resolved with utmost urgency.

As such, to prioritize mobility, Commander Belzen selected fifty cavalry. Claire stayed behind at Wendill Palace, while Theodora assumed her role in leading Euphinia and Adel. Since Euphinia was coming, Melulu was as well, as there was no point in having any of her knight escorts stay behind. The group's foodstuffs and supplies were being carried by Cerberus and Yeti, the giant covered in snow-white fur contracted with Theodora.

The force was rapidly approaching the Tower VII profane area.

From atop Cerberus's back, Adel asked with concern, "How are you doing? We've been having you go nonstop for the past few days and nights."

"I'm fine. This is nothing more than a good workout. How about you? Keeping a Divine Beast summoned drains you too, doesn't it?"

"I'm fine as well. It's tiring, but not too bad."

Being fatigued after using her powers as a Saint was different from physical exertion, but if she had to describe it somehow, it was akin to continuously going faster than walking but slower than a jog.

From Yeti's shoulder, Theodora called out, "Adel, if you need to rest, don't hesitate to say so. The duration of time that you have kept your Divine Beast summoned already far exceeds what I would expect newly awakened Saints to maintain."

In contrast to what she was saying, Theodora herself looked entirely at ease. She was not showing any sign of fatigue at all, and her Divine Beast was having no trouble keeping pace with Cerberus. Their greater experience was evident.

Although Adel was confident she was the best in the world at using ki, she still had a long way to go in developing her abilities as a Saint. Some might think being able to contract a Cerberus was more than impressive enough, but she was comparing herself to Euphinia and Theodora. She doubted she would ever match the former's Sanctuary range or the latter's endurance.

"Thank you for your concern, Eminent Theodora. I can still go on."

"I'll take your word for it. However, don't push yourself too much. The real job starts when we reach the profane area."

Suddenly, the kindly look on Theodora's face sparked an idea in Adel's mind. Currently, Euphinia and Melulu had gone scouting ahead, riding Pegasus. The only ones riding Cerberus were Adel and Mash, and Theodora was right next to them. This was the perfect opportunity to broach a subject that had been on Adel's mind all this time.

"By the way, Eminent, there is a matter I wish to ask you about in confidence. Do you mind?"

"Of course. Do you want me to join you?"

"Yes, please."

Yeti lifted a hand for Theodora to ride on and carried her to Cerberus's back. In spite of her old age, she walked with sure steps and maintained perfect balance.

"Mash, I'm going to ask her about the Moving Coliseum. This is perfect timing, since Princess and Melulu aren't here."

"Oh, right. I agree, this is a good opportunity."

Just as the two nodded in agreement, Theodora joined them.

"Now, what is it that you wanted to ask?"

"The truth is, Mash and I were imprisoned in the Moving Coliseum of Navarra until quite recently."

“What?!” Theodora’s expression changed abruptly.

“This face of mine is proof more than anything,” Mash said. “I became like this because of the experiments that Cardinal Navarra performed on me.”

“I...see. It’s true that that’s likely the only place where such things are possible...” Theodora looked down, as if she couldn’t bring herself to meet Mash’s eyes.

Adel continued, “We managed to escape, and we are now happily in Princess Euphinia’s employ, so we are fine. However, is Cardinal Navarra truly affiliated with the Holy Tower Church?”

“Just saying, Adel and I both ran into Saint Elciel at the facility, so we know for a fact that she at least was involved in some way.”

“She was?! Ah, so that’s how she was able to absorb the miasma from Central Tower and take it in as her own. She must have implanted monster tissue into her own body with Cardinal Navarra’s help and used it as a medium.”

“I wasn’t able to ask you before, when Princess was around.”

“I understand. There’s no telling how this topic might affect her growing mind. It is a bit too early for her.”

“Eminent Theodora, who is Cardinal Navarra? Why is the Holy Tower Church allowing him to do as he pleases? Do you sanction the existence of the Moving Coliseum?”

“Goodness, no! That said, I understand if you hold me responsible as well. Cardinal Navarra and that facility are directly under the Papal Office. I myself have only been to the Moving Coliseum once, back when I was young. I could somewhat tell what was happening there, but I chose to avert my eyes and occupy myself only with my duties. I am equally as guilty for what you have suffered. I am deeply sorry.”

Theodora bowed deeply, making Adel and Mash quite flustered.

“Eminent Theodora, please raise your head! This is too much!”

“She’s right! We aren’t holding you responsible at all!” A cold chill ran down Adel’s back as the thought of how Claire would react if she saw this scene rose

unbidden in her mind. “So, what is the Papal Office? I’ve never heard of it. Is that a place in Alderford?”

“It’s true that the entrance is in Alderford, but it is actually in a place beyond both the world of man and the world of Divine Beasts. The Papal Office accepts new Eminents, just as Eminents accept new Saints.”

“To think such a thing existed...”

This left Adel wondering what this Papal Office had been doing during the Great War in her time. When Central Tower fell and the Church was thrown into complete chaos, the Saints scattered throughout the world were left to their own devices. Eventually, Mad Emperor Tristan and the Northern Federation took over Alderford. Did they destroy the Papal Office during their invasion? The complete breakdown of the Church’s chain of command at the time seemed to imply so.

“Incidentally,” Mash asked, “would the Church brand us as heretics if we were to destroy the Moving Coliseum?”

This was a very important question. After all, he and Adel had already sunk it into a lake. They very much needed to know whether this would get them into trouble.

“I...don’t know. Personally speaking, though, I would not stop you. If it really becomes a problem, I will back you up to the fullest extent of my authority. If the time ever comes, feel free to use my name.”

Having obtained Theodora’s promise, Adel and Mash exchanged a look, then grinned.

“What is the matter, you two?”

“Well, the truth is...we’ve already kind of damaged it. Right, Adel?”

“To be specific, we cut off a few of its legs, making it lose its balance. Then it stumbled into a lake all by itself and sank to the very bottom.”

“My! You two tricked me!” Theodora’s eyes widened, then she chuckled. “Princess Euphinia has very capable knight escorts, I see. She is blessed with more talent than I have ever witnessed in my long life. Having you two at her

side will be crucial to her cultivating and developing her abilities.”

“Eminent Theodora! I knew you had a good eye for people! Princess has more talent than the ocean has water!” Adel cried, stars figuratively dancing in her eyes. Although she still had reservations about the Holy Tower Church and the Papal Office, she now knew for a fact that Theodora was someone she could trust.

“Ha ha ha. So she does. Even I am envious.”

“I know, right?!”

Shooting a glance at Adel nodding smugly, Mash asked, “Changing subjects, what do you think of Adel, Saint Theodora? Just your personal opinion.”

“Mash, what are you saying? I’m not worthy to even tie Princess’s shoes. To imply otherwise is sheer blasphemy.”

“No, I’m asking about...you know, the thing where you fuse with Cerberus. I wanted to ask what Saint Theodora thinks about it.”

“Don’t call it ‘the thing.’ It’s ‘Ki Possession.’”

“Right, Ki Possession. So, Saint Theodora, how is it? I hope it’s not dangerous.”

“I have no idea, so I cannot say much about it. Neither can I comment on how Adel compares to Princess Euphinia.”

“Ah, too bad. I couldn’t help but ask.”

“So, Eminent, you agree then that Princess’s talent is miles above mine?!”

“Ha ha ha. You are free to think what you like, Adel.”

Suddenly, Mash pointed up. “Oh hey, Adel, Princess is back.”

Pegasus was returning from the direction the force was heading. He was approaching so fast, he just might have been going at full speed. There seemed to be urgent news.

When she got within earshot, Euphinia cried, “Adel! Eminent Theodora!”

“Princess! Did you see something unusual up ahead?!”

“Well...I don’t know if ‘unusual’ is the right word, but we spotted a group of people from Malka at the edge of the profane area!”

Despite Princess Euphinia’s courteous wording, what she was describing was technically a military invasion of Wendill’s borders.



“I’M SO SORRYYYYYY! We were circling around the profane area looking for the best terrain to enter from and didn’t realize we had entered Wendill’s territory! I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorryyyyyyy!”

The woman who headed the force from Malka was prostrating herself before Euphinia and Theodora while crying up a storm. At around twenty years old, she looked quite young to be someone leading such a group. She had a gentle face and long, strikingly lustrous black hair. Many would find it hard to reproach such a pretty woman who was sobbing so hard.

“At the very least, please wait until after we clear out this profane area before you behead meeee! I have to make sure monsters won’t escape and harm the citizens of my countryyy!”



“We won’t do anything of the sort! Please raise your head!”

“Nuh-uh, you should behead her right here and now! She’s a whore with a shitty personality to boot, and you’ll regret leaving her alive!”

“You shut up. Don’t fill Princess’s ears with your filth.”

To prevent a member of the peanut gallery from sidetracking the conversation, Adel tied him up with Salamander’s Tail.

Mash sidled up to her. “Psst. Adel, I’ll be stepping away. Don’t tell that woman about my background.”

“What’s wrong? Does she know you?” Adel asked in an equally low voice.

If the woman knew Mash from before, it stood to reason she would be surprised to see how he had changed. After all, he now had a lion monster’s face. There was no way to tell it was him without hearing his voice.

“You could say that. She...is my sister.”

“What?! You *should* approach her, then!”

“Nah, it’s fine. I don’t want to worry her further. Please let Princess and Melulu know too.”

Without waiting for a reply, Mash pulled his hood over his head and turned to leave. This whole time, his sister continued bowing profusely and crying in an exaggerated manner.

“You... You forgive me?!?! Thank you! Thank you, thank you, thank youuuu!”

“Aha ha...” Euphinia didn’t know how to react.

Seeing this, Commander Belzen spoke up. “Your Highness, we cannot simply let this slide. To do so would set a precedent that anyone could invade us whenever they like.”

“You’re right, but... This isn’t a good time to get into it, right?” Euphinia shot Adel and Melulu a look, as if asking for help. Being only ten years old, she was understandably at a loss for how to deal with such situations.

“How about sending a messenger to the capital to report back?” Adel suggested. “And while we wait for the reply, we can focus on clearing out this

profane area.”

The way she saw it, the best course of action was to shelve the issue for now and leave it up to the king. That would free them up to do what they were actually here to do.

Theodora nodded. “I agree with Adel. Our own mission cannot be delayed for this.”

“R-Right! Commander Belzen, do you find this course of action acceptable?”

“Order received, Your Highness!”

“Thank you, Commander. And you too, Adel.”

The smile on Euphinia’s face was the best reward that Adel could ask for.

She beamed with pride. “I am glad to have been of help!”

Without warning, someone grabbed her in a bear hug. “Thank you thank you thank you!!! I get to keep my head all thanks to youuu!”

It was none other than Mash’s sister, the commander of the Malkan force. Even though Adel’s guard was down, the fact that the woman had managed to catch her suggested that perhaps there was more to her than met the eye.

“Whoa! Please don’t hug me without warning!”

Although the woman might be seeing Adel as nothing more than a young girl, there was no man who wouldn’t be flustered at suddenly being smothered in the chest of a beautiful young woman.

Just like the other day in the bath with Melulu, the fact that the other party could not tell that Adel had the sensibilities of a man made her feel that much guiltier. Since then, Melulu had invited her to the baths again quite a few times, and she was always at a loss for where to look. But she couldn’t turn her down, as she would look really hurt. Adel’s inability to simply cast aside her inhibitions and enjoy her new circumstances was actually turning into a secret source of stress.

“I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry! I suppose if I die during battle in profane land, then dead men tell no tales and all things would work out A-okay! I’ll do my best to die for my country’s sake!”

“What are you saying?!” Adel had no idea how to handle this person either. She wondered if Mash had avoided meeting her because she was a pain to deal with.

“Don’t jinx things! I’ll also do my best, so let’s aim to clear the profane area without anyone dying!”

“Princess Euphiniaaaa! Thank youuuu! Ah, I’m sorry I haven’t introduced myself yet. I’m Angela August, the vice-commander of the Silver Lion Division of the Malkan National Army!”

“August?” Euphinia immediately picked up on the name.

“Is something the matter?” Angela returned Euphinia’s puzzled look with the exact same face.

By all appearances, Angela did not look like a bad person. However, the Republic of Malka had allied with the Torust Empire to form the Northern Federation in the previous timeline. The fact that Adel had seen them as enemies until recently left her inclined to be wary of Angela. She felt bad since Angela was Mash’s sister, but she inwardly decided to keep her guard up.

“Uh, well...”

“Princess, if the matter is resolved, let’s move on and attack the profane area! The situation will grow worse when night falls.”

Upon hearing Adel’s advice, Angela clapped her hands as if she had just remembered something. “Speaking of the profane area, my scouts told me that a force from Torust has already gone inside! I don’t know what the situation is inside, but I also think we should hurry! They might need our help!”

“Torust is here too?!” Euphinia exclaimed.

Adel groaned. “They sure are fast. We were already going as fast as we could.”

The broken Holy Tower was inside Wendill, but forces from both of Wendill’s neighbors had managed to arrive onsite first. This made Wendill look bad.

“In that case, let’s hurry on!” Euphinia cried.

“Yes, Your Highness!” the loyal subjects of Wendill shouted, lowering their

heads in unison.

In a slow and languid voice, Angela announced, “Of course, we, the soldiers of Malka will fight with you! Let’s do our best! Ey, ey, oh!”

The Malkan soldiers looked at each other with confusion, then raised a smattering of “Oh!”s.

Adel was now sure that Mash had slipped away because Angela was a pain to deal with. In any case, the combined force advanced into the profane area.



The joined force continued on toward Tower VII’s profane area. The path was thick with vegetation and led ever deeper into Wendill territory, giving credence to Angela’s claim that her men had been making a detour in search of an entrance.

Tower VII had been set up at the site of an abandoned castle that once belonged to a country destroyed by Torust, way back when the Four World Powers were still establishing themselves. The intent had been to let the castle walls protect the Holy Tower from wind and rain, allowing it to last longer.

At the moment, Euphinia already had a Sanctuary deployed, as there was no telling when monsters might appear. Thanks to this, morale was high among the Malkan soldiers and the knights from the Holy Tower Church brought by Theodora.

“Woow! This is amazing! I’ve never experienced anything like this before!”

“I can’t believe it! This is on a whole other level, in range and all other aspects!”

“It’s my first time fighting in such a Sanctuary! I feel many times stronger than usual!”

Not only did Euphinia’s Sanctuary cover nearly the entire profane area, it even provided almighty anima, which meant all fighters inside were free to use spells of whichever element they preferred. Both properties would elicit surprise on their own, but here, they were present as a package.

Adel’s Sanctuary was much smaller in comparison, being barely enough to

cover this strike force. And, as she was contracted with Cerberus, she could only provide fire anima, which was why Mash and Melulu only had access to fire spells when fighting alongside her in past instances. Her Sanctuary was inferior to Euphinia's in both range and ease of use.

To put things into perspective, however, Adel's ability as a Saint was still so high that an Eminent like Theodora held high expectations for her. Euphinia was just that much more remarkable.

"Ha ha ha, bask in it and be awed!" From Cerberus's back, Adel watched the reactions of those nearby and nodded with deep satisfaction.

Melulu, who was keeping an eye out for monsters from the ground, murmured, "As always, Adel is on cloud nine hearing Princess being praised, even though she never gets happy when receiving compliments herself. She's a true fan all right."

Close to her was Lute and Myu, Theodora's knight escorts.

"I think Saint Adel is plenty impressive too, though," Myu protested.

Lute grinned at his younger sister. "Looks like *you've* become an Adel fan ever since that day."

"Noooo, don't say such weird things in front of Saint Adel!"

"There's no doubt this is a wonderful Sanctuary. Anyone would be impressed by it," Theodora smiled, giving her stamp of approval.

However, in spite of all the praise that she was receiving, Euphinia was feeling so nervous that she had her eyes fixed straight ahead, unable to speak. At the moment, she was riding on Cerberus, not Pegasus. She was sitting in front of Adel, but Adel could tell how tense she was without seeing her face. Despite possessing outstanding talent, at the end of the day, she was still very young. This was her first time on an expedition to clear out profane land, and the duty of a Saint weighed heavily on her shoulders.

"Princess. Princess!" Adel called out to Euphinia in the hope of helping her relax, but she didn't get an answer. Apparently Euphinia was so nervous, she couldn't hear Adel. Feeling like she was overstepping her station but seeing no other choice, Adel tapped her shoulder.

“Ye— *Mmph!*” Euphinia whirled around in a fluster, and inadvertently buried her face in Adel’s ample bosom. “I-I’m so sorry, Adel!”

“N-No, *I’m* sorry for surprising you, Princess.”

“Oh god, yes! Euphinia, switch places with me! I wanna suffocate in Adel’s boobs too!”

“How about you suffocate in the fires of hell?!” Adel wrapped Salamander’s Tail around Pegasus’s neck and slammed him to the ground.

“Aaaaargh!”

The Divine Beast crushed quite a few trees in the fall, causing a din. Even so, this racket was preferable to his indecent comments.

Euphinia laughed weakly. “Aha...ha...”

“He never learns,” Adel sighed. “Anyways, Princess. It is true that all of us here are relying on you, but we don’t expect you to shoulder everything. If anything happens, I’m here for you. It’s okay to relax a little.”

“Thank you, Adel.” Euphinia’s expression softened a little. “Um, can you hold my hand? It calms me a lot.”

“Of course! Excuse me.” Adel gently took Euphinia’s hand. It was shaking a little, but that was proof that she was alive and here. Adel swore once again to protect this liege who she loved so dearly.

Suddenly, a commotion broke out.

“Monsters up ahead!”

“There’s a *lot* of them!”

“It’s fine! With this Sanctuary, we can handle it!”

Angela called out in her usual laid-back tone, “Okay, everybody! Unleash your spells on my signal!”

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Arghhh! You’re hitting me too! It hurts, you freaking numbnuts!”

“Seriously...”

It was true that Pegasus was a high-tier Divine Beast and likely contributed in some part to Euphinia's ability to deploy ultra-wide almighty Sanctuaries. In spite of all this, Adel struggled to understand why someone so vulgar was allowed to stay by Euphinia's side. Even the former slaves who Adel had brought to the palace were better in character.

Claire had said that the arrangement was only temporary, believing that Pegasus would eventually leave of his own accord. Even so, Adel constantly felt a powerful urge to find a replacement Divine Beast for Euphinia and chase Pegasus away. In the previous timeline, Euphinia had had contracts with several other Divine Beasts as well. Adel couldn't wait for them to show up.

In any case, the strike force made steady progress toward the abandoned castle. When they made it through the overgrown woodland path and burst into the clearing, the smell of blood assaulted their noses. At the same time, they heard the sound of furious battle coming from within the castle walls.

Euphinia's face paled. "Adel! Do you hear that?!"

"Yes I do," Adel nodded. "They're fighting!"

The smell of blood in the air meant there were casualties, but the sound of fighting meant the Torustan force had not been wiped out yet. They probably needed all the reinforcements they could get.

"Save meeee!"

"Retreat! Retreeeeat!"

Suddenly, knights in armor bearing the crest of Torust spilled out of the crumbling castle gate. Many were injured, hobbling along and supporting each other.

Melulu, who was positioned at the head of the Wendillian force, approached one of the fleeing men. "What happened in there?! What's the situation?!"

"A-Are you...?!"

"We're a joint force from Wendill and Malka! I believe our goal is the same as yours. We're here to clear this profane area!"

"Thank the heavens! You're here! My brothers-in-arms are still fighting inside,

near the collapsed Holy Tower! Please save them!”

“His Highness! His Highness Prince Tristan is still inside!”

“Whaaaaat?!” Angela exclaimed in an exaggerated fluster. “Prince Tristan is here in persooon?! Oh no, oh no! If it’s known that we were wasting time circling the profane area looking for a way in, we would be blamed for leaving the crown prince of our neighboring country to his death! I’m in for it now! W-Will I get fired?! My head’s going to fly, either socially or physically! Oh no oh no oh no oh no!”

Angela had invaded Wendillian territory while searching for a way in, and in doing so had wasted so much time that Tristan was now in mortal danger. If he actually died, even if she was not held accountable, she would very likely be branded as incompetent forevermore.

“Tristan is in there, you say...” Adel grinned inwardly, secretly celebrating Angela’s blunder.

Tristan was the man who would eventually become Torust’s emperor. In the previous timeline, despite being engaged to Euphinia, he had formed the Northern Federation and set off the Great War, bringing Wendill to ruin. Elciel had been a priority on Adel’s hit list, but so was Tristan, and he was even higher up. In the end, the only way to end the Great War had been to take the head of Tristan, the leader of the enemy forces.

The army led by Tristan had acted in a manner that was nothing short of heinous. They massacred the residents of each and every settlement they seized, and plundered to their hearts’ content. When they left, they made extra care that every inch of it was torched, ensuring that they left nothing but death, ruin, and despair in their wake.

If Tristan’s goal was conquest, it made no sense to destroy the cities and kill the people that were to become his. But the order he gave his armies never changed. Furthermore, he framed the king of Wendill, who was to be his father-in-law, with a made-up crime and publicly executed him, ostentatiously displaying his head for all to see. He did the same not only to royals and nobles from the League of Southern Nations—which was somewhat understandable as they were his enemies—but even an Eminent, someone the masses pinned

their hopes and faith on.

Everyone in the world, regardless of age, gender, and nationality, quaked in fear of Tristan. His incomprehensible actions, which seemed more like that of a demon hellbent on wiping out all of humanity, earned him the nickname “Mad Emperor Tristan.”

After Adel had struck Tristan down, the Northern Federation surrendered right away. Adel took this as proof that the Mad Emperor had been feared by even his own men. The entire continent heaved a sigh of relief upon news of his death.

Now, if the man behind such atrocities was to die before his time fighting monsters today, a huge threat would be removed from Euphinia’s future. Adel couldn’t help wishing that the force from Wendill had gone slower and taken its time. Unfortunately, she had no way of knowing beforehand that Tristan was here.

“Let’s hurry inside the walls!” Euphinia cried.

“Y-Yes, Princess. However, seeing the number of injured being carried out, I’m thinking we should proceed slowly and with caution.”

Even though the command had come from her liege, Adel was extremely reluctant to carry it out. If they took so long that Tristan died, she would celebrate even more than she had when Elciel died. This was an opportunity to take a big step toward ensuring that Euphinia lived a long and happy life in this timeline.

“No, time is of the essence! We have to save those who are still fighting! Pudding, hurry!”

Euphinia was calling Cerberus by his actual name and urging him directly. In spite of her youthfulness, she exuded a regal air that compelled everyone to bow their heads and obey without a second thought.

“Don’t call me by that name!” Cerberus growled. *“So, Adel, is that what you want?”*

“R-Right. Yes, go!”

Adel couldn't go against Euphinia, so she told herself they were only going to take a look. Just taking stock of the situation wouldn't hurt, right?

"Everyone—"

"I'm afraid not, Princess Euphinia!" Angela interrupted. "Look behind us!"

Unbeknownst to everyone, a large group of monsters had appeared from the forest, cutting off their route of escape.

Belzen groaned. "What numbers! Your Highness, we cannot advance into the castle now. We'd be forcing ourselves to fight on two fronts!"

"L-Leave the monsters to us!" Angela suggested. "We'll also take care of the injured. That way, you can focus on restoring the Holy Tower! If you do, the monsters should disappear!"

"Let's take her up on the offer!" Theodora urged. "Remember, we're the only ones who can do anything about the Holy Tower!"

Having been convinced, Euphinia nodded. "Very well, let's do it!"

"Wendillians, CHARGE!" Belzen roared.

"Lute, Myu, stay with me!"

"Yes, Grandmother!"

As soon as Euphinia accepted Angela's idea, Belzen and Theodora quickly barked out orders, and the knights of Wendill surged forward. They charged through the crumbling gateway of the abandoned castle, creating a bit of congestion with the knights of Torust fleeing the battle.

"Grrrr, they're in my way! I'm not waiting around for this. Adel, let's go around!"

Instead of going through the gate, Cerberus apparently intended to climb over the castle wall. It did seem much faster that way.

"Melulu! Mash! Come get on Cerberus's back!"

"Okay! Coming!"

"I'm good whenever!"

Adel figured that with the two of them as support, she and Cerberus could make it without the main force for a while.

“Here goes!”

The nimble Divine Beast easily cleared the walls that loomed before them. When they reached the top, they had a clear view of the situation inside. There was a path leading straight from the castle gate to the main keep that seemed to also reach Holy Tower VII on the other side. The location of the white structure was likely the castle’s main courtyard.

Euphinia pointed. “There’s the Holy Tower!”

“I see it too, Princess! It looks like the top part has crumbled down!”

“We have to fix it quickly! To save everyone who’s fighting!”

“Cerberus, run along the castle wall and circle around to the Holy Tower!”

“Will do!”

Cerberus ran so fast, the wind could be heard whistling by. Unfortunately, such speed made for a bumpy ride. Adel was fine, of course, as were Melulu and Mash, who had undergone proper training. Euphinia, however, had a real risk of falling off, so Adel held her firmly. The two mounds on her chest that she thought unnecessary just happened to be perfectly positioned to serve as protective cushions for the princess’s head. This realization made Adel happy, as she was always happy to be of use to Euphinia in any way she could.

The closer Cerberus got to the Holy Tower, the louder the sound of fighting and the heavier the tension in the air became. However, the very moment the group circled around far enough to see what was going on at the foot of the Holy Tower, there was a deafening explosion that kicked up a thick cloud of smoke and dust. It seemed a portion of the old wall had collapsed from a great force, but it was impossible to see anything.

Besides screaming, shouts calling Tristan’s name could be heard from the courtyard, giving Adel hope that the Mad Emperor had been killed. If so, she would be saved a lot of trouble. The thought itself made her smile a little inside.

“D-Don’t falter! I’m fine!”

Although Adel couldn't see him, she recognized the voice. It was a lot younger than she remembered, though, as he had always been around her own age.

"Don't worry about me! Continue carrying out the wounded! There's no telling how long this gigantic almighty Sanctuary will last! Hurry!"

Currently, the one who would eventually become Mad Emperor Tristan was but a prince who had yet to rise to the throne.

"Tch."

The fact that he was shouting out orders meant he was still alive. Adel clicked her tongue with regret at having arrived too soon, but the next moment, surprise overrode all her other emotions.

"What?! Is that...?!"

The dust and smoke was clearing away, finally giving Adel's group a clear view of the Holy Tower's surroundings. There was a young man with chestnut-colored hair kneeling in front of a collapsed portion of the wall, bleeding from his head and heavily wounded, but this wasn't the source of Adel's surprise. Rather, it was the suit of glistening black armor standing threateningly in front of him. Even though there was no way to tell who was inside, Adel recognized the armor at a glance.

"Is that my armor?!"

It was the spelltool that Adel had worn as Swordmaster Adel in the previous timeline. Having been blind at the time, Adel did not know what it actually looked like, but she could never mistake the aura of power that it emanated. This was the armor that Adel knew and cherished deeply.

Why was this armor here? Who was wearing it? And most importantly, why was it surrounded in thick miasma? The image of Elciel clad in the miasma she had sucked out of Central Tower rose unbidden to Adel's mind.

The armored figure held its sword level and was just about to charge at the wounded prince. Mash and Melulu both shouted in a fluster.

"I-Is that Prince Tristan from Torust?!"

"This isn't good, Princess! That's...!"

“Save him!” Euphinia cried.

Immediately, her two knight escorts leaped off Cerberus’s back and charged forward. A split second later, the black knight did too, likely intending on finishing Tristan off.

“Gah!” Reluctantly accepting the situation, Adel also burst into action. She knew how powerful the armor was. If Mash and Melulu got hurt, it would make Euphinia extremely sad. Adel couldn’t allow it to happen, no matter how badly she wished for Tristan’s death. She had no choice but to make a move.

“Take care of Princess for me!” Adel shouted over her shoulder as she also kicked off Cerberus’s back.

Thanks to having gathered all her ki at her feet, she overtook both Mash and Melulu in a flash. She cracked Salamander’s Tail, making the whip wrap around Tristan, then quickly shrunk it to pull him toward herself. In one fluid motion, she grabbed his body and landed behind the armored figure. Having lost their target, the enemy stopped in their tracks and looked around in confusion.

“Damn, you really are fast, Adel!”

“Whoa, you overtook us!”

Just then, Melulu and Mash landed where Tristan had stood. In terms of position, the two of them and Adel now had the armored figure sandwiched.

Tristan groaned. “I... I’m not dead? Who are you?”

“I’m Adel Astal. A loyal servant to my liege, Princess Euphinia.”

Adel was a bit curt. After all, she saw Tristan as the main culprit who had set off the Great War and the ultimate enemy who needed to die to end said war in the previous timeline. She had no choice but to save him, but she most certainly did not do so willingly.

“Princess...Euphinia? From Wendill?”

“Yes...Your Highness.”

“I see. So you’ve also come to deal with this profane area. Wait! My subordinates! Please save them!”



The sudden concern that the man known as the Mad Emperor showed for his wounded subordinates surprised Adel. Also, based on the situation, she realized that he had been fighting to buy time for his men to retreat.

Adel sighed. "Very well."

"Thank...you."

Tristan lost consciousness with a look of relief on his face. He was bleeding profusely from his head, and there were deep wounds all over his body. There was still a chance that he would die from his injuries. In that case, Adel decided to leave him to someone else and focus on the black knight.

With perfect timing, several Torustan soldiers rushed over.

"Y-Your Highness!"

"I cannot bear seeing him so!"

"He fought just to cover our retreat!"

Keeping her eyes trained on the armored figure, Adel replied, "You guys take care of him. I'll hold off the black knight!" She could not brook the sight of her beloved armor being used to stand in Euphinia's way.

"Thank you!" the soldiers cried, quickly making their exit.

Adel slowly inched toward her enemy. "Who are you? Why are you interfering with our efforts to clear this profane area?"

However, the figure did not answer. Instead, they simply raised their sword.

"Looks like you don't want to answer. In that case, I'll tear that armor off you myself!"

The armor that the figure was wearing was supposed to be hers in the future. Though admittedly, it was a bit large for her at the moment.

Boom!

Before Adel made a move, the armored figure stomped on the ground and lunged at her.

"What?!"

The speed of the approach was greater than Adel expected, indicating that her opponent was rather skilled. By the looks of things, they had overwhelmed Tristan and his force alone. Even though Tristan was still young, he would eventually become someone that even Swordmaster Adel, clad in this very same suit of armor, struggled against. Adel judged her current opponent to be nearly as strong as she had been in the previous timeline.

“But, well, that’s how it should be!”

Whoever it was behind this armor, they had better be skillful enough to make the most of it.

Unfortunately, Adel would likely lose if she tried to clash swords with the black knight head-on. Thanks to Ki Convergence, she had the upper hand when it came to speed. However, the knight had speed, strength, and a pretty good weapon. The current Adel could not fight using brute force the way Swordmaster Adel did. But in exchange, she now could see, which enabled her to accurately read incoming attacks and react accordingly.

Adel lowered her center of gravity and braced herself as the black knight closed in. They swung their sword with such speed, most people wouldn’t be able to see it, but Adel had ki gathered in her eyes. Working out the perfect moment to strike, she shifted all her ki to her spelltool, instantaneously producing blades of blue flame. There was no need for her to match her opponent in speed or strength. All she had to do then was leave Salamander’s Tail in the path of their blade.

“Right there!”

In the instant they clashed, Salamander’s Tail sliced off the black knight’s sword like a hot knife through butter. Instead of exchanging blows, Adel had focused her ki on her blade to bolster its cutting edge, then positioned it at the precise moment when it was too late for her opponent to pull back. This was a feat that Swordmaster Adel would not have been able to achieve.

Despite having lost their sword, the black knight maintained their silence. It was an impressive display of grit, but their composure seemed somewhat unnatural. Regardless, they lost their balance due to their swing flying wide, and dropped to one knee. They could get back up given the opportunity, but Adel

was not so generous.

“Show your face!”

Adel gathered her ki in one hand and used Salamander’s Tail to flick off the black knight’s helmet. She simply had to know the identity of the scoundrel wearing her beloved armor to sabotage the effort to clear the profane area.

Clank!

The helmet hit the ground, revealing...

“What?! It’s empty?!”

There was no face. There was no head, even.

“You chopped off their head?!” Melulu exclaimed in surprise, her face twitching a little.

“I wouldn’t make such a mistake!” Adel protested, backing up warily.

“I-Is it a dullahan?! You know, the headless knight monster!” Mash raised his sword, fully on guard.

“It’s rare, but there are indeed instances of ownerless armor being bound by miasma and turning into monsters!” Theodora confirmed as Yeti burst onto the scene, finally having caught up with Adel’s group. “That’s what dullahans are. The more grudges that seep into the armor, the more likely this phenomenon is.”

Understanding dawned in Mash’s eyes. “Right, and this is a castle that was once overrun! And when the Holy Tower broke down, the miasma that filled this place bound the armor together!”

“I also think that is what happened!” Theodora agreed.

Adel wondered if this was where her armor had been found in the previous timeline. It was true that it looked quite vintage.

“Eminent Theodora, is there no other way to stop the dullahan than to destroy the armor?” Adel asked. Considering how much this armor had helped her past self, she was quite partial to it. If possible, she wanted to avoid destroying it.

Theodora looked up at the Divine Beast who had been merely observing while flying in circles. “Normally, that would be the case. But now, Pegasus is with us!”

“Can he do something about this?!”

“Indeed! Pegasus has the power to purify curses and miasma!”

Adel also looked up, then shouted, “You heard her! Make yourself useful for once!”

“Y-You know I would do anything for you, Adel, but that monster looks like real bad news! I don’t want to get anywhere near it! I’m a pacifist, you know!”

Just as Adel was contemplating forcefully dragging Pegasus down with Salamander’s Tail, Mash yelled, “Adel, watch out!”

Adel whirled around to see the dullahan swinging its sword at her, the blade that she had chopped off having been replaced by a gleaming black blade made of condensed miasma. She leaped back to get out of range, but to her surprise, a wave of condensed miasma shot out with incredible speed. She instinctively rotated her body to evade the attack, but not in time before it made a cut in the front of her clothes, revealing her underwear a little.

“Niiice! That’s good, but I want a bit more! If possible, cut her bra too!”

“Pega! Stop saying weird things and help Adel out already! They need your power, right?”

Even Euphinia felt the urge to reprimand Pegasus.

“Argh, o-okay! But you have to make sure it can’t move first!”

“We’ll take care of it! After that, it’s all yours!” Adel replied. However, she did not fully trust Pegasus, so she still held the option to fully destroy the armor in her mind.

“Adel, behind!” Mash and Melulu shouted in unison.

The flying slash of miasma that had ripped Adel’s clothes was circling back.

“It’s chasing me?!”

Adel leaped to the side, but the dullahan swung its sword, aiming for where

she would land. Realizing what it was doing, she extended Salamander's Tail as a whip and swung it at a protrusion on the crumbled castle wall, pulling herself out of the way. The fact that this spelltool could be used in creative ways made it perfect for Adel, whose fighting style now prioritized flexibility and technique over brute strength.

Theodora called out, "Princess Euphinia! The two of us will repair the Holy Tower! Doing so will dispel all the miasma!"

Hopefully, this would make both the dullahan and the monsters that Angela's force was fighting disappear. At the very least, new monsters would stop manifesting.

"Understood, Eminent!" Euphinia shouted. "Pega, make sure you back Adel up!"

Adel shouted back, "Cerberus, please protect Princess!"

"Will do!"

Without further ado, Euphinia and Theodora, who were respectively still riding Cerberus and Yeti, rushed off toward the ruins of Holy Tower VII. Lute and Myu went with them, leaving Adel, Mash, and Melulu with the task of suppressing the dullahan.

Psh, psh!

The dullahan shot off two flying slashes, resuming the fight.

Psh!

It quickly added a third slash.

Psh, psh, psh!

The dullahan added three *more* slashes, for a total of six. It was as if it could unleash as many as it wanted, with no limit whatsoever.

"Quantity...isn't always everything!" Adel cried, concentrating her ki at her eyes and feet. She rushed at the monster, slipping through the tiny gaps between the flying slashes rapidly closing in on her from both in front and behind. Her movements appeared so perfect and effortless they seemed superhuman.

“So fast!”

“Look at her go!”

As Mash and Melulu looked on with bated breath, Adel closed in on the dullahan. It slashed down in an attempt to cut her down directly with its sword. She dodged the attack with such a paper-thin margin, she saw her own reflection as the blade passed her face. When the monster cut back up, she ducked. It tried to press its attack, but she swiftly circled around behind it with precise footwork. The moment she did so, the dullahan was left face-to-face with six flying slashes closing in.

This was the reason Adel had charged straight in and made it a close quarters fight. She had been drawing the flying slashes back toward the monster and hiding their approach with her own body.

“Have a taste of your own medicine!”

Adel kicked the dullahan’s back with all her ki at her feet. It lost its balance and fell right into the slashes.

Screeeech!

The harsh sound of scraping metal filled the air as the front of the dullahan’s armor was torn up. The monster crumpled to its knees. Unfortunately, there had been no way to end this fight without damaging it to some degree.

“Now!”

Adel swung Salamander’s Tail, tying the monster up with the whip. This was what the spelltool had been designed to do, but the whips of fire glowed blue thanks to Ki Amplification. Without the boost in strength, the dullahan would likely break free with little trouble.

“Mash! Melulu! Give me a hand please! I’m not sure I can pull it back by myself!”

Because all of Adel’s ki was concentrated in Salamander’s Tail at the moment, she only had the arm and leg strength of a normal teenage girl. The monster was struggling against its restraints, trying to pull her off-balance. She couldn’t lower the output of the spelltool, and therefore needed Mash’s and Melulu’s

help.

“You got it!”

“Of course, Adel!”

All three of them pulling together managed to match the dullahan’s strength and hold it down.

“Hey, donkey! Hurry and purify this dullahan! If you don’t, I’ll brand you unworthy of serving Princess and give you the boot!”

“Come on, Adel, there’s no need to be mean,” Melulu chided.

Unfortunately, Melulu could not understand Pegasus’s words. The other day, he had straight up sexually harassed her after training, but she’d only thought he was being affectionate.

Adel shook her head. “You never know. Sometimes, you *have* to go this far to get him to take action.”

“Oh, fiiine. Make sure you hold it down, Adel!” Pegasus landed in front of the dullahan, glaring at the empty space where the helmet had been. *“Hey, you bastard! Now I have to do some stupid shit because of you! You better shake in fear while I fucking kill you!”*

Knowing that the monster couldn’t fight back, Pegasus was threatening it with lines that only third-rate lackeys would use. Adel felt a strong urge to release Salamander’s Tail just to see how Pegasus would react, but she endured.

“Now die, you piece of shit!”

Pegasus stuck out his tongue and gave the armor a big lick.

“Wait, what?!” Adel grimaced instinctively. *Ew!*

“Die, die, die, die, dieeeeeee!”

The Divine Beast continued licking the armor all over as fast as he could. Adel shivered with revulsion at the sight of her beloved armor being defiled. What was she to do if it got smelly or rusted?!

“Uaaaargh! What is he doing?!”

“But wait! Adel, it’s working!”

“Yes, the miasma is thinning!”

Just as Mash pointed out, the miasma surrounding the dullahan was visibly fading. The strength tugging at Salamander’s Tail was also weakening. Theodora had been right on the money.

“Even so, does it have to be *this* disgusting?!”

“I-Is it? Seems pretty normal to me. What do you think, Mash?”

“Um, same here. I’m not sure I’d call it *disgusting*. It *is* impressive, though.”

Because Mash and Melulu couldn’t hear Pegasus’s voice, they pretty much thought of him as an animal. To Adel, however, he was a proper entity with a sense of self. A very vulgar entity with a reprehensible personality, at that. Due to this, she saw things differently from the two of them. She loved the armor, but it was going to need a very thorough cleaning before she would touch it, much less wear it.

In spite of Adel’s reaction, Pegasus’s purifying power proved effective. Eventually, the suit of armor fell apart, hitting the ground with loud clanks. The pieces scattered all over and remained motionless, indicating that the miasma was completely gone and the armor was back to being just armor.

“Hell yes! The miasma’s gone!”

“Well done, Pega! You really are Princess’s Divine Beast!”

Such was the evaluation from those who didn’t know better. The knights in the area also showered Pegasus with shouts of praise.

“What an amazing Divine Beast!”

“As expected of a holy steed!”

“Peh! Making me lick this fucking disgusting crap. My tongue is only for licking cute girls!”

“Aww, what’s the matter, Pega? Your tongue is tickling me! Aha ha. Thank you, you really saved us!” Melulu laughed innocently, hugging Pegasus’s head.

“Tch!”

“Wh-What’s wrong, Adel? Is there another powerful monster nearby?!”

“No, Mash. There isn’t.”

Objectively speaking, Pegasus had played a huge part in this fight. The dullahan had been powerful enough to wipe out half of the Torustan force. If it wasn’t for Pegasus, the number of casualties would have been much higher. In terms of ability, he was indeed a good match for Euphinia. Adel revised her evaluation of him a little, though she hated herself for doing so.

Suddenly, a dazzling pillar of white light shot up into the sky nearby, indicating that Theodora and Euphinia had begun repairing Holy Tower VII.

“Mash, Melulu, we’re back to protecting Princess! There’s no telling what will appear around her!”

“Gotcha!”

“Yes, agreed!”

Adel would be missing out on the opportunity to learn directly from Theodora, but it was enough that Euphinia would receive it. Adel’s group hurried to the courtyard where the Holy Tower was located.

Chapter 3: The City She Can't Forget

Several days later, Adel's group successfully cleared out the profane area and restored Holy Tower VII. The miasma in the area disappeared, but that didn't mean everything was over. Tristan and his force had received significant casualties, some of them being too wounded to return to Torust for treatment. As such, they were allowed to stay for a while in the closest city, Sidel.

It was a city that Adel would never forget; this was where Euphinia had died in the previous timeline. Consequently, Adel had become spurred to take revenge, setting off on a path that had eventually brought an end to the Great War.

Up until her death, Euphinia had been doing everything in her power to guide the Great War to a peaceful end. Adel sometimes wondered what Euphinia would think of the Swordmaster who had been propelled by pure rage to kill Elciel and Tristan and trample their armies. It wasn't as if he'd had the moral high ground; one could say his actions had only helped the League of Southern Nations win. However, he had been drowning in grief and rage. His despair had been so deep that it had informed his every choice.

Swordmaster Adel knew that he had sworn his loyalty to Euphinia, but it was by losing her that he realized what he felt was something much deeper. It was devotion. It was adoration. And without her, his life had no meaning.

Adel now had a second chance to be beside Euphinia again, and it made her happier than anything else. She swore with all her heart that this time, she would ensure that the princess would never come to harm. As a result, the stronger her conviction became, the more this city terrified her. Memories of Euphinia's death kept rising unbidden in her mind. Even though she had been blind, the coldness of Euphinia's lifeless body, the silence...all the details were still far too vivid.

"...Adel. Adel!"

Adel gasped as Euphinia's face, tilted in puzzlement, came into focus in front

of her eyes. “Oh, Princess.”

“What’s the matter? You had a really scary look on your face.”

The force from Torust was currently put up at a rest camp prepared for them in Sidel. Adel was taking a small break after helping carry wounded soldiers to beds.

“I’m sorry, Princess! It’s nothing. What can I do for you?”

Adel did her best to force a smile. Causing this Euphinia trouble by recalling events from the previous timeline was out of the question.

“If you say so... Um, Eminent Theodora is returning to Alderford. I was thinking of seeing her off together.”

“Of course! I’m right behind you.”

And with that, Adel and Euphinia made their way to the entrance of the city. Mash and Melulu weren’t available, but Commander Belzen and Angela, the commander from Malka, were present. Belzen was staying in Sidel to oversee the soldiers guarding the Torustan force. After all, Torust’s precious crown prince had been carried in. Security had to be perfect.

Angela was also being held in Sidel. She had sent her subordinates back to Malka first, but she herself was awaiting Wendill’s official sentencing for leading a military force into Wendill without authorization. However, Euphinia had put in a good word on her behalf, so the penalty probably wouldn’t be too severe.

“This is fine. Thank you so much, Princess Euphinia and Saint Adel.” Theodora smiled at the two of them.

Euphinia plucked the edges of her skirt and curtsied elegantly. “It was an honor learning how to restore a Holy Tower from you, Eminent. You even helped set up the camp. I can’t thank you enough.” Her gesture was so adorable, it healed the heart of everyone who saw it.

“Thank you, Eminent.” Adel did her best at curtsying too.

“Hmm...it still doesn’t look very ladylike,” Euphinia commented.

“M-My apologies.”

Even after having been made an official knight escort, Adel was still frequently admonished by Claire for the way she carried herself. Euphinia and Melulu also tried to remind her when they noticed anything, but whenever Adel let her guard down, she inadvertently reverted to acting and behaving like a man.

In a gentle voice, Euphinia continued, “Stand with your feet together, then cross them a little. Next, hold your hands in front of your stomach... Yes, that’s it.”

“Once again...Eminent Theodora, thank you for everything.”

“That’s perfect. You look beautiful, Adel,” Euphinia said, giving Adel a smile. Suddenly, all the effort learning proper manners felt worth it.

Theodora chuckled at the sight of Euphinia giving Adel instruction. “Saint Adel does have enough valor for a man. I suppose it can’t be helped that it comes through sometimes. Don’t tell Claire I said that, though.”

Next to her, Myu said encouragingly, “The stately way you carry yourself is one of your good points!”

“Ha ha, you love everything about Adel, don’t you?”

“You shush, Lute!”

“Very well, it is about time we set off. Lute, Myu, let’s go. Commander Belzen, Lady Angela, I hope to see you again some time.”

Belzen saluted. “Saint Theodora! Your cooperation has been much appreciated!”

“B-Bye-byeeee!” Angela sobbed. “I... I’ll pray that I live to meet you again another daaaay!”

Euphinia consoled Angela, showing genuine concern. “There’s no need to be so scared! We’ll do our best to consider the extenuating circumstances!”

After seeing Theodora off, the plan was for Euphinia and Adel to head to the house of the largest merchant in Sidel, the Sedis family. This was Melulu’s home, and thanks to her putting in a good word, the Sedis family had swiftly prepared the camp for the Torustan soldiers, supplies and all. There were more than a few lives that had been saved thanks to how quickly they acted.

Naturally, Euphinia had already asked Melulu to pass along her gratitude. However, being conscientious as she was, she wanted to express her thanks again in person. She claimed that with her father and elder brother absent, she had to step up and represent Wendill in a proper way.

Adel had no problem with this. In fact, she thought it was a splendid attitude to have. What *was* a problem was that the Sedis family mansion was close to the city center, which was close to where Euphinia had been killed in the previous timeline. Adel didn't know the exact location where it had happened, as the city had already been reduced to rubble, but she was sure that it was around the city center. It was hard to maintain her composure as the memories flashed through her mind again and again.

"Adel?! What's wrong?! Why're you sweating so much?"

"I-It's nothing, Princess."

"Are you sure? Hold still. Let me see your face."

"Yes, Princess!"

When Adel knelt down, Euphinia produced a handkerchief and gently dabbed Adel's forehead.

"I-I don't deserve this honor!"

Despite Adel's protest, however, the sensation of the clean cloth wiping away the sweat on her face and neck felt good.

"Adel, please tell me if there's something on your mind. I want to be of help to you too."

Euphinia's big eyes looked right into Adel's. There was nothing hidden in those eyes, only pure concern, as if she was an angel sent from heaven. Before those eyes, Adel felt loath to hide anything. However, there *were* secrets she had to keep.

"U-Um, I'm truly fine, Princess. I was just feeling a bit hot. There's no cause for worry."

"I...see."

Euphinia pouted, something she almost never did. She had decided to sulk

about Adel not opening up to her despite the repeated questioning. Adel was filled with a rush of guilt, but her hands were tied.

She stood back up in a fluster. “Come on, Princess. Let’s hurry to Melulu’s house!”

Euphinia stared at Adel with upturned eyes that spoke volumes. After a pause, she backed down. “Very well.”

The guilt within Adel was so overwhelming, tears nearly burst from her eyes. She vehemently apologized to Euphinia in her heart again and again, but it did little to alleviate the crushing pain in her chest.

Eventually, Euphinia and Adel reached the Sedis mansion. They asked the guards outside to inform Wolff Sedis, the head of the family, of their arrival. They didn’t have to wait long before a young man in his twenties rushed out in a fluster and bowed deeply.

“Your Highness Princess Euphinia! Thank you so much for coming in person! I am Dankel Sedis, aide to Master Wolff, the head of the family. It is an honor to make your acquaintance.”

“I am Euphinia Tiel Wendill. The pleasure is all mine.” Euphinia curtsied gracefully, prompting Adel to do the same—successfully, this time. “Excuse me, are you perhaps...Melulu’s brother?”

Having the same last name suggested that he and Melulu were siblings. However, Dankel had brown skin and reddish-brown hair, in stark contrast to Melulu’s features. Their faces looked nothing alike either.

“Yes, I know we don’t look alike. We’re half-siblings.”

“Ah, so that’s what it is. I’m deeply sorry for probing.”

“Think nothing of it. I’ll show you in. This way, please.”

“Thank you very much.”

While following Dankel and Euphinia into the estate, Adel realized that Dankel bore a striking similarity to Melulu in the way he held himself and moved. He had said he was Wolff’s aide, but it was clear he was a well-trained warrior, just like Melulu.

The Sedises were supposedly a merchant family, but was martial training also part of their tradition? Adel had never had any relations with them in the previous timeline, so she had no prior information. What she did know, however, was that Dankel's training was not merely on the level of self-protection. No, he had the skills to fight on an actual battlefield even right this moment. This seemed odd to her.

Perhaps she was just a little on edge because this city reminded her of Euphinia's death.

Or so she thought, until she picked up the faint sound of swords clashing. Using Ki Convergence to enhance her hearing, she could hear young children screaming and shouting. She looked around, but obviously there was nothing going on nearby. Was this what she had heard in Sedis during the attack? Was she so far gone, she was having auditory hallucinations?

Adel shook her head in an effort to clear her mind. She was here today as Euphinia's knight escort, and her duty was to protect the princess. All she had to do was focus on that. Neither Melulu nor Mash were here today, so Euphinia's safety rested squarely on her shoulders. Even though they were on Wendillian soil, there was no telling what might happen.

Euphinia asked, "By the way, what is Melulu doing? It has been a while since she's had the opportunity to come home and see her family. Is she happy?"

The moment Melulu reached Sedis, she had headed for her family home to ask for aid and to take time off to spend with family. Ever since, she had been off duty. Euphinia hadn't seen her for the past few days.

At the same time, Mash had set off for the capital to inform the king about Angela and carry back the king's royal decree in regards to her treatment. He had volunteered himself for the position since Commander Belzen had to stay in Sedis. Adel thought it likely he'd only done so to distance himself from Angela.

"Oh, of course! She's not in at the moment, as she's busy running errands all over town delivering supplies. But yes, both my father and I were delighted to see her again after so long."

"I'm so happy to hear it. She always does so much for me, so I hope she gets

all the rest she needs.”

“Thank you, Your Highness. Melulu is fortunate to have you as her liege.”

The small talk continued as the group entered the main building and walked up to a large parlor on the first floor.

“Come on in. My father is waiting for you.”

Euphinia and Adel followed Dankel in and found a very muscular middle-aged man. There were hints of Melulu’s facial features in his, and he had blond hair. There was no doubt this was Wolff Sedis.

Inadvertently, Adel mumbled, “Impressive...”

She was impressed not by his appearance, but by the fighting prowess that she could read from his body. She could tell at a glance that he was better than Melulu and Dankel. Whereas merchants normally presented themselves as affable in order to get people to lower their guard, Wolff’s presence was so intense that it would instill fear and awe in everyone in the room. In fact, his aura radiated so much strength that Adel could almost see him manipulating his ki—the source of energy coursing within all humans, like how anima did in Divine Beasts. Many famous historical figures were said to have had the ability to use it, but such people were extremely rare in this era.

“Thank you for visiting us, Princess Euphinia. I am Wolff Sedis, head of the Sedis family.”

When Wolff smiled and bowed politely, he finally radiated the air of a merchant. However, Adel was sure this was a mask. He was hiding the warrior side of himself, a side cultivated through a staggering amount of training.

Euphinia greeted Wolff with the same amount of courtesy she had shown Dankel, and Adel followed suit. She got it right this time too.

“Who is this?” Wolff asked, looking at Adel.

“I am Adel Astal, one of Princess Euphinia’s knight escorts.”

“I see. You have a good escort.”

Thanks to his own skill, Wolff had been able to correctly gauge Adel’s fighting prowess as well. Adel did not think much of this. All it meant was that Wolff had

a good eye.

Euphinia smiled. “Indeed. Adel—and Melulu too, of course—are serving me well.”

Both Adel and Wolff were glad to hear such honest praise.

“Thank you for saying so, Your Highness,” he said. “As Melulu’s father, your high evaluation brings me untold pride. I leave her in your care.”

“The honor is all mine. Also, I wanted to thank you very much for your cooperation in setting up the Torustans’ camp. Thanks to you, Prince Tristan and his men are well on the road to recovery. You have my deepest gratitude.”

Euphinia’s deep bow was breathtakingly beautiful and filled with grace. Even though she was still only ten, she had the dignity of someone born to stand over others. This was a characteristic that the slightly older version of Euphinia had also held in equal measure.

“Oh, that was nothing. If the profane area was left to expand unchecked, it would have eventually reached Sedis. It’s only right that we aid those who protected our city. And above all else, it was Melulu’s request. We are more than happy to contribute.”

“Your consideration warms my heart. Now, my sole worry is that my father will scold me for deciding things on my own.”

“Ha ha ha! I believe your worry is for naught. His Majesty would surely praise you instead for your kindness and resourcefulness.”

“I agree!” Adel interjected, nodding with satisfaction. She couldn’t help herself.

Wolff shot her a look, then continued. “Still, Prince Tristan took quite a risk this time. Despite being the sole heir to the throne of Torust, he personally led a force into the profane area, did he not?”

“I did the same, so I suppose that makes two of us, ha ha.”

“Mash, Melulu, and I will always protect you, Princess. We’ll ensure that you are always safe and secure!”

“Thank you, Adel. I am ever grateful.”

“I heard that the Wendillian force saved Prince Tristan when they arrived. It fills my heart with pride to know that my own daughter played an active role in the effort.”

Based on the account that the Torustan soldiers gave afterward, the force led by Tristan was elite, but they had been accompanied by only a few Saints, none of whom were particularly powerful. Furthermore, these Saints had been struck down soon after the start of the fight, leaving the soldiers in grave danger.

The Wendillian force that arrived a little later had powerful Saints in Euphinia, Adel, and Theodora. When they were approaching, Euphinia had deployed her Sanctuary, which was so far-reaching it reached even the Torustan soldiers fighting inside the abandoned castle. This was how they managed to last until Adel’s arrival. All of them were filled with overflowing gratitude.

“I do admit I was surprised to hear Prince Tristan had arrived before us. He went to the trouble of helping resolve an incident in our country and got hurt for it. I feel terrible about it.”

“It was a matter of bad timing. I hear that he was in the middle of reorganizing his force for a different objective when he received word of the collapse of Holy Tower VII. He immediately pivoted to deal with the profane area. That is how he managed to arrive first.”

“What was his original objective?”

“He was launching an expedition to the profane land on the other edges of Torust. We know this because we keep tabs on everything that happens on the Torustan side, what with how close Sidel is to the border.”

“My! An expedition to the frontier!”

In this era, the entire human population was confined to four countries clustered together, with Wendill—which contained Alderford—in the center. The total size of habitable land was roughly two-thirds of what it had been during the Holy Kingdom era. And unfortunately, there was very little effort being put into regaining that heyday. Instead, the Four World Powers spent most of their resources maintaining their own borders and keeping each other in check.

“The main goal was surveying, I hear. Prince Tristan strongly believes that instead of eyeing each other’s land, the Four World Powers ought to cooperate and push the frontier back to where it had been during the Holy Kingdom era. The idea is that if all four nations obtained large swathes of land, there would be no reason for them to fight each other anymore. Let’s just say...he’s quite the idealist.”

If Tristan truly believed this, Wolff was right that he was an idealist. And such a person wouldn’t be able to ignore the pocket of profane land that had popped up nearby. His life now hung in the balance because of his decision to rush over, though. Whether it was the right call or not remained to be seen.

“An idealist, you say? You may be right, but I think it is a wonderful ideal!”

Euphinia’s face was bright and her eyes were sparkling. She greatly respected Saint Melmea, the person who had made her name in history by greatly expanding the borders of the Holy Kingdom when it was first established. It was said that Saint Melmea’s Sanctuaries were massive and filled with almighty anima, which obviously sounded similar to Euphinia’s own. It was only natural that Euphinia empathized with Tristan’s goals.

“What do you think, Adel?!”

“Ha...ha ha. I agree with you, Princess. Wholeheartedly.”

If Euphinia looked up to Saint Melmea as a role model and wanted to follow in her footsteps, then it was not Adel’s place to object. Instead, she would support it with all her heart and happily accompany Euphinia on the journey. This was something that would never change, but Adel did resent Wolff a little for giving the princess unnecessary information that now gave her a good impression of Tristan.

Circumstances had forced Adel to save Tristan in the profane area, but she had yet to dismiss the idea of ending his life now to prevent all the tragedy he would cause in the future. The better Euphinia thought of him, the harder it would be for Adel to pull off this plan.

“When Prince Tristan recovers, I’d love to talk with him!”

Euphinia’s evaluation of Tristan was very high at the moment. Admittedly, his

current character was a far cry from that of the Mad Emperor that Adel knew so well. In the previous timeline, he was a man whose name would forever go down in infamy for being responsible for the Great War. Let alone getting the Four World Powers to cooperate, he had brazenly obliterated the southern countries.

Something was not right. Either something was going to happen that would radically change the way Tristan saw the world, or everything so far was an act.

“In that case, we simply must have Prince Tristan recover. I will send him the best doctors and prepare the most effective medicine in this city.”

“Yes, please! Thank you very much, Lord Wolff!”

“Oh, it’s the least I can do. If you manage to forge a connection with Prince Tristan, the peace of our Middle Kingdom will be assured. And peace is worth more than anything.”

There was no telling whether what Wolff predicted would come to pass, but it was true that the situation was very different from what Adel recalled. If so, she couldn’t afford to be imprisoned by the memories of what had happened in Sidel. Her top priority was to ensure that Princess Euphinia spent this life happy and safe. She would remain vigilant and be prepared to deal with any change in circumstances.

Adel felt that this shift in attitude was in itself enough to merit this trip.

Euphinia continued chatting with Wolff for a little while, then she and Adel made themselves scarce.

After Dankel showed them out, Adel asked, “Princess, how do you feel about dropping by the Torustan camp first? Or would you prefer to head straight back?”

“Neither.” Euphinia shook her head and grabbed Adel’s hand.

“Then...?”

“There’s a place I want to go. Would you come with me?”

Seeing the smile on Euphinia’s face, Adel had no choice but to allow herself to be led off by her beloved liege.



Chomp! Chomp! Chomp, chomp, chomp!

"I very much approve of this! It's just as good as what the castle cooks make. Wa ha ha ha!"

A little under an hour later, Cerberus was digging into a massive pudding with such gusto it looked like he was shoving his nose into the plate. This particular Cerberus that Adel had contracted with was named Pudding, and he was certainly living up to his name. Supposedly, his mother had named him after her own favorite dish from her time being contracted with a Saint and living among humans.

Euphinia had brought Adel to this café and ordered pudding for Cerberus. The café had open terrace seating out front, so even Cerberus could accompany the two despite his large form. However, it made for an extremely conspicuous sight. Everyone passing by stopped and stared, with some even kneeling in prayer to express their gratitude for everything that Divine Beasts did to support modern civilization.

Clearly, Cerberus had taken a liking to the pudding served at this café. He wolfed down the extra large offer in no time at all. That was all well and good, but his vigorous tail wagging tickled Adel's nose.

"Um...would you like me to bring more?" the waitress asked hesitantly.

"Yes! I still have room for more! Keep it coming!"

"Hey, don't get ahead of yourself. This isn't free, you know."

"Oh no, it's fine, Adel. Miss, please bring us one more of the same."

"Right away! It's an honor to see how much the esteemed Divine Beast enjoys our pudding!" The woman hurried into the back of the café with a skip in her step.

"The tea and the cake here are delicious too," Euphinia murmured, taking another bite. The smile on her face was so angelic, it healed the heart of everyone who saw it.

"I cannot agree more, Princess!" Adel naturally smiled back in return.

It was true that the tea and cake was delicious. Adel's order was exactly the same as Euphinia's, so her evaluation was from firsthand experience. She knew the princess loved tea and confectionaries that went well with it, but she wanted to gain a better understanding of the specific details of her preferences.

Swordmaster Adel had developed a taste for tea under Euphinia's influence, but cake was hard to eat for someone who couldn't see, so he didn't like it much. As a result, most of his diet had consisted of foods that he could pick up with his hands. Thanks to becoming a woman, Adel now had a healthy appreciation of cakes and was in complete agreement with Euphinia's impressions.

"Adel, you have cream on your cheek."

"Oh, my apologies."

Due to her previous eating habits, Adel wasn't good with a knife and fork. While Euphinia ate her cake by beautifully cutting off little portions at a time, Adel seemed to be dismantling hers.

"It's fine. Here, hold still." Euphinia gently wiped Adel's cheek.

"I-I am not worthy! Thank you very much, Princess!"

"I fully understand being engrossed in a cake and not noticing. Melulu told me that there was a café with delicious cake in Sidel, so I simply had to come."

"Locals always know the best places to visit."

"Indeed. Oh, speaking of which, where were *you* born, Adel? Was it in Wendill?"

"I'm afraid I don't know where I'm from. I was in an orphanage from as far back as I can remember."

"Oh!" Euphinia's shoulders slumped a little in dejection. "I'm sorry for asking something so sensitive."

"No, it's fine! It doesn't bother me at all! I suppose if I *have* to put a name to where I'm from, it would be the city where that orphanage was."

"Where is that?"

“The capital of the Holy Kingdom of Rakul, in the southwest. My orphanage—its name was Astal Orphanage—was located in a small corner far from the city center. All of us who came from there take ‘Astal’ as our last name.”

“Ah, that’s why your name is Adel Astal.”

“Yes. Though I am a little embarrassed to admit it.”

“There is nothing to be embarrassed about! You are now a talented Saint and a wonderful knight escort, so I think the orphanage would be proud to have had you! You can walk with your head held high.”

“Thank you, Princess! I’ll do just that!”

“So, you’re from Rakul... I’ve never been, but that’s where my mother is from. I do want to visit one day.”

“Oh? The queen consort was a princess from Rakul?”

The Holy Kingdom of Rakul was the oldest of the Four World Powers, as its roots traced back to *the* Holy Kingdom of the Holy Kingdom era. After the country was divided by civil war, Rakul was what was left. Consequently, it held the most authority among the Four. Second in the world, after the Holy Tower Church, of course.

Euphinia’s mother, the late queen consort, was a princess from Rakul who had married into the Wendillian royal family. This was something that Adel had already learned from the previous timeline. Unfortunately, the queen consort had already passed away when Euphinia was young.

“I hope this doesn’t come across as rude, but there is something about you that reminds me of my mother. My father said the same thing.”

“Is there? But I am crude and ill-mannered. I don’t dare compare.”

“Ha ha. You know, my mother was a strong-willed woman too. Perhaps not as gallant as you, but still... Do you think it’s possible you are a distant relative?”

“I’d hardly dare to consider it! A lowly servant like me couldn’t be related to a princess!”

“However, you know how to use ki. And according to the legends, so did the founding king of Rakul, and the current royal family trace their lineage back to

him. Maybe you *are* related to them from somewhere in the past.”

“I-I see. The scale boggles my mind.”

If Euphinia wanted to entertain this theory, then Adel wouldn't deny it. As a result of her love for books and history, Euphinia enjoyed drawing speculations like this. Her ability to explore things deeply and derive various hypotheses showed a high aptitude to be a scholar.

“However, is the ability to use ki hereditary? I am not well-versed in the subject.”

“Hmm... That's a good question. If it can be passed down easily by blood, its existence wouldn't have become contested to the point of being widely considered a myth. How did you learn how to use it?”

“Well...” Adel was hesitant to answer.

After Adel had grown old enough to leave Astal Orphanage, he'd often had no choice but to get involved with unsavory people just to survive. It was due to one such conflict that he had ended up being a gladiator slave in the Moving Coliseum of Navarra.

At the time, he only knew how to act tough; he couldn't actually throw a proper punch. Mash looked out for him and he slowly learned how to fight, but then Mash died, and Adel was subjected to experiments alongside the other gladiator slaves. The experiment conducted on him boosted his natural regenerative powers, proven effective when his wounds from fighting other slaves healed at an incredible pace. However, his eyes were then destroyed in an attempt to test the limit of these regenerative powers. They obviously never recovered, and he never saw the light of day again.

Of course, just because he couldn't see anymore didn't mean he was exempt from fighting the other slaves. He fought desperately, doing his very best to sense the presence of his opponents and to control his own body without being able to see what was going on. And somewhere along the way, he noticed the latent power sleeping within himself. It was ki, the equivalent of anima produced by humans.

It was likely that both Adel's boosted regenerative powers and loss of sight

contributed to his discovery of ki. The former boosted the amount of ki in his body, and the latter forced him to focus on sensing that which he could not see.

At the time, his regeneration was so effective, he could heal a snapped arm in under an hour. However, he suspected that his healing ability was sapping his life span. If he had continued living that way, he would have died sooner rather than later.

Upon returning to the past, Adel realized that he could still sense and use ki, despite having been put into a different body. However, he had lost his boosted regeneration, so he could no longer just charge into fights and take attacks head-on. In exchange, he no longer had to worry about the damaging effects of the ability. Now, he could properly live out his life and, with his own two eyes, ensure that Euphinia got to live out hers in happiness and safety.

Of course, Adel couldn't share any of this with Euphinia.

"I kind of naturally picked it up when training with a teacher. However, my teacher didn't know how to use it."

"I see. So it's not hereditary, but a talent unique to you?"

"Be what it may, my power is solely for serving you." Adel touched Salamander's Tail briefly. "This sword is your sword. Please use me however you see fit."

"That...is quite the responsibility. Your power is one that ought to be used for the sake of this world and its people. Yet you are leaving it up to me to decide where it is directed."

"Um, a-am I being a bother?"

"No, of course not. Mother Superior and the other Saints in the palace always tell me how special you are. I'm just happy to have you as a friend by my side."

"Oh, Princess!"

Euphinia was still Euphinia, even when young. She had a big heart filled with love and acceptance, and Adel could not be more moved.

Suddenly, the sound of a commotion out on the street reached Adel's ears.

"Look, the esteemed Divine Beast is frolicking!"

“What a holy sight!”

“It’s so cuuuute!”

It turned out that Pegasus, who should have been chilling in the sky above, was lying on the ground near Adel’s table. For some unknown reason, he was rolling around as if he was trying to put on a performance for the crowd. This seemed rather odd, as his audience included many men and child-toting mothers, a far cry from the virgin girls he’d prefer to draw. That said, Pegasus’s very existence was eccentric, so Adel wasn’t all that surprised by a little eccentric behavior from him, nor would she pay it any attention.

“Um, Adel...”

“Yes, Princess?”

“You...should probably pay attention to the way you’re sitting.”

“Oh! My apologies!”

Apparently Adel had ended up spreading her legs wide without her noticing. At first, she had made a conscious effort to sit with her legs closed, but some time during the conversation, she had forgotten about it and reverted to the way she sat naturally when she had been a man.

Adel brought her legs back together and sat up, correcting her posture. “How is this?”

“Wonderful. That’s perfect.”

When Adel received Euphinia’s stamp of approval, Pegasus got back up.

“The fuck is wrong with you shits?! I ain’t a damn show! Scatter! You all stink to high heaven!”

Abusive language and threats were par for the course for Pegasus. It wasn’t much of a problem, as only Saints could hear what Divine Beasts were saying. However, Adel finally realized what he had been doing on the ground. Of course. It hadn’t been some cutesy performance. No, he had been trying to look between Adel’s legs from a low angle.

“How about I make *you* scatter?!”

Adel cracked Salamander's Tail, wrapping the whip around the neck of the Divine Beast threatening passersby and slamming him into the ground.

"Aaaargh!"

Adel didn't particularly care about being peeped at, but she couldn't condone Pegasus doing the same to Euphinia or Melulu. And like Claire had said, it was up to her to reform him.

She stepped on the Divine Beast and glared down at him. "What were you doing, hm? Spit it out."

"Oh thank you, I love this angle! Ah, could you raise your leg just a little more? I can't get enough of that line running from your plump ass to your thigh!"

"When will you grow up?!"

"What is that Saint doing?!"

"Sh-She's beating up the Divine Beast!"

"Has she gone mad?! Wh-What should we do?!"

As the onlookers got into a flustered panic, Cerberus stuffed his nose into his second plate of pudding, muttering, *"Gah, what a rowdy Saint and Divine Beast."*

Euphinia smiled wryly. "I-I suppose it's a good thing that they're so lively?"

"Maybe it'd be better if Pegasus and I swapped who we're contracted with..."

"Ha ha ha. But you like Adel, don't you?"

"What I look for in a Saint is fortitude. My goal is to polish my fighting skills during my time among you humans."

"In that case... Um, I'm worried people are going to start looking at Adel weird. Would you mind stopping her?"

"I guess I should." Cerberus went over to where Adel was stomping on Pegasus, and easily picked her up by the scruff of her neck. *"Come on, that's enough. The humans are giving you strange looks."*

"Hm? They are?"

At the same time, Euphinia approached Pegasus and admonished him gently. “Pega, you shouldn’t do things that make Adel angry, okay?”

“Okaaay! I won’t do it again, I swear!”

Pegasus’s reply sounded earnest but was very obviously a lie.

“Princess, it seems we might have attracted too much attention. Shall we head out?”

“Sounds good to me.” After paying the bill and leaving the café, Euphinia held Adel’s hand again. “Let’s go, Adel! The next store is this way!”

“Um, are we not heading back yet? How many places will we be visiting?”

“Ha ha, I don’t know. We’re going to keep going until you feel better!”

“Princess...”

The little mischievous look on Euphinia’s face struck Adel right in the heart. Although it was true that Euphinia wanted to visit these stores, she was also doing so out of concern for Adel. Earlier, she had sensed that something was bothering Adel, but because Adel refused to share what it was, she decided to help her another way.

It was true that Euphinia had a heart of gold, an upright character, and wisdom beyond her years, but she also had a stubborn streak that refused to yield once she had decided on something. When she had saved the past Adel from the Moving Coliseum, she had been so determined that she’d even threatened to cut ties with the Holy Tower Church. She could be quite insistent.

At the moment, she had decided that she would cheer Adel up. And so, she was doing everything she could think of to make it happen. Even though she was young, she was the same at her core. Her feelings were coming through loud and clear. Not being able to tell Euphinia the truth pained Adel, but she was so moved that tears burst from her eyes, obscuring her view.

“This is all I can do for you. Now, shall we go?”

“Waaaaah! Princeeeess! I will follow you wherever you goooo!”

Once again, Euphinia set off while pulling Adel along. They visited a few more beautiful cafés, bookstores with shelves full of books that sparked Euphinia’s

interest, clothing stores, and shops selling cute accessories. By the time they returned to their inn, the sun had set.

“Oh dear, look how late it’s become, Princess.”

“Indeed it has. Tomorrow, let’s visit the camp and see what we can do for th
—”

Suddenly, Euphinia’s legs gave out under her.

“Princess!”

Adel caught Euphinia before she hit the ground. That was when she realized that the princess felt hot to the touch.

“I-I’m sorry, Adel. Thank you.”

“It’s nothing! Um, excuse me...”

Adel hesitantly pressed the back of a hand to Euphinia’s forehead. There was no mistaking it: she was burning up.

“Princess, you have a terrible fever!”

“D-Do I? I’m sorry, I didn’t notice.”

“We must get you inside at once!”

Adel hurriedly carried Euphinia to her room and tucked her in, then rushed out to fetch a doctor. As there were a few posted in the Torustan camp, she didn’t have to waste time searching for one.

“Doctor, what is happening to Princess?! Wh-What should I do?!”

The doctor took one look at the sleeping princess and replied, “There is no need to be so worried. This looks like mere fatigue. I venture to say she has been pushing herself too hard lately. If she rests for a few days and eats properly, she should make a full recovery.”

“Pushing herself too hard?! And here I was, burdening her further with *my* problems! I’m so sorry! I’m so sorry!”

Not only did Euphinia step foot in a profane area for the first time in her life, she had been shouldering the heavy responsibility of restoring a broken Holy Tower. On top of that, she had led the joint Wendill-Malka force, and also

contributed to saving the Torust force. When she reached Sidel, she was even involved with setting up the medical tents for the Torustan soldiers.

The situation had changed drastically again and again, and Euphinia had held herself up through it all, likely filled with anxiety and uncertainty the whole time. Doing so had tired her out more than she realized. And then, she had even taken Adel out to cheer her up.

If only Adel had not made Euphinia worried and let her rest earlier, she might not have fallen ill. When Euphinia held out a hand out of concern, Adel had accepted that hand, at the cost of Euphinia putting herself second. Adel considered this a major failure on her part as a knight escort.

The doctor shushed her. “Don’t raise your voice! You might wake her.”

“M-My apologies.”

“It is up to you to look after her, so you must compose yourself. Calm down, and keep an eye on her. She will be well again in no time. Don’t worry.”

His job done, the doctor left, entrusting Adel with Euphinia’s care. She was determined to not sleep a wink until the princess recovered. She prepared a clean cloth and cold water, and placed it on her forehead. When the cloth was no longer cool, she dipped it again in water and put it back, repeating this many times.



Adel also prepared fruits for when Euphinia woke up. She tried peeling an apple in one piece to test herself, and succeeded without much effort. Adel had never done this before, but apparently handling a knife was now second nature to her in this body.

And so, time passed as Adel devoted herself to caring for Euphinia. Suddenly, the princess's large eyes fluttered open, and she looked up at Adel.

"M-Mother...?"

"Um, I'm Adel, Princess."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Of course you are. I mistook you for her."

"There's no need to apologize. I don't mind."

Adel recalled Euphinia mentioning that she looked like her mother. But were they so similar that Euphinia would mistake her for her mother, even though her mind was foggy with fever?

"Rather, I should be the one to apologize! I'm so sorry I didn't notice you had fallen sick!"

"Please, don't let it bother you. I wanted to go out with you. You always tell me to do whatever I want, don't you?"

"I do, but it is my duty to fully support you in your endeavors. And yet, you fell ill because of me. I have failed you."

"That's not true. I couldn't be more thankful to have you as my knight escort."

The warmth from Euphinia's smile seeped into Adel's heart.

"Princess! At the very least, allow me to do something for you! Whatever it is, please name it! And here, I've prepared fruit for you. Do you want me to peel one for you?!"

"Um...if you're offering, can you do one thing for me?" Euphinia's flushed cheeks turned a little redder as she looked at Adel with upturned eyes.

"I'd do anything!" Adel replied eagerly.

Several hours later, in the deep of night, Euphinia was sleeping peacefully right in front of Adel's face. She was still a little hot, but her breathing was

steady. In contrast, Adel was flustered and filled with a guilty conscience. She had never imagined that there would come a day when she was in bed with Euphinia.

Euphinia's request was for Adel to sleep with her. Of course, Adel couldn't turn down a direct request from her liege. However, she was still a guy in her mind, so she felt like she was committing a crime so severe she deserved the death penalty. No one else would see any problem as she was in the body of a girl, but this was also a grave problem to her. Were things really fine like this?

"Mm... Nn..."

Oblivious to the conflict in Adel's mind, Euphinia rolled over. Apparently Euphinia was the kind who tossed and turned in her sleep. Next thing Adel knew, Euphinia had buried her face in her chest.

"Um, Princess? This is a bit, um..."

Euphinia's breath was tickling her a little, so Adel tried pulling away. However, this made Euphinia hug her even tighter, making it impossible for her to escape. Maybe she was mistaking Adel for a stuffed toy. Did she have a habit of sleeping with stuffed toys? Adel made a mental note to ask later. Right now, her priority was to get out of this situation.

"Mother... So nostalgic..."

"'Mother'?"

Euphinia did not answer, as she was merely sleep talking. It seemed she really did see her mother in Adel. Sure, she was wise, and filled with benevolence and dignity befitting a princess, but she was still only ten years old. She was feeling unwell and weak, so it was only natural that she wanted to seek comfort from her mother. However, her mother had already passed away, and so there was no way to give her what she really wanted. Still, if Adel could manage to provide Euphinia even a fraction of that happiness, then she would happily do so.

Suddenly, Adel having once been a man no longer seemed important. The only thing that mattered to her was being a source of support for Euphinia. It was a bit unexpected that she could be of use in this way as a girl, but she felt like she had gotten closer to Euphinia as she was now than she ever had as her

past self. As one who pledged her loyalty and service to the princess, this made her happy.

Adel renewed her resolve and continued watching over Euphinia, letting her do what she wanted. Eventually, when the sun rose and the birds started chirping outside, the princess's eyes opened and she looked at Adel.

"H-Have I been hugging you throughout the night?! I'm so sorry!"

Adel smiled gently. "There's nothing to apologize for, Princess. Did you have a good night's sleep?"

"I did, all thanks to you. I had a very good dream."

The smile that Euphinia gave Adel in return was angelic and adorable beyond comparison.

Chapter 4: Melulu Sedis

A while before Adel and Euphinia visited the Sedis family home near the center of Sidel, Melulu found herself face-to-face with Wolff Sedis. His sharp aura and intense demeanor had always intimidated her, even to this very day as Princess Euphinia's knight escort. That said, she had come to him of her own accord, so it was up to her to broach the conversation.

"U-Um, father! Thank you for helping Her Highness! She's really thankful, and it appears Prince Tristan is recovering well. Oh, and thank you for also arranging for that suit of armor to be repaired."

Upon closer inspection, the armor of the dullahan that Pegasus had purified turned out to be a prized spelltool powered by an anima crystal. As they were what remained of the lives of Divine Beasts, anima crystals were precious, so it seemed wasteful to simply destroy the armor. Instead, it had been brought back to be repaired. Additionally, Adel had asked that it be thoroughly disinfected and cleaned.

Melulu couldn't understand why Adel seemed to treat Pegasus, a bona fide Divine Beast, with disgust. She thought that his attachment to herself and Euphinia was endearing.

In any case, Melulu bowed deeply to convey her gratitude, but Wolff's reply was curt. Without moving an eyebrow, he asked, "Enough of that. How are things at the palace?"

"I-It's going great! Princess Euphinia accepted me as a knight escort, and she's been wonderful to me. My fellow knight escorts are around my age, and we're getting along—"

Slap!

Before Melulu finished, she was interrupted by the back of Wolff's hand hitting her face. The blow was so strong, it nearly made her stumble and fall to her knees in spite of all her training. She tasted blood in her mouth, but wasn't

surprised. She had gotten used to it, growing up in the Sedis family. In fact, it even made her feel a little nostalgic.



“Don’t waste my time with pointless details. I didn’t send you to the palace to babysit or enjoy tea parties. Do you understand?”

“Y-Yes, father.”

The reason Melulu had been sent to work in the palace was to raise the Sedis family to nobility. The usual way of doing this was by blood—in other words, children.

Wolff’s thirst for power was insatiable. Melulu had always known this. After all, she had been raised as nothing more than a tool to realize his dreams. No, this way of putting it was a little off the mark. She had been trained—not raised—and applied in a way that took full advantage of her being a girl.

“Become one of the king’s concubines, or Prince Yulian’s consort. At the very least, wed into a high-ranking noble family. Use whatever means necessary to seduce someone and birth a child. If anyone gets in your way, erase them. We have the means to cover up minor scandals.”

Yulian was Euphinia’s older brother. If Melulu snared the man lined up to succeed the throne of Wendill, then the Sedis family would effectively become royal blood.

“O-Of course. I’m sorry.”

Melulu hated coming home. Every time she did, she was reminded of her identity and the reason she was at the palace. She was stripped bare and dragged back to harsh reality. The time she spent serving Euphinia was a dream filled with laughter and comfort, but she did not deserve any of it.

Suddenly, someone knocked. In came Dankel, Melulu’s stepbrother.

“Father, Princess Euphinia is at our gates. She wishes to meet and thank you in person.”

“I see. Show her in with the greatest respect. Melulu, you step out. If you have time, feel free to stop by underground.”

“Understood, father. I still have many places to visit to arrange for the supplies, so I’ll first—”

“Yes, go.”

Melulu was purposely leaving the mansion so she wouldn't meet Euphinia and Adel. It wasn't that she had been told not to, but she wasn't sure she could be her usual self with them now. It would just make them worry. Although, what *was* her "usual self" in the first place? The way she was in Sidel, in this family, had been her most common state until she left for the palace. She had never even dreamed that there was a life where she didn't have to live in constant fear of her father, swept along by her circumstances. But if that was what she had been like all along, was the person she was in Euphinia's presence just a facade?

The more Melulu racked her brain, the more confused she became. She decided to stop thinking and instead focus on her tasks.



Underneath the Sedis estate was a massive space that almost exceeded the size of the entire aboveground mansion.

"Yaaaaah!"

"Ahhhhh!"

In this space, children around Euphinia's age were swinging weapons at each other. A certain desperation in the air indicated that this was no mere training. And indeed it was not, as the kids who lost would be denied food. Because the place where they fought and slept was surrounded by an iron fence that prevented escape, winning was the only way to survive. Those who couldn't keep up simply starved to death. And if one died during the fighting, it was their own fault for being weak.

Melulu had been on the inside of this fence, as had Dankel. In fact, all of the children inside were Melulu's half-siblings, born from different mothers. Naturally, many did actually die in this harsh environment, but they were easily replaceable to their father. Wolff maintained relations with many women and bought their babies from them when they gave birth.

Melulu truly had more half-siblings than she could count. On one occasion, she had asked Dankel just how many there were. He told her that they numbered more than a hundred, but less than a tenth of them were ever released to live a life outside.

Dankel turned out particularly capable and had a personality suitable for public exposure, so Wolff had taken him on as his aide. Melulu, being a girl, was sent to the palace to bring in noble blood. A few others were also currently serving in the palace, and there were rumors of some living as mercenaries for hire or in the criminal underworld as assassins. In fact, the Sedis family had a reputation in the underworld for producing excellent fighters.

Melulu didn't know much about what her other half-siblings were doing. What she did know, however, was that all of them had been dispatched with the ultimate purpose of fulfilling Wolff's desire for power. They were tools, raised rigorously and passed through a sieve with the tiniest of holes. Wolff's family was a living example of the saying that lions pushed their newborns off a cliff and only raised those who managed to climb back up.

Melulu stared at the children inside the fence, wondering how many would actually survive and be let out one day. Was there nothing she could do despite knowing their fates? Even if there was, what was the right thing to do? Should she stop Wolff? He wasn't one to listen, and she certainly did not have the strength to stop him through violence.

Wolff's fighting prowess was unprecedented. This was something that Melulu had come to understand more clearly as she herself grew and learned to gauge the strength of others. Even Adel might not survive a duel with him.

Up until recently, Melulu had been convinced that there wasn't a girl in her age range who could best her in a fight. But then Adel had shown up and dashed that presumption to pieces. The world was big indeed. And yet, even Adel was barely Wolff's match.

In spite of how good Wolff was at fighting, his consuming hunger for power had been repeatedly denied in youth because of his lack of pedigree. Each time, his desire became amplified further. Melulu recalled Dankel saying something to that effect.

"Oh hey, Melulu! Did you come to help with the training like father suggested?"

The stepbrother that Melulu happened to be thinking of approached from the other side of the fence. This was far too demanding to be called training, but for

what it was worth, there were a few instructors keeping an eye on things, including Dankel.

“Dankel! Um, no, I’m only popping in for a short while.”

“That so? Hey, you don’t look too good. Is something the matter?”

Despite how deeply involved Dankel was with their father’s business, Melulu did hold a certain amount of affection for him as a brother. At the very least, he seemed a lot more human compared to their father. She didn’t have the right to condemn him; they were equally powerless to stop what was happening.

“N-Nah, I’m fine. But hey, I brought some food. May I give it to the kids?”

Melulu lifted two large baskets filled to the brim with bread and confectionaries. She had brought them knowing how harsh the “training” was here.

Dankel gave her a sad look. “You know that doing this won’t change their circumstances, right? Reckless sympathy will only make it harder for them afterward. Fighting and surviving is their only way out. Just like it was for us.”

He was right, of course. What Melulu was offering was only a very temporary reprieve. And in truth, she was doing it more for her own sake than theirs. Despite knowing this, she still felt like she had to do something.

“I know that, but... I still want to do something for them. Please, Dankel!”

Seeing how vehement Melulu was, Dankel gave in. “A-All right. But just this once, okay? Come on in.” He opened a door in the fence and beckoned her inside.

Melulu didn’t know what face to make, but being gloomy and down certainly wouldn’t help things. So, she did her best to sound cheerful while calling out to the children.

“Hi, guys! It’s okay, you can put down your weapons for a second! I brought food, so take a break and come grab some!”

The children, who had the eyes of beasts desperate to survive, merely looked at her with suspicion.

After a pause, Dankel shouted, “Today is an exception! You can eat this. You

won't be punished afterward."

Some of the wariness in their children's faces gave way to expectation. And yet, none of them jumped at the food like normal children would. They didn't dare to get their hopes up. The promise of no punishment might have been a lie. The so-called training here had subjected them to things much more senseless.

Seeing this, Melulu decided to pass out the food in person. The children still had their guard up, looking at each other to see what they would do.

"Here you go. Go on, eat it. It's fine."

When Melulu got around to a short, scrawny boy, he promptly dug in with gusto. Seeing that, the other kids finally started taking cautious bites.

"Aww, thank you for eating it. How is it? Is it good?" Melulu asked, patting the boy's head.

"Mm." He nodded. "I haven't eaten for days, so..."

"I-I see." Melulu's hand froze at the reminder that gestures like headpats had no place here. "What... What is your name?"

"Trad."

Trad was very thin and significantly smaller than all the others, likely due to malnutrition rather than genetics. Here, losers did not get food. The longer they went without food, the weaker they got, which further lowered their chance to win. Melulu knew full well what lay at the end of the road for kids like Trad. It was obvious that he wouldn't leave here alive.

Those who went easy on their opponents in training would also be whipped or beaten. Knowing this, the kids couldn't hold back. They had to give everything they had to survive.

"Is there...any left?" After finishing off his portion in record time, Trad looked up at Melulu with hungry eyes.

"I'm so sorry, I've already passed everything out. I promise I'll bring more next t—"

Suddenly, another kid stepped in. He was much bigger than Trad, and it was

clear that he was doing much better at picking up the stance of a fighter.

“Here. Eat this.” He gruffly shoved his own portion into Trad’s hands.

Trad’s eyes widened. “Th-Thank you!”

“Hmph. I just don’t want it ’cos it tastes gross.”

As it turned out, these children were not entirely incapable of showing each other sympathy, even though their environment forbade them from doing so. This big kid’s gesture spoke volumes.

Deeply moved, Melulu grabbed the two of them in a bear hug. “Oh jeez, and I went to the trouble of buying it for you!”

“Wh-What’re you doing, lady?!”

“I’m so sorry... I’m sorry this is all I can do. Please...live strong. Hang in there.”

It took Melulu all she had to hold back her tears. If she cried, she would only trouble these kids. When she herself had been inside this place, she didn’t think much of it. Now that she had gone outside, however, it tore at her heart. This facility *had* to be shut down. Her change of heart was probably thanks to encountering Euphinia, Adel, and Mash. She had learned how good a proper, healthy relationship could feel.

Upon returning aboveground with Dankel, Melulu asked, “Dankel, how long do you think this place will go on?”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“I mean, don’t you feel bad for them? At this rate, some of them are probably going to, you know...”

“It’s a harsh environment, for sure. But the only way for powerless people like us to rise up is to seize it with overwhelming strength. That’s what this facility emulates. It teaches the harshness of reality.”

“That might be true, but... Do the kids really want this? Is this really the right thing to do?”

“Whether something is right or not depends on the result, Melulu. You and I made it through. For better or for worse, we actually made it through. Then

isn't it up to us to produce enough results to justify the deaths of our siblings who didn't? Otherwise, they would have died for nothing."

Dankel's eyes were downcast as he answered Melulu. He understood what she was getting at, but to stop what he was doing would be to deny the reason for his own existence. He couldn't stop, and he couldn't turn back.

Dankel was a kind boy at heart. He and Melulu had shared some time together in the underground facility. During that time, he had let Melulu win against him, and shared some of his food with her when she was going hungry. The rule that those who did so would be punished had been established because of what Dankel did. If Dankel hadn't been around, there was a chance that Melulu might not be standing here today.

"Dankel..."

Unable to say anything more, Melulu also looked down despondently. It seemed that, at the end of the day, the only thing she could do was quickly seduce someone with high status in Wendill and fully satisfy Wolff's ambition. If she managed to actually join the royal bloodline, there would be nowhere higher to climb to, and Wolff might finally lose interest in his children. Then, if Melulu asked him to put an end to the child-rearing facility, he just might acquiesce. Dankel would accept this outcome too. And so, it was on her to fulfill her role well. There was no escaping from the fate of being a Sedis.

Both Euphinia and Adel had treated Melulu really well. The time she spent with them was like heaven compared to her time in the facility. When she was with them, she felt happy and at peace. Even so, fear and unease washed over her every once in a while. She told herself it was due to the discrimination she faced in the palace for being a commoner, but that wasn't quite right.

After returning to the facility after all this time and seeing the same unchanging view from her past, Melulu finally realized that it was guilt and resentment toward herself. Despite knowing what was going on back home at the Sedis estate, she was living a happy and comfortable life, thoroughly enjoying her position as Euphinia's knight escort. Until she resolved this inner conflict, she could never truly become Euphinia's knight escort. She could never become a person worthy of that position. She could never become someone

like Adel, who only ever looked at Euphinia and dedicated all of herself in service.

Adel was powerful, both as a fighter and as a Saint. If she wanted to, she could easily become famous as a Saint and obtain authority on par with kings and queens. Yet she seemed fully content staying by Euphinia's side, as if that was the only thing she ever wanted. When Euphinia smiled at her, she was moved. When Euphinia scolded her, she actually became despondent. She was innocent and endearing, like a puppy.

Melulu told herself that once this incident was over and she was back in the palace, she would get serious about fulfilling Wolff's order. Unfortunately, she didn't know much about how to seduce men. Perhaps asking Adel would be a start, though her hopes in that were slim. In any case, this was the only way she could eventually stand shoulder to shoulder with Euphinia and Adel without being ashamed of herself.

As Melulu hardened her resolve, she ran around town, securing the supplies needed by the Torustan camp. She visited the children underground every day, bringing more and more food each time. Knowing that doing this gave Melulu peace of mind, Dankel let her do as she pleased.

Everything at the camp was going well. Melulu also received confirmation that the dullahan armor could be repaired. Luckily, its anima crystal did not get damaged during the fight.

This was how Melulu spent her days back in her hometown.



Late at night, two days later, Melulu was in the courtyard at home, looking up at the stars. She had just visited the underground facility and was having trouble sleeping. And as always, the faint sound of a woman's moans filled the air.

Wolff summoned women to his estate on a frequent basis to further add to his already absurd number of children. Melulu had learned to ignore the noise, but something suddenly caught her attention. Her father and the woman were talking, likely after having done the deed, and she thought she recognized the woman's voice.

Melulu sneaked closer to the room, her curiosity piqued.

“They say the Sedis family is known for its many children. I suppose practice really does make perfect,” the woman giggled seductively.

“If you get pregnant, I’ll give you a good price for the child.”

“Ooooh, what should I do? I would be throwing my child into a harsh life of uncertainty where they have to fight to survive each day, right? Wouldn’t that make me a terrible mother?”

This laid-back voice teasing Wolff in a mischievous tone belonged to none other than Angela, the commander from the Republic of Malka.

“Hmph. Pity.”

“Oh, but they would be the child of the king of a brand new country. Wouldn’t that mean a life of luxury and indulgence?”

“If you keep your word, that is.”

“But of course. In exchange for helping us assassinate Prince Tristan, when Malka annexes Torust, we’ll carve out a part and give it to you as a present. I might not act like it, but I’m a part of the August family, so you can believe me. We’re going to be reeeeeeally close going forward. After all, that’s why I’m here testing our physical compatibility too, right?”

“Being king of my own country has always been my biggest dream. You have my gratitude.”

“We just need to play our own parts. Don’t worry, I even have a secret weapon. Everything will go smoothly.”

Melulu couldn’t believe what she had just heard. Tristan, the crown prince of Torust, was going to be assassinated? And her father would be playing a part? And if the plot went well, her family would be establishing a new kingdom in land seized from Torust?

What would happen to Wendill and Princess Euphinia? Would Euphinia be blamed for failing to protect Tristan? In the worst-case scenario, she might even be forced to take responsibility.

This was unacceptable. Melulu was Wolff’s tool; this was something that she

fully accepted. Even so, she could not cause trouble for the kind and sweet princess who, despite being younger, had a heart big enough to embrace Melulu herself.

Melulu's only option was to stop Wolff and Angela here and now. The idea of opposing her father was terrifying, and she might lose her life in this fight, but she simply could not let them do as they pleased.

Melulu stood up. She summoned Sylphid's Spear, clutching it in a tight grip.

Chapter 5: The Attack on the Crown Prince (Part 1)

Several days after Euphinia fell ill, a visitor—her very first since being confined to her bed—came knocking at her door early in the morning. She was still sleeping, so Adel, who had woken up a short while ago, slipped out quietly to avoid waking her.

“What is your business?”

To her surprise, the visitor screamed the moment he saw her. “Ahhhhh!”

“Shh! Princess is sleeping. Keep your voice down!”

“I-I’m sorry!” the young man apologized, looking very guilty. Adel recognized him, but for some reason, he was very flustered and his face was worryingly crimson.

“Prince Tristan, what brings you here this morning?” Adel asked again.

The visitor was Crown Prince Tristan of Torust. Last Adel heard, he was bedridden due to his wounds. Apparently he had recovered enough to be up and moving about.

“U-U-Um, it’s, well, I, uh...”

“Saint Adel,” interrupted Belzen, who was standing behind Tristan and also looking a little uncomfortable, “please get dressed first. The conversation can wait.”

“Hm?”

Only when it was pointed out did Adel realized that she was only wearing her underwear. She had just woken up, so it couldn’t be helped.

“Ah, my apologies. Give me a moment,” Adel said, ducking back inside the room.



As Tristan stared at the door in a daze, Belzen bowed his head in apology.

“As a fellow knight of Wendill, please allow me to apologize on her behalf.”

“A-Aha ha, it’s f-fine... Nothing fazes her, it seems.”

Despite having been seen in her underwear, Adel did not seem flustered in the slightest. For Tristan, however, Adel’s white, lustrous skin and alluring curves left such a lasting impression he was not going to forget the sight for quite a while.

“I’m sure it’s because of how singularly dedicated she is to protecting her liege,” Tristan murmured. “That’s why she’s able to deal with everything so calmly. She was the very picture of radiance when saving me in profane land.”

“I’m...not sure I’d put it that way. Indeed, my men and I acknowledge her strength, but I feel like everything else is just because she lacked a proper upbringing.”

Click.

Just after Belzen’s comment, the door opened and Adel reappeared, fully clothed. She frowned at the looks the two men gave her.

“What?” she asked.

“U-Uh, it’s nothing, Saint Adel.”

“I-Indeed! What Prince Tristan said.”

Adel studied the guests for a brief moment, her guard still up. “If you say so. So, business?”

Tristan bowed gracefully. “As you see, I have pulled through, thanks to your and Princess Euphinia’s efforts. Now, I am able to move about somewhat. I know dropping by without advance notice is ill-mannered, but I wanted to express my gratitude in person.”

The prince had pleasant features, an affable demeanor, and spoke courteously. He emanated the dignity of a royal, just as Euphinia did. If Adel didn’t know what he would become in the future, she just might have had a favorable impression of him.

“Her Highness is still resting. If you want, I can pass on a message.”

“Saint Adel, Crown Prince Tristan is visiting in person. Courtesy dictates that you wake Princess Euphinia and—”

“She is feeling unwell. She must not be disturbed.”

In the previous timeline, Euphinia and Tristan had been engaged. When the Great War had broken out and this relationship was dissolved, it caused Euphinia no small amount of distress. Adel feared that allowing the two to meet would trigger a series of events that would eventually lead to talk of engagement. After all, Tristan now felt indebted to Euphinia for saving his life. The surest way to prevent the past from being repeated was to nip it in the bud at the very start.

Tristan backed down. “I understand. Please convey my well wishes to Princess Euphinia. It would not be appropriate to talk here, where we might wake her up. Would you mind stepping out with me?”

After a pause, Adel replied, “Very well.” She didn’t want to leave Euphinia’s side, but if she woke up halfway through the conversation, the princess and Tristan would meet. Physically putting distance between the two was in her best interest. “Allow me to first find someone here at the inn who would take care of Princess.”

“And I will stand guard,” Belzen offered. “Feel free to take all the time you need.”

“That would be a great help, but...”

Of course, Euphinia’s safety was always top priority. And since Adel was stepping away, she was thankful that Belzen would take her place. However, it was a little odd for Belzen to offer to do so of his own accord. Sidel was firmly within Wendill borders and not the site of any conflict. The knight commander himself standing guard seemed somewhat excessive.

Noticing the doubt in Adel’s face, Belzen beckoned her a little distance away. “May I have a word, Saint Adel?”

Adel joined him. “What is it, Commander?”

“Keep this to yourself, but the situation in Sidel is different than in the capital.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Sedises, a merchant family, hold a lot of sway in this city. The family head, Wolff Sedis, might be harboring a grudge against the royal family. We have to take precautions where we can.”

“Wolff?! Why, what happened?”

“Wolff used to serve as a knight at the palace during the reign of the previous king.”

“Go on.”

“From what I hear, he was an extremely skilled fighter. None of the other knights were his match. He could even fight Divine Beasts on equal footing. And he did all that without the help of Sanctuaries or spells. He claimed that he was using ki.”

“You don’t say...”

When Adel first laid eyes on Wolff, she did get the feeling that he was a formidable warrior. The way he carried himself even gave her the impression that he knew how to use ki, but it was a surprise to learn he actually did. He very likely still possessed the ability.

“If he was so capable, why did he quit?”

“He was strong, but was ostracized for being a commoner...and for his insatiable ambition. He was framed and ousted for a crime he did not commit. Of course, this was all before my time, but that’s what I heard from those who had been in the knight order at the time. Wolff’s anger was so intense, many of them still fear his revenge to this day.”

“And now those in the palace are treating Melulu the same way. Have they learned nothing?”

“For what it’s worth, Melulu’s treatment is not by my order. In any case, be on your guard while in Sidel.”

“What do the other knights think of me? I know I stick out even more.”

“You’re a knight, but at the same time, you’re also an officially initiated Saint. No one dares cast doubt on a Saint. In fact, your presence gives me peace of

mind. The fact that I'm telling you all this is the biggest proof."

The entire world's livelihood depended on Saints, Divine Beasts, and Holy Towers. As a result, Saints were held in very high regard; some of them held statuses above even kings and queens. As such, their pedigree did not factor into their social status. All Saints, no matter their birth, were unconditionally treated with respect. There was no doubt that Adel being one affected her relationships with those around her.

"Well, thanks for the warning. In that case, I'll leave Cerberus with you. I hope you two get along."

A massive beast with red and black fur appeared from Adel's shadow.

"Whoa!" Belzen backed up a step, taken by surprise.

"It looks so majestic!" Tristan breathed. "This is a Cerberus, is it not?"

"Indeed. I'm leaving him here as a guard. Cerberus, stay here and protect Princess. I must step away for a while."

"You got it. Few would have the nerve to try anything around me." Cerberus sat down and made himself comfortable. *"If you're heading to town, bring me something back to make this worth my time."*

"What, did you want more pudding, Pudding?"

"What's that about pudding?" Belzen asked, confused.

"This Cerberus's name is Pudding. His mother named him."

"Aha ha ha! What a cute name for such a fierce-looking beast!"

"DON'T CALL ME BY THAT NAMEEEEE!"

"Heavens!" Tristan exclaimed, then quickly gathered himself and bowed respectfully. "It seems I have angered you, esteemed Divine Beast. I offer my sincere apologies."

"Anyways, I'll remember to bring back a souvenir," Adel promised. "Take care of things here."

"Hmph. Go."

"I-It won't bite me, right? ...Adel?"

Belzen's plaintive question rang out down the hall, but there was no longer anyone there to answer him.



After leaving Belzen and Cerberus in charge, Adel and Tristan headed outside. They decided to go to the first café that Euphinia had introduced, as it was nearby. Adel had yet to have breakfast, as she had only just woken up. So the two ordered the recommended: bread, soup, and slices of white fish meat. The dish, which was apparently called meunière, also came with a vegetable salad.

“Urgh...”

The fish was supposed to be eaten with a fork and knife, but Adel was struggling. She wished she had ordered something she could eat with her hands instead of awkwardly dissecting her dish.

Without saying anything, Tristan sliced open his bread and put the meat from his fish in between. Surprise entered Adel's face when she noticed what he was doing, but he merely smiled back. It was as if he was trying to teach her a different way of eating her dish without causing her embarrassment. He was quite the considerate young man.

When both of them were done eating, Tristan straightened his back and bowed deeply. “Once again, I offer my deepest apologies for all the trouble that I caused you and your country. And, I wholeheartedly thank you for saving my life.”

“I will make sure to convey your words to Princess Euphinia.”

“Thank you. However, Saint Adel, you were the one who actually saved me. My memory is hazy, but I remember watching you fight. It impressed me greatly. My men may have been present as well, but I am wholly convinced that if you hadn't been there, stopping that monster might have been impossible. You are my true lifesaver. Thank you.”

“I-I am honored. However, I heard that Princess's Sanctuary reached you and your troops first. Princess deserves the lion's share of the credit.”

“Indeed, that Sanctuary was simply astounding. It was so massive, we couldn't tell where it was coming from. What's more, its property was almighty,

and it was very powerful. It felt like we were being saved by Saint Melmea from the history books. Despite being younger than me, Princess Euphinia possesses so much more talent than I do.”

“I believe that comparing the strengths of a Saint against a knight or warrior achieves little. It is only when the two work together in tandem that they can truly shine.”

“You’re right, of course. That is very true. However, I’m aware that I myself still have a long way to go. This incident has shown me how inexperienced I am.”

“Inexperience is not necessarily something to lament. That dullahan was extremely powerful, yet you held it at bay long enough for your subordinates to retreat. I can tell how much you have dedicated yourself to your training to pull off such a feat.”

Tristan beamed at the compliment. “Y-You can tell?! Thank you! Hearing that from you gives me a lot of confidence!”

“That said, fighting such an enemy alone was reckless. You musn’t forget your own station.”

Tristan deflated at the chastisement, looking like a puppy that had been scolded. “Y-You’re right. I wasn’t thinking. I need to do better.”

“Speaking on a personal level, though, I was impressed with how you put yourself on the line for the sake of your men.”

Tristan beamed again. “Th-Thank you very much!”

The prince’s reactions seemed so candid that Adel found herself liking him a little. Was this really the same person who would go on to become the Mad Emperor? There was a certain charm to him, a human side, different from Euphinia’s. Adel was getting a warm, fuzzy feeling somewhere deep inside her chest.



“My biggest mistake, of course, was charging into the profane land with only my own forces. I was so desperate to achieve something, I was getting tunnel vision. I was also overestimating my own ability. I should have taken the time to properly scout the area out and wait to enter with you and your force.”

Tristan’s claim that he was desperate to achieve something seemed odd to Adel. That was talk for someone who had a ladder to climb, but he was already the crown prince of Torust. He had already been promised the throne.

“Why were you so desperate? The crown will fall into your lap even if you do nothing.”

Tristan sat up straight, conviction gleaming in his eyes. “I’m trying to get people to look outward.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ever since the Holy Kingdom fell and was split up, the countries of the world have been focused on seizing land and riches from each other. As a result, our world has been steadily shrinking. Did you know this?”

“Yes. The border of our world is smaller than it was during the age of the Holy Kingdom.”

“And yet, we still fight among ourselves. The Four World Powers are always watching each other like hawks, poised to pounce on any sign of weakness. I will be inheriting the throne, yes, but what everyone expects of me is to expand our borders by carving out land from other countries.”

“Is that not what countries do? The Four World Powers, especially.”

“Well, I want no part of it. If we need more territory, there’s plenty of it in profane land! But when I say that, people warn me that doing so would open us up for invasion from other countries. It saddens me to say this, but a lot of people think this way in Torust.”

“I see...”

“To change their minds, I need to reclaim that territory myself and prove that my dream *can* be realized.”

“That’s why you were in such a rush?”

“Basically, yes. My personal circumstances also happened to be somewhat aligned at the time.”

“Are you talking about your expedition to the frontier?”

“You know about it? I’m glad word has spread this far. I want as many people as possible to know what I’m trying to do.”

“Why did you decide to call off the expedition and come here instead?”

“Calling it off wasn’t my decision. Saint Elciel, the War Saint, was supposed to come with us on the expedition.”

“What?! Elciel was?!”

It wasn’t all that strange for a member of royalty to work with an Eminent. Saint Theodora accompanying Princess Euphinia to Holy Tower VII was, in effect, the same thing. However, the pairing of the War Saint with the Mad Emperor held a very different connotation for Adel. Both had played pivotal roles in kicking off the Great War in the past timeline.

“Indeed. Saint Elciel agreed with my views and promised to do everything in her power to aid me. It was thanks to her vocal support that I managed to prepare everything for the expedition. However, on the day we were to set off, she never showed. Then, the other day, I learned that she had been executed by the Holy Tower Church for insurrection.” Tristan leaned in, his expression turning grim. “I suspect there are those within the Holy Tower Church who don’t think fondly of what I’m trying to achieve.”

Adel shook her head firmly. “That, I can refute. Elciel tried to kill Princess Euphinia and Saint Theodora. I was there in person and witnessed it all.”

“Is that true?! How... But it’s clear you’re not lying. In that case, why would Saint Elciel do such a thing?”

The shock on Tristan’s face threw Adel into confusion. Elciel’s character had been exactly the same as it had been in the previous timeline. And yet, Tristan’s was so different, as if he was a completely different person. What was going on? Could it be that something in the future would turn him into the Mad Emperor? Would it happen on this expedition that he was to go with Elciel on? Had killing Elciel altered Tristan’s path in a significant way?

If so, it might be wise to wait and see a little longer. Killing Tristan inside Wendill would put both Adel and Euphinia in a precarious position. Thankfully, Tristan was being completely frank with Adel for some strange reason, and he believed everything she was saying without question. It might be possible to glean more clues from him.

“She apparently went insane. There’s no way to tell what she was thinking. Even Saint Theodora has no idea.”

“I see... What a pity.”

“Going back to my earlier question, why did you decide to lead the expedition force into Wendill?”

“Due to Saint Elciel’s absence, my opponents were able to put a hold on my expedition. However, I had worked really hard negotiating with the emperor and senior officials, and I finally had an elite force specifically equipped for profane land expeditions. I was loath to give up. And that was when I received news of the manifestation of profane land at the Wendillian border. I saw it as an opportunity and leaped at it. How that turned out, you already know.”

“I see. That’s why you were in such a hurry.”

The reasoning behind Tristan’s decision made sense. In the first place, if Euphinia’s theory was correct that Holy Tower VII breaking down truly was due to what had happened at Alderford, then this was an incident that had never happened in the previous timeline. The fact that Tristan ended up going to Holy Tower VII was indisputable proof that his life had been changed.

Adel felt satisfied with the answers she was getting, but there was one last thing that bothered her. “But then...”

“Yes, Saint Adel?”

“Oh, uh, sorry. It’s nothing.”

“Um...would you be interested in talking a little more? We can go for a walk together.”

“I suppose so.”

The two finished their meal and headed toward a nearby waterfront plaza.

They proceeded down the river, listening to the soothing murmur of the stream and feeling the paved, well-maintained path under their feet. A tunnel loomed up ahead, a dim passage underneath a large bridge with carriages busily going to and fro.

Adel maintained a position diagonally behind Tristan and acknowledged his chattering with random noises every now and then as her mind raced. What had bothered her earlier was the presence of the dullahan armor. That was undoubtedly the suit of armor that she had worn practically every day in the previous timeline. She had received it from Euphinia, which meant it must have been in Euphinia's possession. And yet, circumstances implied that the armor had been hidden in the abandoned castle in this timeline. It was only discovered because Holy Tower VII broke down. Put another way, if the incident never happened, Euphinia would never have come into possession of it.

"It doesn't add up..."

Assuming that Holy Tower VII never broke down in the previous timeline, how did Euphinia get her hands on the armor? Unfortunately, Euphinia had never mentioned any specific details, and Adel had never probed. This left only two possibilities.

One, Adel was mistaken. Holy Tower VII *did* break down in the previous timeline, and that was where Euphinia found the armor. But if that was the case, there had been no reason for Euphinia to be vague when recounting what happened. There was no reason for it to be a memory to avoid.

Two, the armor wasn't originally hidden in the abandoned castle, and it came into Euphinia's possession through entirely different means. If so, why was it at the castle this time? Did someone place it there intentionally?

Perhaps there was more to this incident than Holy Tower VII breaking down and being restored. At the very least, the armor needed a closer inspection. Adel wanted to ask Wolff directly, but what Belzen had told her gave her pause. She felt bad about doubting Melulu, but it might be wise to be careful.

"Um...Saint Adel?"

"Uh, yes, Your Highness?"

“A-Am I boring you? I’m sorry, I don’t know what sort of topics I should bring up for casual conversation with a girl.”

Adel looked at the prince with surprise. “Girl? Me?”

“Wh-What do you... You’re every inch a b-b-beautiful girl,” he replied, his face red.

Only when it was pointed out did Adel recall she was now a girl. It would still take quite a while for her sense of self to adapt. It wasn’t that she hated it or that it bothered her, but she did have a tendency to forget the fact when her mind was focused on other matters.

“Ah, well... More importantly, did the dullahan’s armor seem familiar to you?”

The two entered the tunnel under the bridge, their field of view dimming.

“I’m sorry? No, not at all. Was it not discarded in that castle and animated by miasma when the territory reverted into profane land? In that case—”

“It was indeed animated by the miasma, there’s no doubting that. What I’m wondering is, what if the armor was not originally in that castle?”

“Are you saying...?! If so...”

Tristan had nearly lost his life in the assault. There was no way that he was the one who set up the armor. And needless to say, Adel’s group wasn’t responsible either. That left only one party present at the scene who couldn’t be accounted for.

“I think we need to seize the armor and examine it closely,” Tristan said, leaving the shadow of the bridge and squinting a little as his eyes adjusted to the sunlight. “Depending on what we find...”

Adel agreed, also squinting. “We might need to have a serious talk with— No, scratch that. We’re having that talk *now*!”

“What?!”

“Excuse me!” Adel tackled Tristan, pushing him to the ground.

Thud!

Something zoomed right past where Tristan had been standing and stuck into

the ground.

“S-S-S-Saint Adel?! I-I’m not mentally prepared for—!”

With his face buried under Adel’s generous chest, Tristan was extremely flustered.

“Our assailant won’t wait for you to mentally prepare yourself!”

“Wh-What? Assailant?!”

“We’re under attack! Get up!”

The spear that had nearly taken Tristan’s life dislodged itself and flew across the river, straight to the roof of a tall building with red walls.

Tristan gasped. “That’s the armor! So it really had been planted in the profane area as an attempt on my life! Saint Adel, let’s secure it!”

“Yes, Your Highness!”

Adel took a step forward, but then hesitated. The moment she left the bridge’s shadow and sensed bloodthirst, she had used Ki Convergence to spy the figure clad in black full-body armor on the roof. What gave her pause was the weapon. The only spear she knew of that could return to the user’s hand after being thrown was Sylphid’s Spear. If the armored figure on the roof was Melulu and she was seized here, she would undoubtedly be charged with the crime of attempted assassination of the crown prince of Torust. She could very well be sentenced to death.

“Is there a problem, Saint Adel?!”

“N-No, it’s nothing. Let’s go!”

Adel’s concern notwithstanding, letting the assailant escape was not an option. In the first place, there was no knowing for sure if it was Melulu. Even if it was, capturing her now would prevent her from committing more crimes. And if it wasn’t her, that meant someone had stolen Sylphid’s Spear, and Melulu could instead be in danger.

“Your Highness, hang on tight!”

Adel had to bring Tristan along, as leaving him alone might leave him

vulnerable to another assailant. She grabbed him, then wrapped Salamander's Tail around a tree on the opposite bank. When she shrunk the whip again, the two of them shot through the air, crossing the river in the blink of an eye. Right after, she brought them up to the chimney of a building next to the one occupied by the armored assailant. Unfortunately, that roof did not have anything that could serve as an anchor for Salamander's Tail.

"We're leaping the gap, Your Highness!"

"Noted— Whoa!"

Adel gathered all her ki in one foot and leaped the street separating the two buildings in one go.

"Wh-What incredible physical prowess! You're incredible, Saint Adel!" Tristan exclaimed.

Adel directed her attention to the armored figure. This was not profane land, so there was no miasma here. It was very unlikely that this was the dullahan again. In other words, someone had to be wearing it.

"Name yourself! Why do you possess that spear, and why did you attack Prince Tristan?!"

"Were you sent by Malka?!" Tristan added.

Apparently Tristan had arrived at the same conclusion. Adel knew that the force from Malka had arrived earlier than the one from Wendill, but not by how much. Considering the circumstances, they might have had time to plant the armor inside the abandoned castle. The fact that Tristan was being attacked once again gave credibility to the theory that his life was being targeted. And all suspicion fell on Angela, the commander of the Malkan force.

In any case, Adel's first order of business was arresting the armored figure. She used Ki Amplification to turn Salamander's Tail into a weapon with double blades of blue fire, then held it up warily.

Without hesitation, the assailant threw Sylphid's Spear at Adel. Based on what had just happened, she knew that the weapon packed enough power to bury itself into stone pavement even after crossing a river; this was lethal at close proximity. Thankfully, though, Adel's eyes could easily track it thanks to Ki

Convergence.

“Not today!”

Adel parried Sylphid’s Spear with Salamander’s Tail. She knew the spear would be returning to its user’s hand, but the brief window when it did so was more than enough for her to close the distance. Right after the clash, she gathered ki at her feet and lunged forward.

However, the assailant had already turned tail and run.

“What?! You’re not fighting?!”

The assailant was surprisingly fast. In fact, they were just as fast as Adel was when her ki was split between Salamander’s Tail and her feet. They leaped to other buildings in quick succession, beating a hasty retreat. Adel couldn’t immediately give chase, as she couldn’t leave Tristan behind.

“What speed! And without using anima!”

“It’s the effect of the armor! Your Highness, let’s go after them! Give me your hand!”

The suit of armor was enchanted with two effects: night vision and weight reduction. In fact, its wearer would barely feel its weight at all. In addition, the wearer themselves seemed extremely skilled. Adel could not understand how they were moving so fast and jumping so high without the use of ki or anima. She wondered if there was something else at play here, as she did not recall the armor’s buff being so powerful.

“I’m sorry, Saint Adel! If only I had anima, I wouldn’t be troubling you like this!”

“Don’t worry about it!”

Adel and Tristan gave chase, with Adel using Salamander’s Tail to bring them from roof to roof when necessary.

“Do you think it’s luring us somewhere?!” Tristan asked.

“Very likely so!” Adel replied.

The fact that the assailant had immediately started running after throwing

Sylphid's Spear indicated they had no intention to stop and fight in the first place.

"If so, we're heading right into an ambush!"

"Do you mind if we keep going, Your Highness?!"

If it really was Melulu in the armor, Adel could not leave her be. At the moment, the attempt on Tristan's life could be considered a failure. If Melulu returned to whoever had given her the order, she might be killed as punishment. Adel never learned how Melulu had lost her life in the previous timeline; all she knew was that Melulu had no longer been around, Euphinia had owned the suit of armor, and she didn't like to talk about how she had obtained it. When Adel considered the possibility that it was Melulu wearing it right now, she couldn't help but draw lines connecting these dots. Maybe Euphinia had failed to save Melulu under similar circumstances, then kept the armor as a keepsake.

If so, this was a crucial crossroad. History had taught Adel that if she took one wrong step here, things could go very wrong. She couldn't let her guard down for even a second. Even if there was an ambush up ahead, she needed to take Melulu into protection with immediate urgency.

Adding to her earlier question, Adel shouted, "I promise I'll protect you!"

"Yes, let's go! Don't worry, I can protect myself! Even without anima, I have my spelltool!" Tristan tightened his grip on the sword at his waist. It was different from the one that Mad Emperor Tristan used, but it was a spelltool nonetheless.

If Cerberus had been in Adel's shadow, she could have used him to deploy a Sanctuary. Unfortunately, she had left him behind to guard Euphinia. She tried calling out to him in her mind, but there was no response. Perhaps they were too far apart. In any case, all she had to rely on was Tristan's spelltool and his skill with it.

"Thank you, Your Highness! We'll keep going, then!"

As the two continued hopping from roof to roof, they found themselves being led to the outskirts of the city. The buildings grew increasingly sparse, until they

became too far apart to jump between. The assailant shifted to running on the ground, stopping and turning around only when they reached what looked like an old cemetery. There was almost no one around, which Adel appreciated. This was a much more appropriate location to fight in than the middle of town.

“All right, we accepted your invitation!” Adel shouted. “Show us what you’ve got!”

Immediately, the ground started shaking.

“Saint Adel, there’s something under us!”

A fountain of dirt shot into the sky as a massive figure burst up.

“I-Is that a Divine Beast?!”

It turned out to be a two-headed snake with mouths large enough to swallow human beings in one bite. Its scales glinted with a metallic sheen, hinting at how hard they were. The beast growled as its two heads glared down at its two targets.

“Yes, it’s a Divine Beast, and a very powerful one at that. It’s a Yurlunggur, also known as a Double-Headed Copper Serpent.”

“So there’s a Saint working with our enemy?! But I don’t feel a Sanctuary!”

“Me neither. Something’s not right.”

When a Saint summoned a Divine Beast, a Sanctuary would be deployed. This was an area filled with anima of the Divine Beast’s element. Spellcasters could use that anima to cast spells, but it was possible for the Saint to only allow her allies to tap into that anima. Even so, the opposing side should be able to sense the presence of the Sanctuary. Adel had experienced this when fighting Elciel; she could tell Elciel had a Sanctuary deployed, she just couldn’t use the anima.

In contrast, Adel couldn’t sense a Sanctuary at the moment, even though a Divine Beast was staring her in the face.

“It’s as if this is a wild Divine Beast not contracted to anyone!”

Despite that, Yurlunggur was clearly glaring at Adel and Tristan with hostility. There was no doubt there was human intention here. However, there was no Saint nearby giving it instructions.

“What is going on?!”

“It’s coming, Saint Adel!”

The giant copper snake’s head shot toward Adel with far greater speed than its size suggested, jaw wide open. In the blink of an eye, the head that had been looking down from on high was right before her eyes.

“Not a problem!”

Adel was hardly going to stand around and let herself get caught by a straightforward attack that only had speed going for it. She leaped into the air, letting the head shoot by below, and landed on the snake’s body. She then started running up the body, stabbing Salamander’s Tail’s blade into the snake to secure her foothold.

“In fact, I must thank it for coming to me of its own accord!”

Shaaa!

The snake’s other head rushed at Adel from the side with its teeth bared, trying to crush her in its jaws. She was impressed that it could follow her movements, but she had no problem dodging the attack. She even decided to take advantage of it to leap onto the other head.

However, the Divine Beast wasn’t going to fall for the same trick twice. The instant Adel landed on its body, the snake turned its head down and shook her off, sending her flying through the air.

“Ugh! Not yet!”

Adel turned Salamander’s Tail into a whip and wrapped it around Yurlunggur’s body. Just as she was about to pull herself back onto the snake’s body, however, she noticed Sylphid’s Spear zooming her way.

“Tch!”

Giving up her attempt to return to her perch, Adel parried the spear with Salamander’s Tail as a blade. Now in freefall, she was a sitting duck. Tristan chose that moment to charge at the assailant, who was now barehanded.

“I never back down from a fight!” he shouted, brandishing a blade the color of night. His sword was as beautiful as his form when he swung in attack, but the

assailant calmly leaped back out of his range.

“You’re not getting away!”

Tristan’s decision to give chase would have been a good idea if his opponent was still barehanded. Unfortunately, when they were jumping back, Sylphid’s Spear had already returned to their hand. The moment they landed, they were already prepared to meet his attacks. By jumping, not only did they get out of a tight spot, they also managed to retrieve Sylphid’s Spear that much quicker and instigate Tristan into overreaching.

Clang!

“Ughhh!”

The two fighters’ weapons clashed, but it was Tristan’s sword that was being pushed back. Although the two weapons were still locked together, Tristan was gradually made to bend backward. Unfortunately, his wounds had yet to fully heal, and he was fighting without access to anima. His opponent was under the same disadvantage, but for some reason, they were displaying physical prowess nearly on par with Adel’s despite being unable to use Ki Amplification.

When facing a superior opponent, a common strategy was to use footwork to make it hard for them to use their full strength. However, the armored figure was doing a good job making Tristan overreach when he shouldn’t.

The moment Adel landed, she gathered all her ki at her feet and rushed toward Tristan. At the same time, the armored figure doubled their attack, forcing Tristan down to one knee.

“Your Highness!”

The situation was dire; Tristan wouldn’t be able to dodge the next attack, and Adel was one step too far away. Just as the realization sent a chill down her back, the prince stabbed his sword into the ground. His figure disappeared into the shadows, and a moment later, he reappeared right next to a tombstone close to Adel.

“Are you all right, Your Highness?!”

“It was a close call, but I’m fine. Aside from not being able to fight at my best,

that is.”

“Was that your spelltool’s power just now?”

“This is Skadigard. As you saw, it enables me to travel through shadows.”

It sounded like a rather unique and effective ability. Adel could see how useful it would be for getting out of a tough situation. This explained why Tristan had the confidence to fight aggressively.

Spelltools specialized for fighting defensively were perfect for VIPs. Sadly, because Skadigard’s ability could only affect Tristan, it had been of no use at all when he was covering his men’s retreat. The fact that he wore this sword meant he was aware of his own position. However, back at Holy Tower VII, his body had probably moved before he had time to think.

“You don’t need to worry about me, Saint Adel. You can focus on attacking!”

Thanks to Skadigard, Tristan had the ability to keep himself safe. However, even though Adel was now free to focus on attacking, she still had a problem. As Yurlunggur closed in on her again, she caught brief glimpses of where she had stabbed it with her sword earlier; thanks to the tough metallic scales covering the snake, all she had managed to do was leave black scorch marks that didn’t reach its skin.

That was all she could do when splitting her ki between Salamander’s Tail and her feet, and it clearly wasn’t enough. She could unleash a much more powerful attack, but that would require staying motionless and concentrating for a while. Tristan might be able to stay alive for that long if left alone, but protecting a defenseless Adel at the same time was definitely beyond him. Things would be different if Cerberus or Mash were present, but wishful thinking wasn’t going to help anyone here.

Adel wracked her brain. *What can I do? How can I buy enough time to gather my ki?*

SHAAAAA!

Once again, Adel found Yurlunggur’s large maw rushing at her. She noticed that the inside looked relatively soft.

“I got it!”

Adel used the same strategy as last time to get onto the snake’s back. An idea had just popped up in her mind, and there was no time to hesitate. She needed to carry it out right away.

“Prince Tristan! I’ll be taking you up on your offer!”

While shouting, Adel ran up Yurlunggur’s body, waiting for the other head to attack her again. This time, when it closed in, she didn’t evade it. Instead, she used Ki Convergence to kick off with all her strength, leaping straight into the wide-open mouth. If she went in slowly, the Divine Beast would have crushed her with its teeth. She had to dive down its throat and get swallowed whole before it could do so. Yurlunggur’s stomach was a safe place where she would be able to stay still and gather her ki.

“Saint Adel?!”

Tristan cried out Adel’s name in alarm, but she was already out of earshot. He could feel the blood rising to his head. When Adel had saved him in profane land, she was a shining star. She had looked so beautiful and radiant that he found himself strongly wanting to protect her himself, to become powerful enough to protect her. It was the first time he’d felt such a thing.

“How dare you?!”

Just as Tristan was about to lose himself to the anger raging in his heart, he recalled Adel’s words. She had likely been referring to his suggestion for her to focus on attacking. And, if he saw right, she had leaped into the Divine Beast’s mouth of her own accord. Perhaps she had a plan.

“Yes, there’s no way she would be defeated so easily!”

It was clear that Adel was a much better fighter than himself; he couldn’t even imagine how she had gotten so powerful. Her words implied that she chose to believe his claim that he could protect himself even without her around. What he had to do was place his faith in her abilities, and live up to her trust.

Yurlunggur’s two heads closed in on Tristan to swallow him too, while Sylphid’s Spear threaded the gap between them, targeting his head. Thankfully,

there were plenty of tombstones and barren trees all around. Tristan stayed on the move using Skadigard's shadow-walking, praying for Adel all the while.

Unfortunately, his opponents wised up. The armored figure continued chasing him, but Yurlunggur started knocking over the tombstones and trees in the vicinity. Clearly, the intention was to corner Tristan by destroying the points that he could shadow-walk to.

"Ugh! They caught on!"

Tristan did not have the strength to stop Yurlunggur. Its scales were so tough that even Adel's blade of fire could only scorch their surface. At the same time, the armored figure was not letting up their attack. Their strikes were fierce and sharp, but Tristan could tell they were markedly different from the dullahan's attacks. These were the movements of a flesh-and-blood human, not a monster without a body. And every time his sword and his opponent's spear clashed, he could clearly hear the sound of breathing from behind the black helmet.

"I knew it, this is different from last time! Name yourself!"

Instead of answering, the figure continued brandishing their spear. Tristan could not parry so many attacks at once in his current state. He promptly activated Skadigard, jumping to the shadow of a nearby tree. His field of view went dark for a split second, then suddenly changed again as Yurlunggur's gaping maw filled his vision.

"What?!"

Tristan instantly understood that the snake had purposely left this one tree intact to lure him there. Divine Beasts weren't mindless animals; they had at least enough intelligence to carry out conversations with Saints. However, they were normally too proud to use such sneaky tactics when fighting a weak and pathetic human. It seemed more and more likely that a human was controlling this Yurlunggur.

"Curses!"

There were no more valid targets for shadow-walking within Tristan's view. Just as despair shot through his body, his view distorted again. Not due to Skadigard this time, but because his body was suddenly traveling sideways at an

incredible speed. Something had lifted him up and carried him out of the path of Yurlunggur's maw in a split second. The snake's head crashed into the ground in vain, causing a loud *boom* and raising a cloud of dust.

"Wh-What was— You're Saint Adel's Cerberus!"

The being who had intervened in the nick of time and saved Tristan was none other than the Cerberus contracted with Adel; it had picked him up by his neck and carried him as if he was a kitten. It then threw him onto its back with a swift shake of its head.

"I see! You rushed over when sensing that your Saint is in danger! Thank you for saving my life!"

According to Tristan's understanding, Cerberus understood human words. He himself had no idea what Cerberus was saying when it growled in response, though.

A young girl's voice rang out from up high. "Prince Tristan! Are you unhurt?!"

"Princess Euphinia! You came too!"

The princess of Wendill was up in the sky, riding a white horse with wings.

"What happened to Adel?! Was she not with you?!"

"She's inside Yurlunggur's stomach!"

Even while Tristan was talking, the armored figure kept up their assault. Cerberus was deftly evading Yurlunggur's lunges and spitting fire to keep it at bay, which was extremely helpful, but the abrupt movements were making it very hard for Tristan to speak. He wanted to properly explain the situation to Euphinia, but he couldn't.

"That can't be!" Euphinia wailed, very shaken by what little Tristan had managed to say.

"B-But I'm sure she's fine!" Tristan added.

"Adel! Can you hear me?! Adeeel!" Euphinia called out, her voice ringing out through the darkening cemetery.

"I'm here, Princeeeeeeess!"

Fwooooosh!

Abruptly, a massive pillar of bright blue fire burst out from Yurlunggur's stomach, rushing to the sky. Right after that, countless slashes cut open the Divine Beast from the inside. Its large form and tough scales that had proved to be so formidable in battle were no longer doing any good. With a loud shriek, the great beast crashed to the ground.

Adel leaped out of the corpse with a bright grin. "Princess, I'm here!"

Yurlunggur's stomach had been the best place for her to safely gather her ki for a big attack. As the saying went, no guts, no glory. The beast's large body turned out to be its own bane and Adel's boon. When inside its stomach, Adel had gathered enough ki to turn Salamander's Tail into a giant pillar of fire. She had then ripped a hole in the Divine Beast's body from within, thereby creating an exit for herself.

"Thank the heavens! Are you hurt, Adel?!"

"I'm safe and sound, as you see! Thank you for rushing over out of concern for me, Princess!"

Objectively speaking, Euphinia had made the wrong call. Rushing over when Adel was in a dangerous situation was putting the cart before the horse. But it was only human nature to act irrationally.

"Normally, I should rebuke you for coming here, but I am overjoyed at your show of concern! I am moved beyond words!"

Euphinia averted her gaze from the sight of Adel wiping tears from her eyes. "Uh, that's..."

"Just smile and nod," Cerberus chuckled. *"There's no reason to rain on her parade."*

"Aha ha...ha..."

"B-Before anything else, Saint Adel...um, here you go."

Tristan took off his coat and threw it in Adel's direction while doing his best not to look at her. She caught it, but looked confused about what she was supposed to do with it.

“Your, uh, appearance. You might want to cover up.”

Adel looked down at herself and realized that her bare chest and underwear were visible in several spots where her clothes had been melted through. It was likely the work of the gastric juices inside Yurlunggur’s stomach. Her hair and body were unharmed only thanks to her ki’s protection.

“What the fuck, you suck-up?! I was enjoying the sight! Why’d you have to go and tell her?!” Pegasus wailed vehemently.

“Thank you. Much appreciated,” Adel said, gratefully putting on the coat. She then turned to the armored figure. “Now, it’s just *you* left! Time to show us who you are!”

“Wait a minute, Adel!” Euphinia interrupted. “Can you not hear the voice? The voice coming from the armor!”

“I’m afraid I don’t hear a voice.”

“But I did. It was saying, ‘It hurts. Save me!’ I’m quite sure it was the voice of a Divine Beast.”

The real reason why Euphinia and Cerberus were here was that cry for help. The voice had woken Euphinia up, and she had alerted Cerberus and convinced him to come with her. It was pure coincidence that they had found Adel and Tristan under attack when they arrived.

“Does that mean the armor is being manipulated by a Divine Beast?” Adel pondered.

Tristan frowned. “But when I crossed swords with it just now, I clearly heard a human’s breathing from within! I am certain that it is being worn by a human.”

There was no way Euphinia would lie. The fact that she could hear a voice that Adel couldn’t was only a reminder of how much her talent surpassed Adel’s.

On the other hand, there was no hint of dishonesty or uncertainty in Tristan’s expression and tone. If both of them were right, what was going on underneath that armor?

“Regardless, we need to restrain it first!” Adel declared.

Despite now being outnumbered, the armored figure showed no signs of

running away. It seemed like the perfect time to press the attack, but then suddenly, the ground shook violently and something shot out. With a deafening roar, five Yurlunggurs burst out of the ground and loomed over Adel and Tristan.

Adel's eyes widened. "This many at once?!"

"That's impossible!" Tristan gasped. "How can the enemy have that many Saints on their side?!"

"I sense that none of them are contracted! And yet, they are gathered in such numbers, and are clearly hostile." Euphinia made an attempt to converse with the Yurlunggurs. "Please, speak to us! Why are you attacking us?!"

However, no answer was forthcoming.

"Do you know what's going on, Cerberus?!" Adel asked.

"I'm afraid not. But no worries. If they want a fight, they will get one. This will be good training!"

Cerberus was highly motivated, but it was clear he didn't know anything else.

"Pega! What about you?"

"If I had to guess...they're bound by something similar to a curse, not a contract! They're not doing this of their own will! That said, what's to stop us from running away and leaving them be? Come on, let's get out of here! Say no to violence! Let's preach love and peace!"

In contrast to Cerberus, Pegasus was shaking so hard his teeth were nearly chattering, but he possessed very pertinent information.

Euphinia declared with dignity, "I can't do that! If there is a Divine Beast suffering in front of me, I have to save it! To do so is the duty of all Saints! Let's try to figure out a way!"

Despite her youth, she carried herself with such nobility and grace. Adel's heart was filled with joy just looking at her. Adel wanted to grant her wish at any cost.

"Much easier said than done!" Pegasus complained.

“Can you tell where the curse is coming from?” Adel asked. “Then we can destroy the source!”

“That’s impossible even for me! My nose ain’t that sharp! I can only point it out when it’s super close!”

“Then go look for it right now! Princess, we will hang on here! Please hurry!”

“A-All right! When we find the source, we’ll signal you right away! Adel, if possible, can you...”

“You don’t want me to kill the Divine Beasts, right? Understood! We’ll do our best not to hurt them!”

Even if Adel wanted to kill all the Yurlunggurs, she did not have enough ki to repeat her charged attack five more times. It might have been possible if she fused with Cerberus using Ki Possession, but that wasn’t the goal. There was no choice but to deal with the Yurlunggurs’ attacks head-on and buy time for Euphinia.

“Hang in there, Adel! I place my trust in you!” Euphinia cried as Pegasus swiftly flew off.

“So, there’s a curse involved?” Tristan asked. “Do you think Princess Euphinia can actually find the source?”

“Well...even if they don’t, Princess will be safe, since she’s no longer here. That’s enough for me.”

“You only wanted her to escape?!”

“If we end up losing, you need to escape too, Prince Tristan. Cerberus and I will buy time for you.”

“You truly live up to your title as Princess Euphinia’s knight escort. You are remarkable indeed! However, let’s work together so that there will be no need for such desperate measures. After all, we now have the princess’s Sanctuary to tap into!”

Unfortunately, Tristan having access to anima meant their opponent did too. Sure enough, red flames burst into appearance around the armored figure. The spell appeared to be Enchant, the one that Melulu was so familiar with.

“Cerberus! Make sure not to kill the Yurlunggurs or the armored one!”

“Hmph. All right, I’ll do my best. Get on!”

“Thanks!” Adel hopped onto Cerberus’s back, joining Tristan.

Chapter 6: The Attack on the Crown Prince (Part 2)

On a faraway rooftop, Commander Angela of the Malkan forces mirthfully watched Adel's group fighting through a telescope, as her long, black hair fluttered gently in the wind.

"Awww, dear sweet Princess Euphinia ran away. Or is she searching for me? But that's the wrong way, silly."

Pegasus was flying in circles, searching fruitlessly in a location far from Angela's position. It was going to take them quite a while to find her.

"And even if they do find me," Angela giggled, "there'll be a steep price to pay for interfering."

Her target was the crown prince of Torust. Adding the princess of a tiny nation like Wendill to the bill made little difference.

"In the first place, this world doesn't need privileged positions like princes and princesses. Everyone is born equal."

Social classes did not exist in Malka. The country condemned the concept of separating people by privilege, believing that absolute equality was the key to an ideal society. To them, people like Tristan and Euphinia were evils from an outdated era who needed to be purged. They were unnecessary in the world that Malka was trying to build.

To Angela's displeasure, Tristan and his allies were putting up a pretty good fight against the five Yurlunggurs. Cerberus was doing a good job evading their furious assault by zigzagging to and fro, making the most of its swiftness and agility. On its back, Adel brandished her blue-flamed double blades with alacrity, flawlessly parrying every attack that came her way. Even from such a great distance, Angela could tell how impressive Adel's skill and how powerful her weapon was.

"What a nuisance she is."

If it hadn't been for Adel's meddling, Tristan would have died ages ago. She

had remarkable fighting prowess, despite being a Saint. Angela had heard that Adel served as Euphinia's knight escort, and she now knew why. Most Saints shied away from the crude business of fighting in person, opting to stay well behind and haughtily order lackeys to fight on their behalf. The fact that Adel wasn't like them was a plus in Angela's book, but she still hated all Saints with a passion.

Saints were even more privileged than kings and queens. For the time, the world had no choice but to kneel to them for the crucial role they played in maintaining habitable land. But the day was coming when they wouldn't be able to monopolize that power anymore. Soon, that power would be wrested from their hands so that it could be used to serve every single person equally.

The Holy Tower Church claimed that Saints dedicated themselves to serving the world, and that this was why they distanced themselves from secular power. However, the way Malka saw it, they were merely sequestering themselves to protect their privilege. If not, they should have discarded their special rights. For the sake of technological advancement, they should have stopped keeping their abilities exclusive and shared them so that anyone could use them. Sadly, there were no signs that they would ever do so willingly.

The country of Malka dreamed of creating a world of balance, where everyone was equal and lived in peace. It was willing to do whatever was needed to realize this dream. Assassination was a tried-and-true method to achieve their goals, and they were definitely not beyond applying feminine wiles to stir the embers of burning ambition within a former knight.

Of course, it wasn't as if Angela didn't enjoy the latter process. Carrying out her secret missions was quite stressful, so she appreciated any opportunity she had to let off steam. She was human and female, so she liked having trysts with men.

"Now then. Since you're on a roll, Adel, how about I give you a few more playmates?"

From her chest pocket, Angela produced a stack of thin, metallic plaques engraved with complicated patterns. Each one was colored according to the elements of Divine Beast anima. Some were red, some were blue, some were

yellow, and so on.

“I still have so *many* more Sealing Plaques.”

A Divine Beast was trapped inside each Sealing Plaque, and anyone holding the Plaque could force the Divine Beast to do their bidding. Deploying Sanctuaries and erecting Holy Towers were still beyond Malkan technology for the moment, but these devices still allowed anyone to use a Divine Beast in battle. This was one part of a Saint’s abilities, and a fair enough start.

“This is a righteous power that makes everyone equal. The time for Saints and their silly privilege will soon be over.”

Technology was an inexorable march into the future. These Sealing Plaques could reproduce some of what Saints could do. One day, *none* of their abilities would be considered special. That was how things ought to be. Everyone ought to be equal.

“Now, what better playmate for a Cerberus than another?”

With a smile, Angela spread the plaques in her hand into a fan, and picked out three red ones with a Cerberus sealed inside. Adel was a good fighter, but even she should be powerless in the face of such numbers. Sadly for her, Princess Euphinia was still flying around blindly in circles.

“It’s time to wrap up the party!” Angela cried.

Whooooosh!

Just as Angela was about to unleash the Divine Beasts in the Sealing Plaques in her hands, she was ambushed from behind by a bird of fire. It grazed the talismans in her hand, melting them with its heat.

“Noooo!”

When melted, the Sealing Plaques would lose their power. All the Divine Beasts sealed in them would escape. This was a fatal loss of fighting potential at a crucial time.

“Who did that?! How could you ruin such a good moment?!” Angela whirled around, livid, to find a large man wearing a hood that covered his face.

“I *knew* you were up to no good. That’s why I acted like I was returning to the

capital and went into hiding to follow you instead, sister.”

“My, oh my! Is that you, Mashie?”

The voice definitely belonged to Mash. However, when the man pulled back his hood, he revealed a face very different from the one Angela put to that name. In the first place, it wasn’t even a human face.

Mash chuckled wryly. “What a relief. I was worried you wouldn’t recognize me with this face.”

“It’s cute. I like it. Then again, you’ve always been cute. Not being able to see your old face again makes me sad.”

“Says the person who sold me to the Moving Coliseum of Navarra!”

“Can you blame me? Your big sister is very surprised right now. I didn’t think I would ever see you again, much less with a face like that. You were supposed to die in that place.”

Mash started making hand signs while glaring at Angela’s grinning face. “Tell me, how does it feel being bitten in the hand by the little brother you thought you had gotten rid of? I feel like a weight has lifted from my shoulders.”



“Funny you should ask, I’m quite angry right now. Enough to kill you with my own hands.”

“Try it if you can!”

Mash thrust his hands into the air, unleashing a bird of fire that flew high into the sky and exploded. This was meant as a signal for Adel and Euphinia. It shouldn’t be long before they reached this location.

Angela’s eyes widened. “You’ve changed, Mashie. You’ve learned to rely on others instead of trying to do everything yourself.”

“That’s not it. It’s just that I’ve never had anyone around me who I could rely on before. But now I do.”

“Aww, your big sister is happy for you.” Angela nodded approvingly, still smiling. “But I admit, you did get me good. I never expected someone to ruin all my Sealing Plaques with the anima from Princess Euphinia’s uselessly large Sanctuary. I really am quite angry right now, you know. You won’t have it so easy next time, all right?”

Angela pulled a face and pouted as if she was a child. The next moment, her figure faded away.

“Tch, she ran.”

For better or for worse, Angela was good at escaping.

“‘You won’t have it so easy next time,’ was it?” Mash murmured. “No, sister. *You* won’t have it so easy next time. Because we’ll be ready.”

Just then, he heard Euphinia’s voice calling out to him from high up.

“Mash! Why are you here?! Didn’t you return to the capital?”

Mash looked up and saw the princess perched on Pegasus’s back.

“Your Highness, I’ll explain later! I’ve destroyed what I think was controlling the Divine Beasts! Let’s return to Adel at once!”

It was true that back in Malka, there wasn’t a single person whom Mash felt he could rely on. Thankfully, that was no longer the case.

Mash bowed deeply toward the prime example of the change in his life.



Suddenly, all the Yurlunggurs stopped moving.

"Oh, heavens!"

"Sweet freedom!"

"It appears we are no longer under control!"

"What torment it was!"

"What cruelty, controlling us against our will!"

They all started talking, their voices filled with relief and indignation.

From atop Cerberus's back, Adel shouted, "Yurlunggurs! Do you no longer have any intention to attack us?!"

"Indeed, lively Saint lassie."

"We were controlled by an odd implement and forced to attack you."

"We are deeply sorry."

"I hope you don't mind us heading home."

"We have to grieve our fallen comrade."

"I'm deeply sorry for killing one of your own. I was unaware of your circumstances."

"A tragedy it is, but it could hardly be helped."

"We're all old anyway, ha ha. Our time would have come sooner or later."

"More importantly, it appears there is still a trapped Divine Beast in your midst."

One of the Yurlunggurs turned to look at the assailant in black armor. Euphinia's earlier claim of hearing the voice of a Divine Beast seemed true after all.

"Do your best to save it, young lass."

"We bid you farewell."

The five Yurlunggurs wrapped their bodies around the corpse of the

Yurlunggur that Adel had killed and held it up. In the next instant, a large cloud of dust appeared out of nowhere, concealing their forms. When the dust settled, they were no longer anywhere to be seen. It seemed safe to assume that they had returned to their own world, a dimension separate from the one where humans lived.

Adel turned toward the armored figure who now stood alone. “Now it’s just you left!”

Even though Adel’s side now held the advantage in numbers, the assailant showed no intention of running away. Instead, they held Sylphid’s Spear up at the ready. The next moment, their body glowed with a faint green light and became enveloped in a whirling gust of wind. This was the effect of an Enchant spell used with wind anima that accelerated the caster’s speed with tailwinds.

Currently, the field of battle was covered in both the fire Sanctuary deployed by Adel and Cerberus and the ultra-wide almighty Sanctuary deployed by Euphinia and Pegasus. An almighty Sanctuary was called so for enabling those within to cast spells of all elements, so it was clear this was the one that the assailant was tapping into. The spell that they were using, Tailwind, was the one that Melulu was best at. It would have been impossible to cast this spell using Adel’s Sanctuary, which was filled only with fire anima.

The armored figure started running around Cerberus.

“Melulu, is that really you?” Adel called out.

“So fast!” Tristan exclaimed, his head turning furiously. “My eyes can’t keep up!”

Apparently, the absence of the Yurlunggurs was working out in the armored assailant’s favor. Moving about at such speed would have been impossible when their great forms were writhing all about.

“It’s indeed fast!”

Adel had seen Melulu use Tailwind a few times before when they trained with Euphinia. This opponent was easily surpassing Melulu’s top speed, even though they were using the same spell. In fact, they were even faster than the dullahan had been back at Holy Tower VII.

“Adel, can your eyes keep up?!” Cerberus asked as he also turned his head left and right in a bit of a fluster.

“Yes, but...”

Adel could indeed keep up with the assailant’s movements if she concentrated her ki in her eyes, but there was a problem.

“Your Highness, duck!”

The armored figure abruptly changed directions, charging not at Adel, but at Tristan sitting behind her. Adel swiftly whirled around and covered Tristan’s head with her body, thrusting Salamander’s Tail into the assailant’s path.

However, the opponent was quick to react. By twisting their body, they managed to get away with the blade of blue flame only grazing their armor. Furthermore, in passing, they swung Sylphid’s Spear at Tristan. Because they were avoiding an attack themselves, they only managed to scratch Tristan, but it was a wound nonetheless.

“Your Highness! Are you all right?!”

“Not to worry! It’s no more than a scratch!”

There was a small tear in Tristan’s sleeve that was dyed with his blood, but the wound wasn’t deep. However, there was no guarantee that the next hit would be as harmless.

If the armored figure had gone for Adel, she would have been able to dodge the attack by the skin of her teeth and counterattack by leaving her weapon in their way. The closer they got, the harder it would be for them to avoid the trap. However, since they were attacking Tristan, it was much harder for Adel to keep the timing so tight. She had no choice but to take action a moment earlier, and that was a moment more for the assailant to react.

Adel’s current standard fighting style was a reactive one; she read the attacks of her opponents and used their own momentum against them. The more powerful her opponent, the greater the contrast between her own strength and the strength that she had possessed as Swordmaster Adel in the previous timeline. There was no denying that her base physical prowess had dropped from her change in gender, and she had also lost the bolstered regeneration

that Cardinal Navarra's experiments gave her. As it had also helped regenerate ki faster, its effectiveness in battle was remarkable, notwithstanding the fact that it was a dangerous modification that whittled down the user's life span.

"The next attack is coming, Adel!"

"I know! Cerberus, when I signal to the side, run that way as fast as you can!"

"Got it! I'm ready whenever!"

Fighting reactively was the wrong call in this situation. Each second this fight lasted was a second of Tristan being exposed to danger. Adel may not have been suited for fighting offensively now, but she had Cerberus to make up for it. To wound an opponent moving so quickly, she would normally have to split her ki between her eyes to follow the opponent, her feet to catch them, and her weapon to actually deal significant damage. Now that she was riding Cerberus, though, she could leave all the moving around to him. He was every bit as fast as her when she used Ki Convergence, especially when splitting her ki three ways.

As the armored figure dashed about like the wind, Adel gathered all her ki in her eyes. With certainty, she shouted, "Right! Run to the right as fast as you can!"

"You got it!"

Cerberus whirled around and took off at top speed. His path was perpendicular to the assailant's, and they closed in on each other in the blink of an eye.

"Well done! Yah!"

The moment that the two sides passed each other, Adel swung Salamander's Tail, accurately hitting the armored figure's head. Their helmet fell off and hit the ground with a loud clang.

Of course, Adel did not behead her opponent. With how familiar she was with this particular suit of armor, she knew exactly where its weaknesses were and where to attack to only remove the helmet. Doing so required precision on the level of passing a needle through a pinhole as well as an extraordinary control of strength. This was hard enough to do when the target was standing still,

much less when moving about with the speed of a gust of wind. Little wonder she needed Cerberus's aid.

"That face! Is that not one of your fellow knight escorts, Saint Adel?!"

"I-It is! It really is Melulu!"

There was no mistaking that winsome face and blonde hair. It was Melulu they were fighting. Adel had hoped as hard as she could that it wasn't, but she couldn't deny it any longer.

"Melulu! Melulu! What happened?! Why are you attacking Prince Tristan?! Do you understand what you are doing?!"

Melulu did not answer. The girl who was usually all smiles now looked back with blank eyes. It was clear she was not her usual self. Without the slightest change in her facial expression, she resumed running at high speed.

"She's not responding. She must be under the influence of something."

"I agree, Your Highness. Princess and the Yurlunggurs both mentioned there was another Divine Beast. Perhaps that is what's controlling Melulu. I'm sorry, Your Highness, but..."

"You two must be close. Worry not, I understand what you want to say. We have many questions to ask her. Try removing her armor; doing so might enable her to regain herself. The fact that it used to be a dullahan does not bode well for someone wearing it."

Even though it used to be a dullahan, the armor had been a core part of Adel's identity and had been an invaluable asset in winning the Great War in the previous timeline. To hear it being disparaged saddened Adel a little. However, she was thankful that Tristan was willing to talk to Melulu. Under these circumstances, he had every right to demand her head.

"Understood! In that case..."

Adel shifted her focus to attacking the weaknesses in the armor so that it would fall away from Melulu's body. It was far from impossible, especially now that she could rely on Cerberus to serve as her feet. All she had to do was shift where she aimed her blade.

“Again, Cerberus!”

“Just say the word!”

Once more, Cerberus closed in on Melulu. Adel swung Salamander’s Tail at her shoulder, making the armor of her right arm fall off in its entirety.

“Yes, it’s working! Whoever you are, release Melulu right now! You’re not getting away!”

Despite Adel’s warning, Melulu continued moving with a blank face. Before the two clashed again, however, a voice called out from in the sky.

“Melulu! Melulu! What’s happened to you, Melulu?!”

It was Euphinia, riding on Pegasus. Judging by the timing, she had likely dealt with whatever it was that had been controlling the Yurlunggurs.

“Princess! The Yurlunggurs returned to their senses and left! However, Melulu is still—”

“It was my sister, Angela, who was behind everything! She was controlling the Divine Beasts using what she called Sealing Plaques!”

Adel whirled around in surprise at hearing Mash’s voice. “Mash! Didn’t you return to the capital?!”

“Nope, I was trying to expose my sister!”

“It was thanks to Mash destroying the Sealing Plaques that the Yurlunggurs left,” Euphinia explained.

Tristan bit his lip. “So this really *was* Malka’s attempt on my life!”

“Prince Tristan, based on the state of this armor and Melulu, it seems we need to speak with Wolff Sedis as well,” Adel growled.

“I agree.” Tristan nodded. “Angela and Wolff must have been working together. My shortsighted decision gave them an opportunity they could take advantage of.”

Adel felt somewhat responsible too, as she had been a key part of what had happened at Alderford. If Elciel was still alive, Tristan might have been with her right now instead, off on their expedition to profane land.

Adel hadn't the slightest inkling that Malka had intentions on the crown prince of Torust. In the previous timeline, the Torust Empire and the Republic of Malka had joined hands to form the Northern Federation. She couldn't even imagine what had happened for Malka to change from trying to assassinate Tristan to allying with him.

Perhaps Mad Emperor Tristan had forced Malka into submission. Or perhaps Malka had been manipulating him from the shadows. Both seemed equally possible. After losing Euphinia, Adel had become blinded with rage and only cared about laying waste to everything in sight. Understanding the enemy's circumstances had certainly never been a priority. Adel's single-minded quest for revenge had no place for such thoughts.

Thanks to having a broader understanding of things now, Adel realized how close Torust and Malka were to fighting each other. And sandwiched in between them was Wendill. This setup could easily trigger another Great War. The boy who had called himself a Watcher, the one who had sent Adel into the past, had mentioned that there was a force compelling all humans to end up with the same fate. Perhaps the current situation was an example of that.

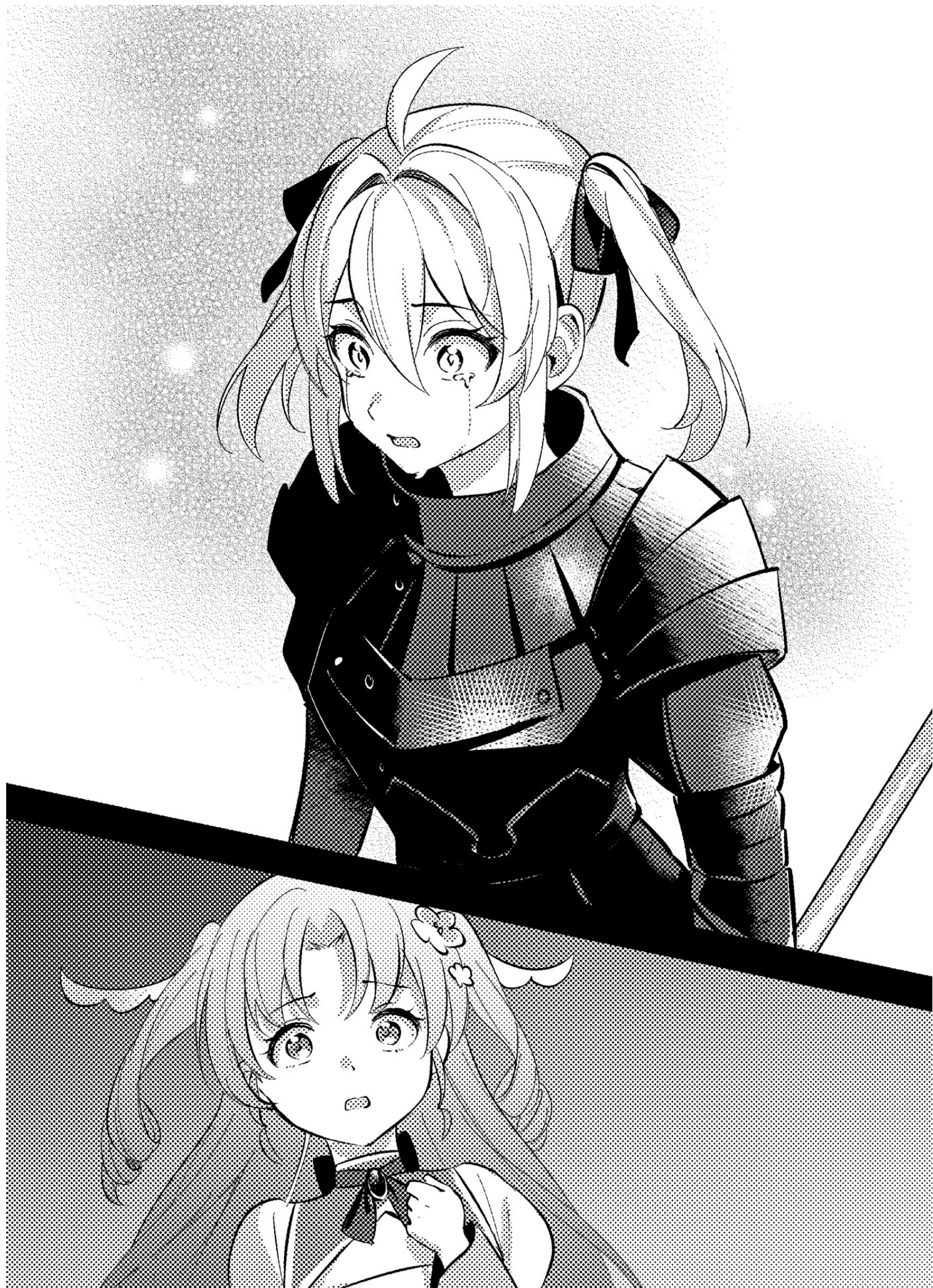
"In any case, we need to focus on Melulu!" Euphinia shouted. "Melulu! Melulu, can you hear me?! I know it's not you doing this! Return to your senses! Come back to us!"

The desperation in Euphinia's face and voice spoke volumes about how deeply she cared for Melulu. It was so keen that Adel couldn't help but feel a little jealous. Miraculously, Euphinia's raw sincerity seemed to reach Melulu. The girl lowered her weapon and stopped moving.

"Melulu!" Euphinia cried.

Adel smiled with relief. "Did Princess's voice get through to her?!"

In a faint voice, Melulu mumbled, "No, I'm not the person you think I am, Princess. I'm a tool. I'm only a tool..." Tears welled up in her eyes and started falling down her cheeks.



“What are you saying, Melulu?!”

“She really has stopped moving!”

“Did Princess really reach her?!”

However, Melulu’s face and eyes turned blank once more. She then turned the point of Sylphid’s Spear toward herself...and thrust it at her own throat.

“Melulu, no!” Euphinia gasped.

“Wha—! Stop!” Mash shouted.

Even Tristan yelled, “Don’t be rash!”

By this time, Adel was already in motion, having kicked off with all her ki in her feet. Just now, she had used Ki Convergence to keep a close eye on Melulu, noting the movement of her muscles, the direction of her gaze, and even the pace of her breathing. Before Melulu had turned her spear on herself, Adel could tell what she intended to do.

“I won’t let you!”

When running at top speed, Adel could cover distances faster than she could swing Salamander’s Tail in whip form. She successfully managed to get between Melulu and her spear in time, but with no choice but to use her own body as a shield, the point went through her shoulder.

“Ugh!” Ignoring the sharp pain, Adel tackled Melulu with her momentum and pinned her down.

“Saint Adel!”

“Adel! You’re hurt!”

“I’m fine! Mash, take Melulu’s weapon away!”

“A-All right!”

Mash rushed over, snatching Sylphid’s Spear from Melulu’s hand. Melulu struggled furiously, prompting Adel to shift all her ki to her arms.

“Melulu, settle down!”

Unfortunately, Melulu redoubled her resistance, and her face remained blank.

She showed no sign of responding to Adel's calls.

Adel groaned. "It looked like Princess got through to her for a split second just now, but...!"

"It didn't last!" Mash stabbed Sylphid's Spear into the ground as hard as he could and held it down with all his strength. The weapon had the ability to return to its wielder's hand at will, so he was trying to thwart it.

"Save me! Help! Let me out!"

Adel's eyes widened in surprise as she heard the voice of a young girl who wasn't Melulu or Euphinia.

"Someone! Please!"

"I hear a Divine Beast's voice...from Melulu!" Adel exclaimed. "I see, so this is what Princess was talking about!"

Because Adel was touching Melulu directly, she was finally able to hear the voice too.

"At this rate, I'm going to kill this girl! I've been ordered to kill her when everything's over, no matter if we succeed or fail!"

"Ahh, so that's why!"

"Did you learn something, Adel?!"

"It wasn't Melulu trying to kill herself! The Divine Beast possessing her is being controlled by a Sealing Plaque, and was ordered to do it! Melulu was going to be framed for everything!"

Being able to do this was probably the biggest reason for dressing Melulu up in the armor, more than the boost that it gave to her fighting abilities. If Melulu killed herself after attacking Tristan, she would be held fully responsible for her actions. Even though Adel would have realized what was actually going on, she would have no way of proving it. If she tried to point the finger at Angela and Wolff, they could merely claim that she was trying to frame them, and it would devolve into a case of "he said, she said." They had done a good job of protecting themselves.

Adel gritted her teeth. "No matter the outcome, it is Melulu wielding the

spear. If she dies, the truth of the matter will be buried with her! In other words, the Sedis family is using her as a sacrificial pawn!”

“Maybe,” Mash agreed, “but we won’t let that happen!”

“So, we have to destroy the Sealing Plaque controlling this Divine Beast, right? But how do we find it?! I’m quite sure that the moment I let go, Melulu’s life will be in danger again!”

“Allow me!” Euphinia stepped forward with conviction in her face.

“Princess?! Please stand back, it’s dangerous here! We’ll do something about Melulu ourselves!”

Euphinia shook her head. “I know you’re worried, but I too want to do what I can for Melulu’s sake.”

“You have an idea, Princess?”

“Yes. I will try to separate the Divine Beast from Melulu.” The princess kneeled next to Melulu and gently cupped her emotionless face.

“Y-You can do that?!”

“I can’t be sure until I try, but I did manage to hear the Divine Beast’s voice from far away.”

“Right, you did say that. I myself can only hear it when I’m directly touching Melulu. Your talent as a Saint is indeed far beyond my own!”

“No, Adel. This isn’t a matter of talent, but of compatibility. This is why I believe I should be able to form a contract with this Divine Beast.”

“I see! Contracting the Divine Beast and bringing it into your shadow should free it from its Sealing Plaque!”

“That’s right, Mash. That’s what I’m counting on!”

If Euphinia succeeded, the situation would be resolved. The two knight escorts decided to trust their liege and leave things to her.

“Oh, Divine Beast! Please hear my voice and be one with me!”

Euphinia’s hand on Melulu glowed with a faint light. It was a pure and kind light that perfectly encapsulated the princess’s character. Before long, Melulu’s

entire form was enveloped in the glow, and a shower of sparkles rose from her body and flew toward Euphinia's chest.

Adel recognized the sight from when she herself formed a contract with Cerberus. "Good, it's working," she murmured softly so as to not break Euphinia's concentration.

"Is it going well?" Mash asked worriedly.

Just as Adel was about to nod in response, the particles of light suddenly turned black. Without warning, they turned into whips that tightened around Euphinia, as if they had gained a mind of their own.

"Augh!"

"Princess!"

The power that bound the Divine Beast was fighting back against Euphinia's interference. Seeing that it now posed a direct danger to Euphinia, Adel felt she had to step in.

"No, Adel, wait! Let me first try using what Eminent Theodora taught me!"

The light surrounding Euphinia's body rapidly increased in intensity.

Fwoom!

In the distance, a pillar of light shot into the sky.

"Princess, is that...?!"

"It looks like the same phenomenon that we saw at the profane area!"

"Yes, it is! It's a pillar of anima, the same one we use when bestowing power to a Holy Tower!" Euphinia confirmed, breathing heavily. Whatever it was that she did had fatigued her greatly, but the whips of black light that had been constricting her were gone.

"I was interrupted during the process, but I am halfway toward contracting this Divine Beast," she explained. "Contracting with a Divine Beast means becoming one with them. This enables me to sense the source of the power binding this one! That's where it is!"

"That location...is the Sedis estate," Mash noted.

Tristan pressed his lips together. "Can't say I'm surprised."

"I'll go destroy it," Adel declared. "Mash, you stay here and protect Princess and Melulu!"

"But you're hurt! I should go instead."

"I'm fine."

"Take a good look at yourself. Your clothes are soaked with blood! You need medical attention."

"What do you..." Adel realized the shoulder where Sylphid's Spear had pierced her earlier was hurting. In the previous timeline, any wounds Adel suffered would have closed up long before the amount of blood loss became a risk.

"Pega, take Adel's place and hold Melulu down!" Euphinia ordered.

"I'll take over holding this spear down!" Tristan offered. "In the meantime, please treat Saint Adel's wound!"

Adel had misgivings about letting Pegasus touch Melulu, but the situation was dire. Fortunately, thanks to Euphinia being partially contracted with the Divine Beast in question, both it and Melulu had weakened in strength. Tristan and Pegasus were more than enough to serve in their respective roles.

"Adel, sorry. I'm going to t-touch you, but please bear with it."

"Why are you apologizing? I should be the one to apologize, for making you go to the trouble for me."

"I'll help too!"

"Thank you, Your Highness. I'm sure Adel would feel more comfortable being treated by someone of the same gender."

"I'm afraid I don't have much experience doing so, but..."

"Don't worry, I'll talk you through it. First, press cloth against the wound, then tie it tightly."

"Like this?"

Working together, Euphinia and Mash did their best to stem the blood flowing

from Adel's shoulder wound.

Mash nodded approvingly. "All right, that should do it."

"Thanks," Adel said. "All right, I'm off to destroy the Sealing Plaque!"

"No, wait. Like I said, I'll go!" Mash protested.

Tristan shook his head. "Both of you can go. I'll protect everyone here."

"That's a good idea," Mash agreed. "There's no telling what might be guarding the Plaque. The more fighters heading over, the better."

"Don't worry about us," Euphinia said reassuringly. "We'll be fine!"

In the previous timeline, Adel would have vehemently refused to leave Euphinia alone with Mad Emperor Tristan, no matter what she said. However, she realized—with the most surprise she had felt since the start of this whole incident—that she was fine with the arrangement, given the current situation and the kind of person this Tristan was.

"I...understand, Princess. I will be off with Mash."

Euphinia averted her eyes in shame, unable to bear the sight of Adel's smile. "I'm so sorry that I couldn't finish the contract. Because of me, you have to push yourself even though you're hurt."

"Princess..."

Euphinia's voice was quivering and tears were welling up in her eyes. Adel understood how worried the princess was for her, and it nearly moved her to tears herself.

Maybe Euphinia had looked at her with the same face in the previous timeline. Sadly, Adel had been unable to read facial expressions due to being blind.

"Like I said before we left Welna, I am your hands and feet, Princess. There's no need to apologize for using your own hands and feet. Please don't be concerned for me."

"If my hands and feet got hurt, I would feel pain. I cannot *not* be concerned for you." A teardrop spilled over from Euphinia's large eyes, but she rubbed it

away. "I'm sorry, I'm only making things harder for you by saying this."

"Oh, Princess! Your warmth is too much for me! My heart! My heart overflows!" Adel's tears fell like a waterfall, completely obscuring her vision.

A person's facial expressions could convey so much about their emotions. As someone who had been blind until a short while ago, Adel felt this all the more keenly. She had been unable to hold her own tears back any longer when seeing Euphinia cry out of concern for her.

Euphinia gently brought a handkerchief to Adel's eyes, making her flustered. Smiling through her tears, she said gently, "My hands and feet are connected to me. So I can't help it, now can I?"

Mash called out in warning. "The pillar of light is fading! We have to hurry!"

"Got it!" Adel replied. "Princess, we're off!"

"Both of you, come back to me safe and sound!"

"We will, Princess!"

"Yes, Your Highness!"

The two knight escorts bowed in unison, then leaped onto Cerberus's back and shot off toward the Sedis estate.

Chapter 7: The Attack on the Crown Prince (Part 3)

“That’s the anima pillar!” Mash pointed at the pillar of light rising from the courtyard in the Sedis estate. Strangely, the ground showed no signs of disturbance, being little more than well-maintained turf.

“The pillar should be marking the location of the Sealing Plaque. If it’s not aboveground, then...”

“Right! It’s probably underground! Let’s grab one of the servants and make them take us to the entrance!”

Adel enlarged Salamander’s Tail. “No, we don’t have time for that!”

“We’re brute forcing it, then?”

“Indeed. Mash, Cerberus, are you ready?”

“Of course!”

“Anytime!”

The three of them attacked the ground with fervor; Adel with Salamander’s Tail, Mash with fire birds, and Cerberus with fire breath. They were raising a cacophony, but no one came out of the mansion. The place had already been emptied, meaning they had chosen the correct course of action after all. By the time the pillar of light faded away, their large hole had broken through to reveal a cavernous space underground.

“All right, we got through! Mash, Cerberus, we’re heading in!”

The two humans leaped onto the back of the Divine Beast, who then jumped into the hole. Upon landing, they found themselves in a cave larger than the size of the mansion aboveground. The foul and stale air, as well as the bleak atmosphere, gave the place the impression of a jail. Adel and Mash were all too familiar with this setting.

“This...brings me back, Mash.”

“Yeah, the Coliseum. It’s the smell. Or rather, the whole vibe.”

“Which means whatever’s going on down here, it can’t be good.”

Something terrible was being carried out in secret, away from judging eyes.

Adel looked around. “But it seems empty. That doesn’t make sense. The anima pillar was here just a moment ago. At the very least, the Sealing Plaque shouldn’t be far—”

“Adel! Here! I found someone!”

Mash beckoned Adel to a corner with lots of small holding cells. In one of them, a short boy lay on the ground. He was unnaturally thin, clearly having been the victim of malnourishment. A child did not belong in a place like this. The similarities between this facility and the Moving Coliseum of Navarra were starting to pile up.

“What was being conducted here?!” Mash growled, his face a mask. “You there! Boy! Are you okay?!”

The boy stirred and groaned a little.

“Hold on! I’ll let you out now!” Adel slashed the cell’s bars with Salamander’s Tail, the blue flames melting iron with no resistance. The wreckage crashed to the ground, making a loud din that echoed throughout the underground space.

“Okay! Now, let us take you outsi—”

“Adel, watch out!”

Mash suddenly tackled Adel from the side, pushing her to the ground. A massive slash flying parallel to the ground hit them almost right after. They slammed into the ground with force, then bounced several times before finally coming to a stop.

“Mash! I’m sorry! You all right?!”

If Mash hadn’t reacted when he did, the two of them would have been much worse off.

“I... Ugh... I’m fine. How about you?”

“Only a little scraped and bruised, thanks to you.”

When the two were sent flying, Mash had done his best to shield Adel with

his body. Thanks to this, he had taken most of the impact.

“That’s...good...”

The way Mash was speaking worried Adel. It sounded like he was fighting to stay conscious.

“You rest up. I’ll handle things from here. Cerberus, take Mash somewhere safe!”

“Very well. I’ll be right back.”

As Cerberus picked up the boy in the cell in his mouth, Adel noticed that he was bleeding.

She gasped. “You...while protecting the boy... Well done, but are you all right?”

Just as Mash had protected Adel, Cerberus had also jumped in to save the boy. Unfortunately, he had been hit by the flying slash in the process. Even so, Adel was grateful that he had done so.

“Hmph. This is nothing.”

Despite his words, Cerberus was staggering a little. He was having trouble walking straight.

Seeing this, the boy got back down and started pulling Mash’s body. “I-I’ll do something about this mister! Don’t worry about us!”

Adel nodded. “All right. I’m trusting you, little man! Cerberus, you rest in my shadow. Depending on how things go, we might have to use *that* move. I want you at full strength.”

“I said I’m fine. But...if you insist...”

Without further protest, the Divine Beast disappeared into Adel’s shadow. He actually had been wounded quite severely. It would take him some time to recover enough to perform Ki Possession, even with the accelerated healing that Divine Beasts enjoyed inside a Saint’s shadow. Buying time was now Adel’s immediate priority.

“You do that. I’ll be needing your help later,” Adel said, turning toward the

person who had unleashed the earlier attack.

Her opponent was wearing a full suit of black armor, but it obviously wasn't Melulu. They weren't armed with Sylphid's Spear, and their aura was completely different. In fact, Adel recognized this aura.

"You must be Wolff Sedis! How could you attack us while our attention was on the child in the cell?! Have you no shame?!"

Thanks to Mash, Adel had evaded the brunt of the attack. The cells, however, were in a terrible state, having been reduced to piles of twisted metal. And if it wasn't for Cerberus, the boy would most certainly have lost his life.

"You had the advantage in numbers, so I seized an opportunity that presented itself. That's all."

"Mere sophistry! Did you not think of how heartbroken the boy's parents would be if he had died?!"

"You need not worry. *I* am his parent. And as his father, I commend him for being of use to me."

"What?! You knave! First Melulu, and now—"

"This place is a facility for training my children. Only the best survive. Melulu made it out, but that boy's only worth is as a decoy."

"How can you still call yourself a father?! These are your children!"

"My children are my tools. It's up to me what I use them for."

"I...get it now. Melulu did mention this before."

As someone who had been an orphan her entire childhood, Adel did not understand what parents were supposed to be. However, even she could tell that Wolff's perspective was deeply warped.

"In a way, this gives me peace of mind. I no longer need to feel bad about attacking Melulu's father. I will have you surrender the Sealing Plaque of the Divine Beast controlling her right this instant!"

Adel held Salamander's Tail at the ready, the blades of blue flames burning fiercely at both ends of the handle.

“As I thought. When you visited with Princess Euphinia, I knew you were special. You are both a Saint and someone who can use ki!”

“If you can tell right away, that means you can too! I knew it!”

Adel could tell by the intimidating aura that Wolff’s black armor was a spelltool, and that its abilities were being massively bolstered by Ki Amplification. Both the dullahan and Melulu—when she was wearing this armor—had reminded Adel of her past self, but none more so than Wolff at the moment. He was wearing the same spelltool and using the same power that had characterized Swordmaster Adel.

“Wasn’t Melulu wearing that armor? Have there always been two sets, or did you call it back?”

In the previous timeline, some time after Euphinia’s death, the armor had begun exhibiting new abilities, such as being able to naturally repair itself and come to its owner when mentally called for. Adel had attributed this to the armor becoming familiar with its owner’s ki through repeated usage of Ki Amplification. If Wolff could evoke the same functions, he must be just as masterful at manipulating ki as Adel had been, if not more. And seeing as the armor was a perfect fit for Wolff despite having been worn by Melulu mere minutes before, shape-shifting seemed to be another one of its abilities.

“The latter. The Armor of Lamentation was made with a very special anima crystal. The Divine Beast was forcibly captured and killed in the cruelest way possible, so that its anima crystal would be filled with the utmost bitterness and hatred. This armor amplifies its wearer’s strength by resonating with their own dark emotions. It is eager to feed on mine, and thus comes when I call it.”

“That armor...has a name?”

This was Adel’s first time hearing it, as Euphinia hadn’t known it in the previous timeline. This was also Adel’s first time learning about the armor’s special anima crystal and its properties. However, it was safe to assume that anything it could do by itself could be magnified with ki.

Now that Adel thought about it, it was true that the Armor of Lamentation had become much more powerful after Euphinia died. Apparently that wasn’t because of Adel’s mastery of ki, but because the armor’s wearer had been

plunged into despair and rage—in other words, lamentation. It was not willpower that had surpassed Adel's previous limits, but the armor.

Behind Melulu's bright facade, her heart was filled with the conflict and trauma from her upbringing as a tool of the Sedis family. These unspeakable emotions had resonated with the Armor of Lamentation, enabling her to fight much better than she normally could. And now, not only did Wolff have the same advantage, he even knew how to use Ki Amplification.

Ironically, Adel could not use this armor anymore. Now that she was once again at Euphinia's side and serving as her knight escort, she was satisfied with her life. In her current mental state, it would be impossible for her to draw out the Armor of Lamentation's full potential.

"Would you be interested in working with me?" Wolff asked, holding out a hand.

"What?!"

"Help me kill Tristan. After that, once Malka destroys Torust, they will give me a portion of the territory to found my own kingdom. I can ensure that you receive anything you wish for."

"So that's why you sent Melulu to take His Highness's life. A mere merchant dreams of having his own country. Hah. You must be delusional!"

"It is no delusion. The founding king of the Holy Kingdom used ki, as did the giants who left their names in the annals of history. This is the power of heroes, and those who wield it deserve a status befitting such glory."

"I vehemently disagree! All of my powers, including my ability to use ki and my abilities as a Saint, exist for the sole purpose of serving my liege, Princess Euphinia! I would never wield them for your sake, not in a thousand years!"

"Then you are a fool. You have been tamed by a mere child and are content being under her thumb."

"At least I'm not like you. After all your years, you still haven't tempered your oversized ego and come to terms with reality. It's unseemly."

"You couldn't be more wrong."

“How so?”

“When one ages, ambition does not die down. No, it builds, year after year after year. And now, I have armor that turns all my ambition into strength! What a wonderful spelltool it is!”

Sure enough, the Armor of Lamentation was giving off a black glow that raised Adel’s hackles. After being ousted as a knight of Wendill, the bitterness brewing inside Wolff had turned into the deep-seated delusion that now gave him strength. Adel sensed that he was now as powerful as her past self had been when defeating Elciel and Mad Emperor Tristan, though their motivations could not be more different.

“You may know how to wield ki too, but you stand no chance against me in this armor. This is your one and only chance to surrender.”

“I refuse. If I can’t defeat you, there’s no meaning in me standing here.”

Adel couldn’t help but see her past self in Wolff. And because of this, she felt the need to overcome him in her new body. Doing so would be a step toward proving to herself that this time around, she *could* protect Euphinia and ensure that she lived a happy life. This was also a good opportunity for Adel to test herself.

“What’s more, the fact that this armor is no longer with Melulu makes me more certain that Princess is safe and sound. I’m actually relieved to see you wearing it! Now all I have to worry about is defeating you and destroying your Sealing Plaque!”

“You’re a stubborn one. I see I have no choice but to make you submit by force. But don’t worry, I won’t kill you. You’re the only other person I’ve met who can use ki. I’m sure the children you birth will become very useful tools indeed!”

“Talk is cheap. Let’s see if you have the strength to back it up!”

“You’ll see soon enough!”

Wolff swung his sword vertically. It was a very fine weapon, but it was no spelltool. Even so, there was incredible speed and force behind the attack. When bolstered with the power flowing from the Armor of Lamentation, it

turned into a tremendous shock wave that gouged a deep rut in the stone paving with its passage, filling the air with a deafening clamor.

This was an attack on par with that of a true swordmaster, and Wolff could pull it off as many times as he liked without being drained or fatigued in the slightest. Adel knew this because it had been the same for her when she had worn the Armor of Lamentation. This armor had turned Swordmaster Adel into a superhuman capable of facing—and obliterating—entire armies alone.

Normal spellcasters grew fatigued with each spell they cast, and they needed a Saint present to supply them with anima through a Sanctuary. While deploying a Sanctuary, Saints were incapable of casting spells themselves; Elciel was the only exception that Adel knew of. In other words, at least two people had to work together to pull off large scale attacks. Someone capable of doing so alone—with an attack that wasn't even a spell—was beyond exceptional as a fighter. Not that Adel would ever commend Wolff for it, though.

“Yah!”

Adel dodged the shock wave by taking a small step to the right. The point was to move in small, controlled bursts; if she jumped hard, she would be a target the instant she landed. Naturally, Wolff followed up his attack with many more in quick succession, carefully controlling their speed, range, and trajectory. However, Adel threaded the barrage with the gracefulness and ease of a master dancer.

“Beautiful movements indeed!” Wolff said appreciatively. “However, prancing around won't help you win this fight!”

Wolff was right, but what he didn't know was that Adel was buying time for Cerberus to recover. Besides, it was no longer her style to fight aggressively. Instead, her basic strategy was to figure out how her opponent was moving, seek an opening, and crank up Salamander's Tail to the max using Ki Amplification to land one decisive strike. It was not yet time. The fact that Wolff was sticking with flying slashes meant he was also still sizing Adel up.

“You never know!” Adel countered. “Based on our age difference, I think you'll tire out first!”

“Then I must end this fight before that happens!”

Wolff was the one who broke the impasse, seemingly having fallen for Adel's provocation. He lifted his sword as high as he could, then brought it down to unleash a shock wave significantly more powerful than the ones before. He then immediately started running toward her while staying half a step behind the slash. When she dodged the slash, he would step out and attack her directly.

"I see what you're doing!"

Adel chose to leap backward. The flying slash continued to close in on her, but she kept backing up. The wall behind her was coming up soon, but she still firmly refused to go left or right. As this was an underground arena with four walls, she could monitor how much space she had left. When she reached the optimum distance, she started to spin her weapon rapidly. The double blades turned into a windmill. There was no need to supercharge the weapon with ki, so the flames were just red.

"What are you..."

Confusion was creeping into Wolff's mind as Adel suddenly leaped as far as she could to the right. The next second, Wolff's slash and body occupied the very position that Adel had, and he realized that a thick stone wall was right in front of his eyes.

"WHAT?!"

A huge *boom* reverberated throughout the underground space as Wolff crashed into the wall with enormous force. This was what Adel had been aiming for. She had spun the flames of her weapon to draw his attention and obstruct his view of the wall, preventing him from judging how close he was to it. He'd fallen for it, and had hit the wall at full speed. His back was now wide open.

"EAT THIS!"

Adel stabbed Wolff's back with all her strength as Salamander's Tail burned with all the ki that she could muster. She definitely felt her attack land, but to her chagrin, it only left a small dent in the Armor of Lamentation, failing to pierce through. And in the next instant, Wolff's form warped, then disappeared.

This could only mean one thing: Wolff was moving so fast that Adel couldn't

see him. Because all her ki had been in her weapon, she was only seeing with her naked eyes. Sensing Wolff's bloodlust, she promptly sent her ki to her eyes, just in time to see him bearing down on her.

"I've got you now!"

"No you don't!"

Adel pulled one foot back, avoiding Wolff's downward strike by a hair's breadth. It was so close, she could see her own reflection in his broad blade as a tuft of her hair floated to the ground. He promptly brought his sword back up in a horizontal swing, but she leaped up over it with a midair somersault. Then she backed up again half a step to avoid the following thrust. Wolff tried to chain his attack into something else, but he suddenly found himself pitching forward. Adel had wrapped Salamander's Tail around his arm and pulled him off-balance.

Adel had no choice but to buff her eyes and feet with Ki Convergence in order to handle Wolff's terrifyingly swift attacks. However, this meant she had no ki left to send to her weapon. Instead, she had decided to use it as a whip to mess with Wolff's balance. She had no chance in a simple comparison of strength, but by accurately reading her opponent's movements, she was putting up a good fight.

"Tch!"

Wolff clicked his tongue in irritation as he fell to one knee. The next thing he knew, the corner of his eyes registered the gleaming, graceful leg of a woman.

"Yaaaah!"

At the precise moment when Wolff was most vulnerable, Adel kicked his head as hard as she could. Her feet had been strengthened through Ki Convergence this whole time so that she could move fast enough to react to the furious exchange of blows. It was a simple matter using that ki to unleash a jaw-droppingly powerful kick instead.

The ensuing thud was loud, especially for a woman's kick. Earlier, Adel's best effort to stab Wolff had resulted in little more than a dent in his armor. As she had no hope of staying still to gather her ki, that was literally the most powerful attack she could pull off at the moment. This was a new strategy, hoping to land

a hard enough hit to his head to render him unconscious without worrying about the armor.

“Hmph. Young ladies should not be lifting their legs so high.”

“Can’t help it. I didn’t get a proper education!”

Unfortunately, Adel’s kick only made Wolff sway for a moment. Even so, that seemed more effective than stabbing his back with Salamander’s Tail, so she considered the efficacy of doing the same thing repeatedly.

“In that case, allow me to learn a little from *you*!” Wolff directed his sword away from Adel. With a fighting cry, he unleashed a flying slash at the pair who had retreated to the far wall, Mash and the young boy.

“You coward! Have you no shame?!”

“As I said, I’m learning from you!”

Even while disparaging Wolff, Adel was already in motion. She caught up to the shock wave, reaching Mash and the boy first.

“Hang on tight!”

With the two in her arms, Adel managed to leap out of the incoming attack’s trajectory. However, doing so made her vulnerable. Wolff had almost reached the spot where she would be landing, barreling over with such speed that there was a gale in his wake. He was definitely moving much faster than she was; without Ki Convergence, her eyes couldn’t even register him. As she was already well aware, the synergy between ki techniques and the Armor of Lamentation was absolutely remarkable, all the more so thanks to Wolff’s heart being filled with the darkness that the armor liked so much.

Mash groaned, then shouted as loud as he could manage, “Adel, just abandon me! I’m only slowing you down!”

“Don’t be stupid!” she snapped back.

Wolff smirked triumphantly as he crowed, “I’ve got you now!”

“No!” Mash made hand signs as fast as he could, then unleashed a bird of fire.

FWOOOOSH!

Not only was the bird at least twice its normal size, it also burned with blue flames that were clearly far hotter than usual.

A stunned “What?!” came from both Adel and Mash as Wolff blocked the spell with the blade of his sword.

The effort drew a grunt of surprise from Wolff as he realized he was losing ground and being pushed back. The next thing he knew, the bird exploded at point-blank range, violently sending him flying through the air. He crashed against the far wall with enough force to make parts of it collapse on his head.

“Wh-What was *that*?! My spell is never that powerful! Did you do something, Adel?!”

“Uh, not consciously. But maybe it’s like how I make spelltools more powerful with ki.”

Earlier, Adel had been holding Mash with arms strengthened with ki. Perhaps that ki had ended up flowing through Mash in a phenomenon similar to Ki Amplification. Mash had then ended up using it when unleashing his spell, to very impressive effect. At a glance, his bird of fire was as powerful as what Adel could pull off only after taking the time to charge Salamander’s Tail up with ki. Being able to repeatedly fire off attacks of that level with such speed was a massive advantage. And Adel most certainly needed an advantage now, as she didn’t have anything else even remotely as powerful in her arsenal.

“Is that even possible?”

“I had no idea. Normally, Ki Amplification works only when I familiarize myself with a spelltool to the point where I consider it an extension of my body. I suppose this is proof of how much I trust you.”

Adel’s mind raced behind her smile. She had never experienced this in the previous timeline. At the time, Euphinia only had one knight escort, so Adel had not had the chance to fight alongside trustworthy comrades. No matter the bond between knight and liege, Euphinia couldn’t cast spells using the anima from her own Sanctuaries. And it was generally unthinkable for a Saint to stand on the front lines next to their knight escort.

“I-Is that how it works? I’m really honored. Thank you for trusting me so

much, Adel.”

“And I thank *you*. You saved me just now.”

By now, Adel had lost much of the rage and despair that the Armor of Lamentation fed on. Instead, she had both trustworthy allies and power based on that trust. This made her quite happy, to be honest. And now, she would use that power to overcome the specter who represented her past self.

“You think we got him?” Mash asked, peering at the wall that Wolff had crashed into.

“RAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Before Adel could reply, Wolff burst out of the wall, roaring at the top of his lungs.

“Not quite yet!” Adel placed her hand on Mash’s shoulder. “Give him another taste!”

“Sure thing! Take this!”

Mash’s fingers flew, and another giant bird of blue fire zoomed at Wolff.

“Huuaaaarggghhh!”

With another wrenching yell, Wolff brought his sword overhead. The weapon was glowing with an ominous shine that had originated from the Armor of Lamentation. When the blade came down, it cleaved straight through Mash’s bird of fire.

“You swine have no hope of stopping me!”

“What incredible swordsmanship! I can’t believe he cut through my spell!”

“Can you cast it again?! Keep your hands moving! Don’t let him get close!”

This strategy of buffing Mash’s spells was only draining as much ki as it took Adel to maintain Salamander’s Tail as a double-bladed sword of blue flames. It was a lot easier on her than gathering ki for one big attack. She could sustain Mash spamming the spell.

“All right! I’ll give it a try!”

For the third time, a bird of fire rushed at Wolff.

“I said, this won’t work on me again!”

Wolff bisected it again, swinging his sword upward this time. However, when the two halves parted, what he saw wasn’t his view opening up, but a fourth bird that was now nearly on top of him.

“What?!”

Put simply, Mash had fired off his spell twice in quick succession, making sure the birds were flying as close to each other as possible. Wolff had not been able to see the second one until he’d cut down the first.

“But still, that’s not— Ugh!”

Wolff took a step forward and was about to swing down again, when he lost his balance due to having stepped too far. Of course, he wouldn’t normally make such an elementary mistake. No, he had done so because Adel had wrapped Salamander’s Tail around his foot and pulled. She had closed the distance while hiding behind Mash’s birds, biding her time.

“Damn you, you sneaky vixen!”

“Thanks for the compliment! Now receive your present!”

Once again, Mash’s spell exploded, propelling Wolff through the air.

“Nuaarrgh!”

This time, instead of being slammed into the wall, Wolff managed to kick off it, sending himself shooting toward Adel. He held his sword in front of himself as he closed in with incredible speed. He was even faster than before, possibly having surpassed Adel’s reflexes.

“Don’t get in the way of my countryyyyyy!” Wolff roared, his sword a split-second away from running Adel through.

“You can’t beat me with a shallow dream like that!” she shot back.

“Adel, watch out!” Mash cried.

Schwiiing!

“What?!”

Wolff realized with disbelief that his sword had lost half its length. The culprit

had been none other than the blade of black flames in Adel's hand. Adel herself now sported Cerberus's ears on her head and a fluffy tail behind her back. She had managed to bring out her trump card, Ki Possession, and fuse with Cerberus in the nick of time.

The Divine Beast's animated voice rang out in Adel's head. *"Mua ha ha! Thanks for waiting, Adel. It's time to give this craven coward a lesson!"*

You took so long, we were nearly done for, Adel replied. *Make sure you thank Mash later.*

Mash had helped buy quite a lot of time. If it wasn't for him, Adel likely would have been overwhelmed some time ago.

"Sorry about that. But now, you get to use my power as much as you want!"

"Gladly!"



Adel closed in on Wolff and drove a knee into his stomach. Unable to react in time, Wolff took the full brunt of the attack. The force of the impact shot through the Armor of Lamentation, crumpling it and sending a lance of pain through his abdomen.

“Ugh! What is happening?! What is that power?!”

“You are but a frog in a well! You think you’re worthy of ruling an entire country? You can’t even beat a mere knight escort! The very thought makes me laugh!”

“Shut up, you wench!”

Wolff swung his broken sword in a blind rage, unleashing countless flying slashes everywhere. Apparently the move didn’t require a full-length blade.

“It’s because I’m a ‘wench’ that I can use this power!”

Adel cut down every one of the flying slashes with Salamander’s Tail. The black flames that now formed its blades were, according to Cerberus, a legendary power from the myths passed down among his species. By fusing with her, his own strength had risen explosively, enabling him to grant her the usage of these black flames.

“Your misfortune was in never having met a liege who you could love and respect! That’s why you became trapped in delusions of grandeur, believing yourself to be superior to all others and never growing up! I am strong because I have Princess Euphinia! You have no one! And that’s why you can’t beat me!”

“I TOLD YOU TO SHUT UP!”

Wolff rushed toward Adel in a suicidal charge, holding his broken sword at his hip. Adel thrust the palm of her hand in his direction. The next instant, a ball of black fire appeared between the two of them.

“It’s time to knock you down a few pegs! You’ll pay for everything that you did to Melulu and her siblings!”

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

“AAAAAAAARGHHHH!”

The fireball swallowed Wolff entirely, then slammed into the far wall and kept going. When it finally dissipated, there was a massive tunnel that ran quite a ways into the earth beyond.

Adel pumped a fist. “Yes!”

“Wa ha ha! When we’re like this, we’re invincible! We can beat anyone with a single blow!” Cerberus cheered, his voice filled with pride.

“Don’t let it get to your head, though,” Adel chided. “Considering everything that happened beforehand, this was by no means an easy victory.”

“We did it, Adel! Look, the Sealing Plaque is also burning up. Now Melulu should be back to normal!” Mash pointed at a small plaque on the ground that had probably fallen out of Wolff’s pocket just moments ago. With how hot it was burning, there wouldn’t be much of it left.

“Indeed. This should have resolved the situation on Princess’s side.”

“What a relief. Now, as for this guy...” Mash turned his eyes to Wolff Sedis, the man lying next to where the Sealing Plaque had been. “It looks like the Armor of Lamentation saved his life. I can’t believe how tough that armor was. I doubt he has any strength left to resist, though.”

“That attack obliterated Elciel without a trace, yet there he is.”

There was no longer any sign of the Armor of Lamentation except a few melted fragments. Wolff himself, however, was still breathing, with all four limbs attached. Considering that the job of a suit of armor was to protect its wearer, the Armor of Lamentation had served its purpose beyond satisfaction.

“What do you want to do with him, Adel? Bring him before Her Highness? Or should we...”

“Hmm, good question.”

If they kept Wolff alive, he could be made to spill everything he knew about this incident. However, in light of everything he had done, he would most certainly be given the death penalty anyway. He was certainly aware of this, so he had no incentive to speak truthfully. He might even twist his narrative in a way that would harm Euphinia.

A more fundamental concern was that Wolff still had the ability to use ki. There was a very real possibility that he might manage to free himself and escape before the day of his execution, especially since people of this era had no idea what ki users were really capable of.

Adel's thoughts swirled in her mind as she approached Wolff. "So, how do you feel being beaten in a fight for the first time in all your years?"

Wolff sighed, then chuckled wryly. "Not as bad as I feared."

"The fact that you had never lost before was another misfortune. You never got an opportunity to know your limits. There are plenty of people who could use ki but failed to achieve their goals."

The version of Adel in the previous timeline had been one such person. If Adel had stayed in that timeline, being forced to live in a world without Euphinia, that bitterness might have led to another monster like Wolff...

"You...may have a point."

"Do you have any intention of confessing everything and atoning for what you did to your children?"

Before Wolff could reply, a voice rang out.

"Father!"

Adel whirled around to see Wolff's son, Dankel, entering the room. "Dankel Sedis! Did you come as backup?!"

Taking advantage of the split second that Adel was distracted, Wolff shoved her aside and took off running.

"Tch! You just don't know when to quit!"

"Ha ha ha ha! You've come at the perfect time, Dankel! Delay these fools! Buy me time to escape so I can regroup!" Wolff barreled toward the exit, cackling loudly.

"You're not getting away!"

Adel was impressed that Wolff could still move, but he had definitely gotten more sluggish. She had every intention of giving chase after dealing with

Dankel, if he was going to stand in her way. She was about to start running too, when...

“It’s all over, Father.”

“Ha ha ha ha! Ha ha h—”

With a sharp whistling sound, Wolff’s loud laughter came to an abrupt stop. His head fell to the ground, and the rest of his body crumpled lifelessly. Dankel caught the flying chakram that he had thrown when his father had passed by.

“What?! Why?!” Adel and Mash blurted, unable to believe what they had just witnessed.

“You heard him just now, didn’t you? To the very end, my father saw us as nothing more than tools and disposable pawns. Melulu asked me if this is truly all we are, if there were no other paths for us. I want to believe in her. This is my duty...as the oldest son.” Dankel cast his head down in shame, then approached Adel and kneeled. “I won’t run or hide. In exchange, please show mercy to Melulu and all my siblings!”

“I...see.” Adel nodded. “Very well. We will leave it to Princess and His Majesty to decide what to do. For now, come with us.”

“Understood.”

“Adel, do you mind helping me bury Wolff after everything’s over?” Mash asked. “At the end of the day, he was a victim too. Malka was the real mastermind.”

“If you want to, then I’ll accompany you.”

“Thank you.” Mash barked a small laugh of derision, seemingly directed at himself. “This is how Malka does things. They spout righteous ideals, but don’t bat an eye at the most inhumane things done for the sake of those ideals.”



Euphinia took one step into her room and took a deep breath, inhaling the smell of books. “I’m finally back! There’s nothing like my own room, after all!”

The happy smile on her face naturally made Adel smile too. Or at least, it would have, if her attention wasn’t completely occupied. Adel was carrying

dozens of books that Euphinia had purchased from used book stores in Sidel. The stack was so high that it threatened to fall over the instant Adel let down her guard.

“P-Princess! Where do you want me to place all these?!”

“Right, Adel! Sorry. Please stack them up in a corner of that bookshelf, please.”

“Right away!”

“Can someone take this stuff off my back too?”

“You can leave those by the door, Pudding. They’re souvenirs for everyone at the castle. I’ll pass them out later.”

Mash approached Cerberus and untied the mountain of bundles on his back. “You’ll be passing out *all* of these, Your Highness? That’s going to take quite some work.”

“Well, it won’t be fair otherwise!”

Adel sighed. “I suppose it *would* make them happy.”

“It would, wouldn’t it?!” Euphinia beamed.

Adel knew that Euphinia had visited a ton of bookstores and souvenir stores and picked up a lot of things. After all, she had been the one carrying the bags on many of these trips. However, it was a fresh experience seeing how happy the princess looked after all the shopping.

As Euphinia sighed in contentment after putting all the books away, Adel engraved the memory of her expression into her mind. “She looks so happy...”

“H-Her Highness is a bit of a big spender, don’t you think?” Mash asked Adel in a whisper.

“There’s no problem!” Adel declared with confidence. “Everything in this country belongs to the royal family! As such, Princess can do whatever she wants with it!”

Both Mash and Melulu, who had overheard, laughed.

“So this is Princess Euphinia’s room...” murmured the new face in the group.

It was a young girl with bat wings on her head and back who appeared to be in the same age group as Adel and the others. Her appearance was very humanlike, but she was a Divine Beast. This was the Lilith—a species also known as Dream Demons—who had been forced by the Sealing Plaque to possess Melulu. After Adel and Mash destroyed the Plaque, she had completed the contract with Euphinia. She was quite graceful and ladylike—though not quite Euphinia’s equal—and overall a far cry from Pegasus. Adel was earnestly hoping that thanks to her joining, she would be seeing Pegasus a lot less in the future.

“Please think of this as your room too, and make yourself at home!”

“Thank you, Princess Euphinia. You’re too kind.”

Euphinia smiled, but then her face turned serious. “Now, after we put everything away, let’s go see my father.”

A lot had happened on this expedition. The man known as Mad Emperor Tristan in the previous timeline turned out to be a surprisingly good-natured person. On the flip side, whereas Malka and Torust had been allies before, their relationship in this timeline was revealed to be so precarious that Malka was plotting to assassinate Tristan.

When parting, Tristan had said that he wanted to keep the truth under wraps as much as possible. There were voices within Torust who wanted their country to carve out and seize land from others, and this incident would serve as the perfect pretext for them. In the worst-case scenario, things might even end up with Torust declaring war against Malka in revenge.

Tristan had then repeated the pet theory that he’d first told Adel: that instead of fighting each other, humans ought to beat back the frontiers of profane land to reclaim the borders of the Holy Kingdom. To this end, Tristan was willing to overlook what Melulu had done and didn’t want her punished. Euphinia had then promised to come to his aid if he ever needed it in the future.

All of this had to be reported to the king, even though Wendill was a tiny nation without the power to act on any of this information. This timeline might not have Mad Emperor Tristan and Elciel, but there were endless seeds of conflict that could erupt into another Great War. Knowing that the talk with the

king was going to take some time and get quite serious, Euphinia couldn't help bracing herself a little.

Suddenly, the coarse voices of the former gladiator slaves of Navarra rang out and they rushed in.

"Boss Lady! Boss Ladyyyy!"

Adel frowned. "What is it? Pipe down."

"Yes, ma'am! There's a letter addressed to you!"

"Hm?" Adel accepted the letter and checked who it was from. It turned out to be from Tristan.

"Oh my, he writes so fast!" Euphinia exclaimed, looking happy for some reason. "It's just as he said!"

When Tristan had made a full recovery and headed home, Adel had seen him off. The memory now flashed through her mind.



After making all his farewells, Tristan called Adel back. "S-Saint Adel! Um... C-Can we meet again?!"

Adel tilted her head in puzzlement. "I am Princess Euphinia's knight escort. Where she goes, I go."

"In...uh...in that case! Princess Euphinia, would you be interested in paying Torust a visit?! You could think of it as expanding your horizons! I'm sure it'll be worth your time!"

"Of course, Prince Tristan. I always welcome chances to see the big, wide world and to learn from other cultures."

"Y-You do?! Then please do come to Torust! A-And bring Saint Adel with you!"

"I'd love to. Is that fine with you, Adel?"

"Naturally. I will follow you wherever you go, Princess."

"In that case, Saint Adel, would you mind if we k-kept in touch through letters?! So you can send word of when you are coming!"

“I...suppose? I don’t mind.”

Obtaining information on things happening in Torust or other foreign countries could prove useful in protecting Euphinia’s future.

Tristan’s face burst into a grin. “Really?! Where should I send them to?!”

“Um, I don’t have a residence of my own. I suppose sending it to the palace should do.”

By this point, Adel was getting a little confused as to why Tristan looked so happy.

“The palace it is! I shall write as soon as I can!”

Once again, Tristan beamed pure sunshine.



Adel looked at the letter in her hand, scratching her face as she looked at a bit of a loss. “I didn’t expect him to write *this* quickly...”

“Make sure you write him a reply.”

“Of course, Princess. But, I’m not good with this kind of thing. In fact, I’ve never written a letter before.”

Adel sighed. In the previous timeline, writing had been entirely out of the question. She wasn’t sure she could now either.

“This is a good opportunity to learn how to write letters. I’ll teach you.”

“Thank you, Princess!”

For Adel, any time spent with Euphinia was heavenly. Her past self had also thoroughly enjoyed the times when Euphinia read aloud to him.

“But first, we must report back to my father.”

“Yes, Princess!”

Adel followed Euphinia out the door, happily looking forward to the time she would spend writing letters with the princess.



Later that night, Euphinia was in her bedroom. There were three pillows lined

up on her very spacious bed.

“Phew, we can finally rest. Today was quite tiring, was it not?”

“Y-Yes, Princess!” Adel replied, stammering a little.

Today, Euphinia had asked Adel and Melulu to sleep with her. Adel had acquiesced right away since it was a request from Euphinia, but she still felt like she was doing something highly inappropriate.

“Yes, Princess.”

Melulu, who would normally be poking fun at Adel and dragging her into the bed, looked downcast today.

The reason was, of course, because she had been a part of the plot to assassinate Tristan in Sidel. Even though she had been controlled, she still felt deeply guilty. Before returning to Welna, she had even asked Euphinia to relieve her of her position, saying that she no longer had the right to be a knight escort. Euphinia had barely managed to dissuade her by suggesting that she first report everything to the king and let him decide.

That reporting had just recently finished. Thanks to Euphinia’s supplication and Tristan’s wish to not hold Melulu responsible, the king agreed to let Melulu remain as Euphinia’s knight escort. Of course, this did nothing to lift the guilt in Melulu’s chest. That process was going to take a long time.

To make matters worse, the Sedis family would be facing hard times for a while. Dankel would be taking over the business and caring for their siblings, but trust was hard to regain once lost. Wolff had been a terrible father who thought of his children as nothing more than tools, but there was no denying that he had been a shrewd and successful merchant. Dankel had very big shoes to fill, in multiple ways.

Knowing all this, Melulu felt even worse that she alone would get to take things easy staying here at the palace.

It was because Euphinia understood how Melulu felt that she had brought up this sleepover. She wanted to help assuage Melulu’s feelings, even if by only a little, and to give her as much support as she could. Adel had been called to help her out.

Adel understood the intention, and was deeply moved by this display of how much Euphinia cared for those in her service. However, sleeping with *two* innocent young maidens made her feel double the guilt. She would have been a lot more comfortable sleeping while huddled up with Mash and the former slaves.

From her position in the center of the bed, Euphinia said, “Melulu, I’m sorry for forcing you to join me tonight.”

“Oh, no, I cannot be more grateful, Princess. Not only did you let me stay as your knight escort, you even showed such leniency toward my family.”

“You are very important to me, Melulu. That’s why I’ll always do everything I can for you. Would you continue staying with me and protecting me as my knight escort?”

Euphinia gave Melulu a tender smile filled with affection. Seeing this, tears started flowing from Melulu’s eyes, wetting her pillow.

“But Princess, I don’t deserve such words from you. Unlike Adel, who came to the palace purely out of love for you, I came here with ulterior motives. I was a tool sent by my father, ordered to seduce anyone who could bring noble blood to our family.”

“Even so, it doesn’t change the fact that you are important to me,” Euphinia said, softly stroking Melulu’s head. “You’re like my big sister, always bright and with a ready laugh.”

Adel added, “You say you were a tool, but I could tell that your feelings toward Princess were sincere. Those feelings aren’t something a mere tool could have. You’ve always been Melulu, and you’ll always be Melulu. It would make me happy too if you continued serving Princess with me. As comrades who both love her from the bottom of our hearts.”

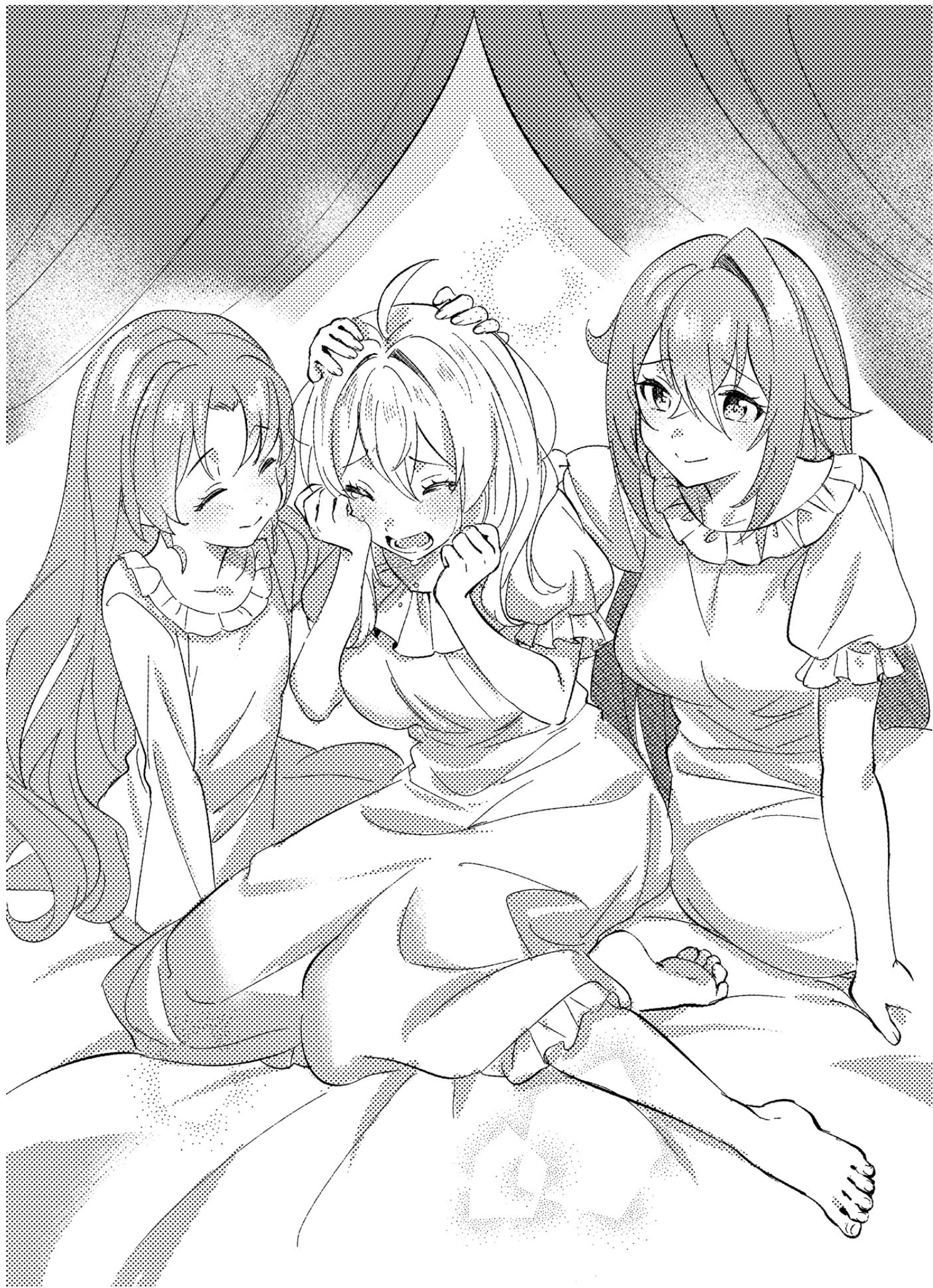
“Princess! Adel!”

After that, Melulu bawled her eyes out for quite some time. It took Adel and Euphinia a lot of effort to console her, but Adel treasured every moment of it. In the previous timeline, Euphinia had the Armor of Lamentation in her possession and Melulu had been deceased. This time, the armor was lost, but Melulu had

returned to Euphinia, safe and sound. There was no doubt that this was a part of Euphinia's happiness that Adel had managed to restore.

History was definitely changing. Just thinking about it filled Adel with satisfaction and happiness.

Adel woke up the next morning and found, to her slight distress, Euphinia sound asleep, hugging her with her face buried in her chest. Apparently the princess had picked up an odd habit from her time in Sidel.



Afterword

First of all, thank you so much for picking up this book. This has been volume two of *Sword Saint Adel's Second Chance*. I hope you enjoyed it.

Also, thank you so much for all the fan letters you sent after volume one got published! I debuted in 2012, so I've been doing this for over ten years, but it was my first time getting fan letters. It was a very new experience. Before then, I had thought they were something that existed only in fantasies. When I actually received some, it made me really happy. I'll continue doing my best to meet your expectations, so I hope you continue to support me!

As I mentioned briefly, I've been writing for quite a while now, but my condition hasn't been the best lately. Not only have I started going to an osteopathic clinic for shoulder and back pain, when I tried the device that measures your biological age or something, it said I was 55 years old. That's more than 10 years above my actual age!

Then again, if I was actually 55 years old, I'd be close to the age when I can get a pension, so, yay. The goal of all corporate workers is to either earn enough to live out the rest of their lives or to work long enough that they become eligible for pension. So, I'd be getting a leg up toward getting out of the rat race. Though to be honest, both goals seem equally hard to reach.

The two year mark since I became a full-time writer is coming up. And man, it hasn't been easy. I can't stop thinking about the fact that even though I'm fine at the moment, when I finish my current work, I'd have none left, and therefore I'd have no way of supporting myself. It's like a constant debuff that keeps poisoning my mental state. Of course, I could free myself of it by getting a side job, but then I'd get the physical debuff of constant sleep deprivation.

Well, it's not easy either way, but at the moment, I'm doing all I can to prolong my life span as a full-time writer. To that end, I'm working out many plans to increase my work.

Also, to avoid bankrupting my creativity, I'm deliberately watching more

anime and movies this year. This is why I've been to the cinema quite a few times this year. I loved the Mario movie! The art blew me away in every scene. They went full throttle from start to end. Every minute was worth my time. When I write, I try to think of scenes that are fun on their own. Then, by chaining them together, I end up with a book that's fun from cover to cover. I feel like that movie strongly resonated with this philosophy. That's why I found it such a blast to watch.

Naturally, I wrote this volume of *Sword Saint Adel* in the same way. So, if you feel like the composition and development of the story is laid out really well, it's all just in your head! Honestly, I don't focus on that sort of thing when I write. It probably just ends up falling into place that way because of my twenty years as a software engineer. Seriously, you'd be surprised by how useful my programming experience is for writing light novels.

To wrap, I want to sincerely thank my editor, N-sama; the illustrator, Unapoppo-sama; as well as everyone else who gave their all making this book happen. As always, the illustrations of Adel are super cute. I love her so much!

With that, I shall now take my leave!

Bonus Short Stories

Massage

“Yah!”

Early one morning, the blue flames of Salamander’s Tail swished through the air in a courtyard within Wendill Palace. With blades sprouting from both ends of the handle, the weapon started rotating with increasing speed, becoming louder in the process. This continued for some time, until the sword flashed in a horizontal slash that looked like the final flourish of a sword dance.

Adel exhaled, then stopped moving.

“Hmm, looks like your movements are a little better than they were yesterday,” Cerberus noted from where he had been watching.

“Maybe.” Adel rotated each shoulder in turn, then rolled her neck. Maybe she really was moving better than yesterday, but she was hesitant to acknowledge it.

“You don’t look too happy about it.”

“It’s not that I’m not happy, but...”

Ever since Adel had become a woman, her neck and shoulders had grown stiffer by the day. It had taken some time for the effects to become noticeable, but she now had decreased muscle mass, and she had two lumps that were significantly larger than average stuck to her front. Despite that, she was in top condition today. The stiffness seemed to have gone away, and her joints felt fluid.

Suddenly, Melulu appeared. Upon spotting Adel, she approached with a smile. “Hey, Adel! Morning! Lemme join you. Let’s practice together.”

Instead of answering, Adel glared at her with resentment.

“What?” Melulu asked quizzically. “Why’re you making that face? Uh, do you

have a stomachache?”

“Are you really going to play dumb? Have you forgotten what you did yesterday?!”

“Uh, what?”

“Don’t you ‘what’ me! You barged in when I was in the bath and groped me all over!”

Melulu often wanted to bathe with Adel. However, she had been a lot more touchy-feely than usual yesterday, all while claiming that she was giving Adel a massage to help her loosen up. Adel did in fact feel much better, but she still thought Melulu had touched her a lot more than was necessary. In the end, Adel had reached the end of her rope and slipped away.

“Did I? The last thing I remember was going to sleep. You’re saying I was groping you all over? Like...this?”

For demonstration’s sake, Melulu reached out and grabbed Adel’s chest.

“Aha! So you *do* remember! As I said, stop it!”

“Nah, I’m pretty sure I didn’t do anything to you yesterday.”

“There’s no point in denying it!”

“But the massage felt good, didn’t it? How’s your condition today?” asked another voice from high up.

Everyone looked up to see a young girl with bat-like wings on her head and back. It was Lilith, the new Divine Beast that Euphinia had contracted with.

Adel gasped. “Lilith?! How do you know about—”

“Because that was me. I possessed this girl and borrowed her body for a while. I like seeing the faces people make when they’re feeling good.” Lilith giggled. *“The way you were trying so hard to muffle your moans was really cute.”*

“You can keep those remarks to yourself! I mean, It’s true that I feel better, but—”

“Huh? What’s going on? Did Lily do something?”

“Apparently she possessed you and used your body. You need to be more

careful.”

“No, no, I don’t care about that. *Where* did she touch you? What’d she do, specifically?”

Although normal people couldn’t hear the voices of Divine Beasts, Divine Beasts had no trouble understanding human speech. Lilith approached Adel, hands outstretched.

“Right here, and like this!”

“I said, stop it!” Adel wailed. “Don’t gang up on me!”

“Oh, good,” Cerberus sighed wryly. *“It’s gonna get even louder around here.”* He curled up and settled himself comfortably.

Heavyweight Drinker

Late one night, Adel and Mash were sitting across from each other in the knight escorts’ sitting room inside Wendill Palace.

“I see. So that’s what’s happened in Malka...”

Mash had finally shared the full details of his background with Adel. He had told her that Malka was his birthplace, and that members of his family—including Angela—all held positions of power within the country’s military and government.

“The people had had enough of the former king’s tyranny, so they called for his head. But the August family is now purging everyone who doesn’t step in line with them. They’re doing the exact same thing as the despot they hated so vehemently. I tried to speak up and stop them, but this was the result.”

Mash pointed at his head, which had been replaced with that of a lion monster.

“They captured you and sold you to the Moving Coliseum of Navarra?”

“Exactly. We may be related, but I’m terrified of my sister.”

“Does that mean the upper echelons of Malka have ties with Cardinal Navarra?”

“Mhm. Not everyone is involved, of course, but some certainly are.”

“Strange. The more I hear, the more I can’t imagine Malka and Torust forming an alliance.”

“An alliance? Malka and Torust?”

“Uh, it’s just some rumor I heard.”

In the previous timeline, Malka and Torust had joined hands, forming the Northern Federation and kicking off the Great War. This was the history that Adel had lived through.

“Well, whoever said that has no idea what they’re talking about,” Mash chuckled. “Of the Four World Powers, Torust is the only one that’s an empire. That means their head of state possesses the most power. They’re the last country that Malka would ever want to work with.”

“I did get that vibe, yes. After all, Angela did just attempt to assassinate Prince Tristan.”

Adel suspected that these two countries had also originally been at each other’s throats in the previous timeline. The War Saint and Mad Emperor must have then done something further down the line that drastically altered that dynamic. Even though Elciel was already out of the picture and Tristan was showing no signs at all of turning into the Mad Emperor, these changes might, in turn, lead to other problems later on. The world was complicated like that.

“My heart was in my mouth the whole time. If my sister had succeeded in killing Prince Tristan, the Kingdoms would have been plunged into war practically overnight. I shudder to imagine how many would have died.”

“Remember that the patch of profane land in question was within our borders. In the worst-case scenario, the blame might have been directed toward Princess. It’d have been a catastrophe.”

“I’m really sorry about my family.”

“Nah, none of it is your fault. Don’t let it get you down.”

“I can’t help thinking how different things would be if I had managed to stop my family. But this is what ended up happening to me. I was entirely out of my

depth. I hate how powerless I am.”

“As I said, don’t let it get you down. You’re still alive, and you’re here now. Your journey has only just begun.”

“That’s...true. Thanks, Adel.”

Adel stood up and fetched a bottle and two glasses from a shelf. It was a fine wine taken from the palace kitchen. All wines served in the palace were of exceptional quality.

“For now, let’s drink all those worries away!”

“Uh, you can drink?”

“What’re you saying? Ha ha ha! I may not look like it, but I’m a heavyweight drinker!”

Adel had been a heavyweight in the previous timeline, gaining a rather high tolerance from drinking quite often.

“Haven’t you only just become of age? Since when have you been drinking?”

“Don’t sweat the small stuff. Come on, grab your glass and let’s toast.”

“Ch-Cheers!” Mash took a sip, then sighed contently. “Whew, this is delicious.”

“Ha ha ha... It be’er be! *Hic!*”

“Adel?! How are you so red after only one sip?! You sure you’re okay?!”

“Of ’caaaause... Zzz...”

“Hey, wake up! Adel! You most definitely are not a heavyweight drinker!”



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Sword Saint Adel's Second Chance: Volume 2

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