

# My Pet Saintess is a Saintess 1



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MEDIA



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ORE NO PET HA SEIJOSAMA Vol. 1

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Hanashi Media, LLC  
838 Walker Road Suite 21-2 103  
Dover  
Delaware (DE) 19904  
<https://www.hanashi.media/>

**ISBN:** 978-1-961788-10-7





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# My Pet is a Saintess

Muko-Buncho

## Chapter 1: Dream

**A***h, so it's that dream again.*

Yamagata Tatsumi knew one thing, and that was that he was dreaming.

*Hmm, isn't there a word for dreams where you know you're dreaming? Lucid dream, right?* The thought felt somehow abstract, and Tatsumi continued watching the now-familiar dream as if it were someone else's.

Was he in some kind of cellar? It was a small room—about the size of a school classroom—and dimly lit. In the middle of the floor, a woman was on her knees, praying fervently. Everything around her—the walls, the floor, even the ceiling—was stone. The only source of light came from a handful of flickering candles.

The woman looked to be in her late teens or early twenties—making her a few years older than Tatsumi, who had just repeated his first year of high school. Her long, straight hair reached down to her waist. In the red light of the candles, it shone a bright copper, though it may have actually been blonde; it seemed more platinum than golden.

Tatsumi couldn't make out the color of her eyes because they were closed. *Too bad*, thought Tatsumi, *they must have been beautiful*. From her features she appeared to be of European descent, but she didn't look anything like most of the Americans or Brits that Tatsumi had met.

Her well-defined nose bridge and the sharp contours of her jawline were perfect. Looking closer, Tatsumi could see that her delicate, petal-like lips were in constant motion, probably chanting spells or blessings in a language unfamiliar to him.

*Saintess.*

The word appeared in Tatsumi's mind without warning.

Every time he had this dream she was there on the floor, chanting or praying or whatever she was doing, and the more he thought about it, the less it

seemed like she was chanting spells. She looked more like a holy maiden, praying fervently.

Tatsumi's eyes fluttered open.

Groggy and fresh from sleep, Tatsumi looked up at the familiar ceiling and tried to think—when had all of this started? He fixed the image of the holy maiden in his mind as he wracked his brain. About a year ago, he figured. Back then, he'd only been having the dream once a month or so. After a few times, he realized this was not normal.

Then the dream started coming more frequently.

Once a month became twice, then three times. Finally, it was once a week, then once every three days—and now, for about ten days, he had dreamed of the saintess every night.

The words '*ten days ago*' rang a bell in his mind.

"Ten days ago? Wasn't that the day I... lost Chiko...?"

*Chiko.* His last and most beloved family member.

About a year and a half ago, Tatsumi had lost his parents and sister in a tragic car accident. To celebrate his successful admission to the high school of his dreams, the family had set out on a trip to a hot spring resort. As his dad drove, a large truck whose driver had fallen asleep crashed into them.

Tatsumi shouldn't have survived. Everyone called it a miracle. Of course, the rest of his family had been killed almost instantly. When he woke up several days later in the hospital, all he could remember was the sight of the front of the truck smashing through their windshield.

With fractures in several parts of his body, he was hospitalized for over two months after regaining consciousness. And in those two months, Tatsumi's entire life changed.

After his discharge, Tatsumi learned that the neighbors had taken care of the funeral arrangements—paid for by the family's life insurance. They buried both his parents and his sister that day.

Fortunately, the payout would also provide enough money to support Tatsumi into adulthood. A lawyer had explained the details to him, but honestly, Tatsumi couldn't remember much of it.

At his age, Tatsumi was in no position to manage the insurance money himself, so the responsibility fell to his dad's sister—his only living relative.

All Tatsumi knew about his aunt was that she was in her mid-thirties and unmarried. She lived quite far from Tatsumi's family, and they rarely had any meaningful interactions. In fact, she was so busy with work that she didn't even attend the funeral. She also categorically refused to take Tatsumi in and look after him.

"On paper, I'm your guarantor and legal guardian. But beyond that, let's stay out of each other's way, okay? Or would you rather be put into a foster home?" she had asked him bluntly.

What else was there to do? Tatsumi began to live on his own, with his aunt as his guardian in name only. Every month, money appeared in his bank account for his tuition and living expenses. He wasn't even sure if it was his aunt doing this or the insurance company.

Of course, there was a possibility that she was pocketing some of the money intended for him. Tatsumi wasn't naïve. However, he had no intention of investigating it or bringing it up. If he did, and his hunch was right, his aunt would be deemed unfit as a guardian, and Tatsumi would be forced into an institution. He would rather live alone.

Tatsumi got rid of the family home and moved into an apartment near his school. The house was too big for just him, and the maintenance costs and property taxes would have put a considerable strain on his monthly stipend. But more importantly, living in a house filled with memories of his deceased family was just too painful.

Although he'd managed to get into the school of his choice, Tatsumi's high school experience started out far from ideal. He spent the first crucial months, which should have been a new beginning in his life, in a hospital bed. Even after he got out, he had to endure a painful rehabilitation program. By the time he'd

fully recovered and returned to his daily routine, the first semester of his freshman year was over and summer vacation had begun.

Tatsumi was inevitably an outsider when he showed up for semester two. It seemed his classmates had been informed of his tragedy beforehand. While he wasn't bullied or maliciously treated, he felt out of place and often found himself alone. Everyone treated him with kid gloves, as if he were fragile.

And all that missed work meant Tatsumi struggled academically. His grades plummeted, and before long he was one of the lowest-performing students in his class. Despite this, Tatsumi kept going to school. He remembered how proud his family had been when he was accepted, and he wanted to honor their memory.

However, with lackluster grades, no clubs to immerse himself in, and no close friends, he soon found himself attending high school out of habit.

Still, he kept going. That was because he had Chiko, the last remaining member of his family, to come home to. By being home at the time of the accident, Chiko had escaped the tragedy that befell the rest of the family.

Tatsumi had met Chiko over a decade before. On Tatsumi's sixth birthday, his parents brought home a baby cockatiel. From that day on, Tatsumi and Chiko were inseparable. Tatsumi fed Chiko when she was too young to eat on her own. As the bird grew older, they enjoyed ice cream together during the hot summers and huddled together in the kotatsu in the cold winters. In the spring they went for walks, and in the fall, they shared in the bounty of the season. Whenever Chiko fell ill, Tatsumi rushed her to the vet, and when Tatsumi caught a cold, Chiko watched over her with a worried look.

But as with every special bond, the time inevitably came to say goodbye. Chiko had died just ten days before. She breathed her last in Tatsumi's arms, as if falling into a deep sleep. The feeling of her soft warm body gradually turning cold was a sensation Tatsumi knew he would never forget.

In his apartment, suddenly emptier than he had ever thought possible, Tatsumi cried silently all night. He cried and cried, and when dawn broke, he carried Chiko's lifeless body to a nearby riverbank and buried his dear friend. He made a small grave, and even though all he could find were wildflowers, he

placed them in front of it reverently. Standing before the grave, hands clasped in prayer, Tatsumi prayed for Chiko's soul.

For what seemed like an eternity, Tatsumi prayed. He wished he could have prayed forever, but reality beckoned. His high school life was entering its second spring, though to Tatsumi, it felt like the first. With his bad grades and numerous missed days, it looked like he would be repeating last year. No wonder he hadn't found the motivation to come to school yet this semester.

Or at least that was one reason. The other reason Tatsumi had been scarce at school was because he'd been spending every possible hour with Chiko, who was showing signs of aging. Tatsumi had barely left his apartment that week, staying by Chiko's side almost constantly.

But with Chiko no longer around, Tatsumi made a decision: he would leave high school. With no close friends at school, and no emotional anchor in Chiko, he felt no attachment to his high school life.

Back at the apartment, Tatsumi changed into his school uniform for the first time in a long time and went to school. But instead of his first class, he went straight to the staff room and silently handed his resignation form to his homeroom teacher—whom he was meeting for the first time. The teacher tried to talk him out of it, but there was no passion in the words, and just like that, Tatsumi's high school life came to a quiet end.

That was when he began dreaming of the young woman praying in the stone room every night. As he mourned Chiko's loss, Tatsumi locked himself in his apartment. During the day, he did nothing but stare at the birdcage Chiko had slept in. At night, he'd crawl into bed and dream about the holy maiden. This had been his routine for ten days. He felt neither hope nor purpose.

Pushing himself up from the bed, Tatsumi grabbed his cell phone from beside his pillow. He began flipping through photo after photo of Chiko, reminiscing about the memories they'd shared.

"Chiko... what do I do? Without you... I just... I can't do this without you—I need you..."

This was a question Tatsumi had asked himself countless times over the past ten days. He stared intently at Chiko's face on the small screen of his phone.

The innocent eyes looked back at him. Wrapped in feathers that were almost silver-gray, Chiko's head stood out, a brilliant pure white. This was Chiko, the bird that had grown up with Tatsumi since his childhood, his most beloved and last remaining family member.

## Chapter 2: Summoning

That night, Tatsumi had the same dream again. Although he woke up, he remained lying on his back, staring blankly at the ceiling as he remembered the dream. It was a strangely vivid dream, one that he could remember in great detail. And it felt like the dream was becoming more real with each passing day.

In a dimly lit underground room, the holy maiden was praying fervently as she always did. In this particular dream, Tatsumi could clearly feel the intensity of her devotion as clearly as he could see the intricate details of the scene. Beads of sweat formed on her skin, which was as white as pristine snow. Eventually, these beads of sweat rolled down her motionless body and fell to the stone floor with a soft patter.

“Why... why do I keep having this dream?” Tatsumi muttered to himself, his eyes not leaving the ceiling.

There must be a reason for having the same dream so often. A common explanation might be that someone was calling to him—a so-called ‘isekai’ cliché. However, while such events might be commonplace in novels or comics, the idea of being suddenly summoned somewhere seemed completely unrealistic to him. After all, why should he be summoned? Tatsumi was just a normal sixteen-year-old boy.

In fiction, it was a common plot where a princess from another world would randomly summon a hero to save her kingdom, but the idea that this could happen to him was hard to believe.

More importantly, he understood that he couldn’t keep living like this. He had to move on. He couldn’t let grief weigh him down forever. Steeling his resolve, Tatsumi slowly got out of bed and started to change his clothes.

After dropping out of high school, the least Tatsumi could do was look for a part-time job. With that thought in mind, he finished getting dressed, washed his face, and briefly considered going to the closest grocery store for a job

magazine. However, as his eyes drifted to the corner of the room where Chiko's cage once stood, an overwhelming sadness washed over him.

Memories of the happy days he had spent with Chiko flooded his mind, and with them came the painful realization—Chiko was really gone. The thought paralyzed him. Grief filled him once again, leaving him without the will to do anything. His appetite had gone with his friend; since Chiko's death, he'd only eaten the bare minimum, most of which was the instant food he'd stockpiled earlier.

At the end of the day, Tatsumi stayed in his room and did nothing. Again, he sat on his bed and browsed through pictures of his parents, his sister, and Chiko on his phone. At some point, he picked up the acoustic guitar that was propped up next to his bed and began to absentmindedly strum on it.

The guitar had been his dad's. When Tatsumi was young, his dad would play songs for him on it all the time. The guy had been in a band once, and he'd harbored hopes of becoming a professional guitarist. Although he eventually gave up on that dream, he often bragged about how close he came to achieving it. Tatsumi himself, though no professional, had learned from his dad and could play the guitar decently.

As Tatsumi gently plucked the strings, he reminisced, "Whenever I played the guitar like this, Chiko would chirp along, like she was singing..."

The memory only darkened his mood further, but as his mind filled with the image of Chiko sitting beside him and singing along, Tatsumi continued to gently strum the guitar. The notes echoed in the silent room, each one carrying the weight of his grief and nostalgia.

What happened next came without warning.

Suddenly, an ethereal light blossomed around Tatsumi's bed.

There was nothing on the bed that should have been emitting such a light—just the usual sheets and blankets.

And yet, somehow, the bed was the epicenter of this mysterious glow. Mystified, Tatsumi could only squint and try to make out what was happening behind the dazzling dance of light.

The light was a silvery hue, devoid of any heat. In fact, it emanated an almost sacred aura—it was at once blindingly bright and gently soothing.

Just then, Tatsumi noticed something at his feet. There, bathed in the silver light, was a collection of what looked like geometric patterns surrounded by symbols and characters.

The brilliant light seemed to make the patterns shine even brighter, and to Tatsumi's limited knowledge, they seemed eerily similar to magic circles. Just as this realization hit him, his consciousness was swallowed by a deep, enveloping darkness.

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Tatsumi painstakingly fluttered his eyelids open, as if walking through a fog.

Everything around him was dim. *Is it still night?* he wondered.

But when he went to look out the window that was above the headboard of his bed, it wasn't there. In its place was a solid, elaborately carved stone wall. To make things even weirder, intricately decorated candelabras were attached to the wall. They looked expensive, and their candles were all lit, glowing warmly.

*Wait, since when does my room have stone walls and candlesticks?*

His groggy mind tried to piece things together.

After he'd sold the house, the apartment he and Chiko moved into was a modest two-bedroom. It was spacious enough to live alone—well, until recently, alone with a pet—and, to be honest, he had grown quite fond of it.

However, said apartment definitely did not have stone walls. In fact, it would be quite unusual to find an apartment with stone walls in modern Japan.

So... this was not Tatsumi's room. His confusion growing, he propped himself up to survey his surroundings.

Stone walls surrounded him on all four sides. Not just the walls, but the ceiling and the floor were made of stone.

*Wait, this looks... familiar. Very familiar, in fact.*

Scratching the back of his head, Tatsumi scanned the room once more. Then his gaze landed on something... or rather, someone.

A woman was kneeling on the floor, staring intently at him with large, ruby-red eyes. Her long platinum hair cascaded around her, with one strand sticking up at an odd angle. Perhaps what you might call 'stupid hair.'

The young woman's eyes were wide open in what must have been sheer terror, but her gaze was unwavering. Tatsumi found himself staring back, with no idea what to think.

Then, recognition dawned on him.

"You're... the saintess I've been dreaming about?"

Indeed, she bore a striking resemblance to the pious woman he had seen praying in his lucid dreams.

Tatsumi glanced around again to confirm that this was also the basement-like setting from his dream.

Could this woman be the same person?

But before Tatsumi could turn his gaze back to the saintly figure, he was thrown off balance by a violent jolt. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he couldn't withstand the sudden force and found himself falling backward.

*What in the hell...?* As panic set in, a curtain of shimmering platinum hair danced across his vision. He felt a tight embrace and was enveloped in a sweet scent.

It took Tatsumi a moment to realize that the woman from his dreams was... holding him.

Suddenly, she lunged forward and wrapped her arms tightly around Tatsumi. After holding him for a few moments, she pulled back slightly and looked intently into his face. Their eyes met—her crimson orbs and his dark ones locked in close proximity. Glistening tears filled her sparkling red eyes, yet she smiled warmly at him.

“At last... It feels like I’ve been waiting an eternity to see you again,” she whispered.

“Wait, have we met before?” Tatsumi replied, genuinely surprised.

“Yes... Your face, your voice, your smell... I’ve never forgotten it, not for a moment,” she said, her voice thick with emotion. With that, the tears she had been holding back spilled over and fell onto Tatsumi’s face.

Feeling the wetness on his cheek, Tatsumi became aware of their position. The two were intertwined on the bed, the woman practically on top of him. He could feel the soft contours of her body pressing against him, yet she was surprisingly light. He especially noticed the softness of her breast, pressed against his. Every time she moved, her body brushed against him, teasing and tantalizing.

He hadn’t noticed it in his dreams, but her clothing was a thin piece of cloth that barely covered her, revealing more than it hid. Despite the dimness of the room, they were so close that Tatsumi could see her skin faintly through the fabric.

Before he realized it, Tatsumi’s gaze was drawn to the distinct curve of the woman’s cleavage. The sight made him nervous, and a warm blush spread across his cheeks.

The pink tips of her breasts were hidden against Tatsumi’s chest, but there was no doubt that this woman sported considerable assets. If he were to estimate her ‘Breast Fighting Strength,’ he would bet that it was between 85 and 90.

Tatsumi sighed. Even now, he couldn’t help thinking a thought like that, could he? *Men really are pitiful creatures*, he thought, as if he were talking about someone else.

Whether she noticed his gaze or not, the woman smiled again and said something completely baffling.

“It gives me great pleasure to meet you again... my lord.”

“Huh? Wait, what did you...? My... lord? Are you talking to... me?”

“Yes. Aren’t you my lord?”

The happiness showed plainly in her smile. She really did think she had met Tatsumi before. But no matter how hard he searched his mind, Tatsumi couldn’t remember ever meeting such a beauty. He had never really known a non-Japanese person; at most, he’d spoken to a foreigner once or twice when they’d asked for directions.

What was more, her striking appearance—the platinum blonde hair and ruby-red eyes—was unforgettable. If he’d ever met someone like this...

She must have sensed his confusion, because the woman went on, “It’s understandable that you don’t remember me. The version of me you know doesn’t look like this.”

“What do you mean?” Tatsumi was even more perplexed now.

She giggled. Pulling herself away from him, she sat up on the bed.

“I’m sorry for not introducing myself before. My name is Calsedonia Chrysopraxe. I hold the position of priest in the Savaiv Temple of the Kingdom of Largofiery.” Maintaining her seiza-like pose, she gave a silent bow.

“My name is Tatsumi Yamagata,” Tatsumi said quietly.

“Yes, I know,” Calsedonia replied with a gentle smile that any man would have gotten lost in. It was a radiant smile, truly of the highest order. But it didn’t help Tatsumi’s confusion. Not only did she know his name, but she was talking about places he’d never even heard of.

A suspicion began to form in Tatsumi’s mind, but before he could express it, Calsedonia continued, “Master, you may not recognize or remember me. But I know you, perhaps better than anyone. No... I *remember* you.”

Calsedonia fixed her gaze on Tatsumi, and in her serious eyes, he felt a sense of déjà vu. He had felt such a gaze on him before, from very close. From his hand, from his shoulder and even from his lap.

Yes, for some reason, her gaze reminded him exactly of his beloved little family member.

“Chiko?”

Tatsumi wasn't sure if he'd meant to say the name aloud, but the moment she heard it, Calsedonia's face broke into the most brilliant smile he had ever seen. A smile so genuine that anyone who witnessed it would never doubt the immense joy she felt. And then, words came from her lips that sent shock waves through Tatsumi.

“Yes... Yes, that's right! I am... I am Chiko! Master... I'm your Chiko!”

## Chapter 3: Reincarnation

Still smiling, but with fresh tears in her eyes, Calsedonia embraced Tatsumi once again. As he instinctively caught Calsedonia... Chiko?... Tatsumi found himself falling back onto the bed. Once again, he was surrounded by her incredibly soft body, and he had no idea how to handle the situation.

This was not something he was proud of, but Tatsumi had never held a woman in his arms. Of course, he had probably been held by people like his mom as a baby, but he didn't remember, so that didn't count. Just now, he was unsure where to put his hands—on her shoulders? Or her waist?—and they flailed awkwardly in the air.

Ignorant of Tatsumi's internal struggle, Calsedonia happily nuzzled her head against his chest. The softest parts of her body pressed against him, but Tatsumi chose to ignore the sensation. As she repeatedly rubbed her forehead against his chest, a single strand of hair, an 'idiot hair,' bounced playfully from the top of her head.

Watching the strand casually swaying, a memory surfaced in Tatsumi's mind. Back when Chiko was alive, she used to nuzzle her head against Tatsumi's hand or cheek in a similar way. Sometimes, she would tilt her head as if to say, "Pet me, pet me!" Of course, Tatsumi would indulge her by gently stroking the top of her little head.

Reflexively, Tatsumi began to pat the top of the head of the woman who was clinging to him.

Startled, Calsedonia looked up. Her eyes met Tatsumi's with a new intensity.

"Master..."

"Ah, I'm sorry! It's just... my pet cockatiel used to do that, so I automatically..." Tatsumi stammered as he quickly withdrew his hand, embarrassed by his own impulsiveness. *Of course*, he thought, *not everyone*

*wants to just be touched like that, so intimately and without warning.* But deep down, he wished he could have felt her soft hair a little longer.

However, Calsedonia didn't seem upset. On the contrary, her face lit up even more.

"Yes...! Yes...! That's right! Master used to stroke my head just like that! I remember! Your hand... well, it was just a fingertip back then, but it was always so warm!" she cried happily. Her beautiful face was thoroughly wet with tears of joy, and she held Tatsumi even tighter.

"Master... my... my master..." Calsedonia murmured, repeating the words like a mantra.

Tatsumi gazed at the woman who held him. Of course, there were many differences between her and Chiko. Nevertheless, he couldn't completely ignore her words. Her manner and subtle gestures were *very* reminiscent of his beloved pet.

There are moments when intuition overcomes logic. Right then, Tatsumi's instincts told him that there was truth in her words.

"Are you... really... Chiko...?" he whispered, his voice filled with disbelief and hope.

"Yes! I'm Chiko. I was reborn as a human in this world, but I still have memories from when I was Chiko... from when I was a cockatiel. I was raised by you, Master... and I breathed my last under your watchful care... I *am* your Chiko!" she said again, the tears still streaming down her face.



“This... this ‘world’? ‘Reborn’?”

Phrases like ‘alternate world,’ ‘summoning,’ and ‘reincarnation’ raced through Tatsumi’s mind. They were terms he’d seen in plenty of novels, but never in real life.

All the while, Calsedonia continued to press her soft body against him insistently. To make it even more intense, they were in what seemed to be a dimly lit basement... on a bed to be exact. Tatsumi’s body involuntarily reacted in a very masculine way; it was only natural.

*What the heck should I do now?*

As his rationality and instincts fought an intense battle within him, a third voice echoed in the room—a room Tatsumi had been pretty sure contained only the two of them.

“Now, now, Calsey. Maybe you should relax a bit. Our young man here seems rather nervous, don’t you think?”

The voice was soft, yet it carried an unmistakable strength that came with wisdom and age.

Turning toward the source of the voice, Tatsumi saw an old man. He must have been about Tatsumi’s height; seeing as Tatsumi was 168 centimeters, that would have been tall for someone this guy’s age. With white hair that matched his thick, long beard, the man radiated an aura of kindness. He was probably in his seventies; Tatsumi had no idea what the average lifespan was in this world he’d been ‘summoned’ to—and he no longer doubted that was exactly what had happened—but this man surely counted as an old man.

Still, he stood up straight and didn’t look decrepit or anything. One might have even called him spry.

Tatsumi’s gaze fell behind the man, where he noticed a door standing open. Apparently, he had been so busy with the woman who claimed to be the reincarnated Chiko that he hadn’t noticed it before.

With a friendly smile and a leisurely step, the old man began to approach Tatsumi and Calsedonia.

With each step the man took, his loose white robe rustled softly. The garment was obviously made of a high-quality fabric, and it shone with purity. Gold and silver threads were generously woven into various parts of it, and it was adorned with intricate embroidery. This man either held a high position or was considerably wealthy—or maybe both.

His attire actually reminded Tatsumi of a Christian priest he'd seen on TV one time.

"Since I was a bit worried about Calsey and decided to check on her... Hohoho, it seems she's successfully summoned her dear bridegroom," the elder remarked with a smile.

"Yes, Grandfather. I've successfully brought my master into this world," Calsedonia replied.

"Hohoho, very well then. That's very commendable. Now, young bridegroom..."

"Uh... bridegroom?" Tatsumi interrupted. "You mean... me?"

"Of course, young man. Besides my granddaughter Calsey and myself, there's no one else here, is there?" the elder replied, his gentle smile never fading. "Perhaps we should move to somewhere more suited to conversation? This isn't the best place for a long explanation." The old man's gaze shifted to Calsedonia, who was still sitting on top of Tatsumi.

"Calsey, you should change," he chided gently. "Your current attire might be a bit, um... distracting for our young gentleman here."

As if snapping out of a trance, Calsedonia quickly sat back away from Tatsumi, hastily covering her ample breasts with both hands.

"Oh! How careless of me... to appear so indecently in front of my master..."

Blushing a deep crimson, Calsedonia stepped down from Tatsumi's bed and slipped out of the room through the open door.

As she made her hasty exit, the delicate fabric she wore outlined the shapely curve of her bottom, which swayed with every step. Tatsumi's gaze lingered. He couldn't help it; he was captivated.

The older man noticed and let out a warm chuckle, his eyes twinkling. Realizing he'd been caught, Tatsumi's face turned a shade reminiscent of Calsedonia's earlier embarrassment.

"Hohoho, it seems the young man's heart still beats with vigor," the elder mused, his voice rich with mirth. "No shame in that, my boy. In fact, it's quite reassuring to see you respond to my granddaughter in such a... manly fashion."

The subterranean chamber echoed with his hearty laugh.

"Now then, introductions are in order," the man began, his tone suddenly more formal. "I am Giuseppe Chrysopraxe. I hold the esteemed position of High Priest of the Savaiv Temple of the Kingdom of Largofiery."

"Head... High Priest?" Tatsumi blinked in surprise and took a closer look at Giuseppe.

As they talked, the man had led the way into a different room, one that looked more like a lavishly decorated living room. The plush sofa, the intricately carved table, the ornate furnishings—all practically shouted opulence. A beautiful vase with an equally beautiful arrangement of flowers sat prominently in the room. It was clear that this room was reserved for esteemed guests.

Tatsumi couldn't remember the exact route they had taken from the basement to this room, but the distance and the long, carpeted hallways suggested that they were in a large building. Everything was spotlessly clean.

Although the corridors had no windows, the living room was bathed in a soft, natural light that suggested it was daytime—assuming, that is, that this world *had* day and night. Or maybe it was always daytime here; Tatsumi figured that anything was possible.

Before Tatsumi knew it, a delicate ceramic cup filled with steaming tea was placed on the table in front of him.

"Please enjoy. It's hot, so be careful," a voice said.

"Um... Thank you!" Tatsumi replied, startled.

The voice belonged to a tall man in his mid-twenties named Baldio. As soon as he had set down the tea—with a warm smile directed at Tatsumi—Baldio took a

step back, bowed politely, and promptly left the room.

His attire bore similarities to Giuseppe's, though it was less ornate. Tatsumi guessed the man held a position of authority, but not as high as Giuseppe's. He was probably some kind of secretary or aide, and his quick departure was to avoid eavesdropping on the conversation.

Taking Giuseppe's lead, Tatsumi sipped the tea. Its taste and aroma reminded him a little of jasmine. This drink was probably typical in this realm, or at least in this kingdom. And considering that it was served by someone as important as Giuseppe, it must have been brewed from the finest tea leaves.

Tatsumi sipped the tea, savoring every mouthful. Meanwhile, Giuseppe watched him with obvious amusement, his eyes twinkling.

"Now, I would love to go into the finer details with you, but where on earth is Calsedonia?" the old man mused, stroking his ample beard and glancing toward the door they'd come in.

Indeed, it had been quite a while since they'd entered the parlor. Tatsumi glanced at his watch out of habit. He'd put it on when he woke up, so it was transported with him during the summoning. Apart from the bed and the guitar, the only other things that seemed to have made the journey were his casual sweatshirt, jeans, and the old-fashioned flip phone in his pocket.

When Tatsumi looked at the timepiece, however, Giuseppe's brow arched in surprise, and he leaned forward.

"What is that device you have there?" he inquired, his eyes sparkling with genuine interest, like a kid discovering a new toy.

Tatsumi laughed as he took off the watch and handed it to Giuseppe. "This is called a watch. It's a device we use to tell time. Where I come from, it's really common... lots of people have them."

"Ah, a timepiece, is it? Such an unusual and compact design!" Giuseppe remarked, examining the clock with fascination. So this world did have things that told time, but nothing so small... maybe just hourglasses and sundials?

The watch, a solar-powered chronograph, had been a gift from Tatsumi's younger sister for passing his high school exams. He'd been wearing it during

the accident, but despite having suffered a few scratches, it was in miraculously good condition.

“Hmm... there are several hands on it, but only the thinnest one seems to be moving,” Giuseppe observed.

“In my world, a day is divided into twenty-four equal parts. Each of these is further divided into sixty, and then...” As Tatsumi explained his world’s concept of time, Giuseppe’s eyes grew wide in amazement.

“Why do you divide the day in such a complicated way? Is there a specific reason for such a detailed division in your world?” he asked.

Tatsumi hesitated, unsure how to respond. The standard he’d always known—twenty-four hours in a day, sixty minutes in an hour, sixty seconds in a minute—had never *seemed* unusual. But now that he thought about it, Tatsumi realized he couldn’t explain *why* they did things that way. Who had established Earth’s system of time, and when? Because, clearly, such conventions couldn’t be taken for granted in this new world.

Tatsumi suddenly began to realize that he might be in way over his head in this new place.

## Chapter 4: The Holy Maiden of the Savaiv Temple

In Levantis, the royal capital of the Largofiery Kingdom, the Royal Palace stood majestically in the heart of the city. Home to the king and his family, the palace was surrounded by a sprawling cityscape. The city held around 40,000 souls, making it by far the largest in the Largofiery Kingdom—both by area and by population.

Towering over Levantis was a sanctuary of the Savaiv Temple. This world worshipped the Four Great Gods: the Fertility God Savaiv, the Sun God Grayba, the Evening Moon Goddess Gravavi, and the God of the Sea Dragabe. No matter where one ventured on the Zoisalight Continent, the temples and shrines of these gods would never be far.

Savaiv, the God of Fertility, was especially revered; he was the deity with the most followers. Most of Savaiv's worshippers were farmers, although this was no wonder as farming was the most common occupation in the world. Because of his association with fertility, he was also worshipped as the god of safe childbirth and the protector of marriages. Most couples took their vows before Savaiv. From nobles to peasants, weddings almost universally took place in Savaiv's temples or shrines, with his priests as witnesses.

Perhaps because of this, Savaiv's temple was the most majestic and magnificent of the four temples in the royal capital. Every day, throngs of worshippers flocked there to offer their prayers to Savaiv, and the temple's doors remained open day and night to let them in. On either side of the temple's main entrance stood fully armed temple warriors, ever vigilant in their duty to protect.

Calsedonia walked quickly through the corridors of the Savaiv Temple. The temple's underground was known as the 'Sacred Ground,' the region around the royal capital with the densest magical energy. This area was reserved for special worship and ceremonies within the temple. The reason Calsedonia had

chosen this underground chamber to summon Tatsumi was to harness the intense magical energy permeating the area.

After leaving the basement, Calsedonia made her way to her personal chambers within the quarters provided for the temple's resident priests. She needed to change out of the special ceremonial robes she had consecrated for the summoning ritual and into her usual priestly attire.

Closing the door to her room, Calsedonia changed hastily. She then inspected herself in a slightly oversized mirror to make sure her hair and clothing were perfect. The mirror was an extravagant luxury that spoke to Calsedonia's value in this world—glass and ceramics were rare, as the art of making them was known only to a few demi-humans attuned to fire.

Satisfied with her appearance, Calsedonia placed the sacred seal of the God Savaiv around her neck and hurried out of her chambers. On her way out, however, a thought occurred to her. *I wonder where the master and Grandfather could be.*

It was certain that Tatsumi was with her grandfather, the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple. But it seemed unlikely that Giuseppe would keep a guest like Tatsumi in the basement for long. They had probably gone somewhere else. *Maybe one of the reception rooms?* she wondered. Given its status as the kingdom's main temple of Savaiv, the building had multiple reception rooms. The real question was which one Giuseppe had taken Tatsumi to. Still, she figured that a quick investigation would clear up her doubts.

As Calsedonia started to move with this thought, a voice called out to her from behind. "Lady Calsedonia, I bring a message from the High Priest."

Calsedonia turned around to see a female priest bowing respectfully. "At present, the High Priest is with the guest in the third reception room," she continued. "He requests your presence there as soon as you are ready."

"The third reception room, got it. Thank you." Calsedonia nodded and immediately began making her way there. As she walked, she crossed paths with several other priests.

Nearly everyone Calsedonia passed looked at her with awe, their gazes a mix of reverence and curiosity. 'Saintess' Calsedonia was a well-known figure,

recognized by most in Levantis City.

Her rare magical talent, significant internal magical reservoir, and mastery over Holy magic, particularly healing and purification spells, alongside her unmatched beauty, earned her the title of the Holy Maiden. Walking through the temple, even junior deacons couldn't help but show their respect, bowing slightly as they made way for her, admiration in their eyes.

“Ah... Lady Calsedonia always looks so beautiful,” one quietly said.

“I couldn't agree more,” the other responded. “But she seems especially happy today, doesn't she?”

“Did you notice that too? Yes, she does seem quite joyful. I wonder what good news she has. But then again...”

“... News?”

“For Lady Calsedonia to show her joy so openly... Something big must have happened.”

The junior deacons shared a look of curiosity. It was no wonder they wanted to know more, the way Calsedonia was glowing that day.

Indeed, Calsedonia's heart felt as light as her steps. Since her childhood, there had been a man in her heart—a man she had never forgotten. Now she was finally reunited with him! Of course her heart was singing with joy.

Her memories of being Chiko, though clear and vivid, were unusual in a world that believed in reincarnation. At least, Calsedonia couldn't recall ever meeting anyone who remembered a past life.

But the specifics didn't matter. What mattered was the happiness she and Tatsumi had shared, and the longing she felt until this day. She had spent years researching summoning rituals, never neglecting her magical training. Soon, she would have to explain to Tatsumi why she had summoned him to this world. The thought made her nervous. Would he be angry, or even despise her for doing it? He had every right to; after all, she had brought him to this world against his will and torn him away from his previous life.

The thought of him despising her made her steps falter momentarily. Yet, the joy of their reunion far outweighed these concerns. Before her rebirth, she had been quite young, but her love for him was deep. Just being by his side brought her immense happiness. With him, she felt complete, needing nothing more. They had grown up together, spent every day together; they were always, always together.

As Calsedonia walked, wrapped in these happy memories of him, she was unexpectedly greeted. “Ah, Lady Calsedonia! What a surprise to see you today. Is this the guidance of God Savaiv, guardian of marriages?” The courteous voice belonged to a well-dressed young man, the heir to an earldom, if her memory served right, who had proposed to her several times before.

Approaching Calsedonia, he knelt and gently kissed the back of her hand. The bold gesture made Calsedonia furrow her brows, but the young heir was oblivious. Calsedonia remembered his face... but not his name. After all, he was far from the first man who had asked her to marry him.

Proposals came almost daily, directed to her grandfather, the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple, from men of various standings, including those with royal claims. However, Giuseppe consistently declined each offer, honoring Calsedonia's wishes and the secrets of her heart.

In the world of the temples, which stood independent of any kingdom's reach, serving the gods meant not having to bow before any monarch. Yet, tradition often saw priests pay respects to kings, a nuance Giuseppe leveraged to tactfully decline marriage proposals for Calsedonia from high-ranking nobles and royalty alike. Her status as a revered priest shielded her; no noble, regardless of their power, could compel her into marriage.

As the man continued to sing her praises, Calsedonia simply ignored him. She wanted nothing more than to get to Tatsumi as soon as possible. While this guy had begun by praising her beauty and achievements, his monologue quickly turned into a boast about himself, which was neither interesting nor entertaining. All she wanted was to see her beloved master! Calsedonia continued to nod and smile politely, but inside she was screaming.

Just as she was about to lose her patience and walk away, another figure approached them.

“Calsey!”

Hearing her nickname, Calsedonia's face instantly brightened.

The heir, however, grimaced in displeasure.

“Morga!” Calsedonia greeted the newcomer. “Ah, sorry for my rudeness... I mean, Sir Morganaik...”

This young man, distinguished by his tall, lean build and striking red hair and auburn eyes, was adorned not in priestly garments but in plate armor, with a longsword at his side. His breastplate bore the sacred seal of the Savaiv God, signifying his role as a temple knight.

Temple knights, warriors dedicated to defending the temple and its clergy, underscored the institution's independence. Given that temples could not seek kingdom aid in crises, they relied on their knights for protection. Yet, in the event of an intrusion, such as thieves breaking into the temple, kingdom forces could intervene, but only with the temple's consent.

“What are you doing here?” Morganaik asked Calsedonia. High Priest Chrysoprase is expecting you.”

“Oh, that’s right, Morga.”

Turning back to the young heir, Calsedonia said, “I apologize, but my grandfather—I mean, the High Priest Chrysoprase—has summoned me. I must take my leave now.”

The young heir sighed resignedly. “Of course, if it’s a summons from High Priest Chrysoprase, there’s nothing I can do. Let’s meet another time?”

With a nod to Morganaik, the heir finally left. Calsedonia turned to Morganaik. “Thank you, Morga. You saved me. That man can be quite persistent...”

“Don’t mention it. But if it’s true that the High Priest is waiting, shouldn’t you hurry?”

“Ah! How could I keep my master waiting!”

With a new sense of urgency, Calsedonia set off once again down the temple corridors. As she hurried away, Morganaik stood still, gazing at her retreating figure with a certain deep emotion in his eyes.

## Chapter 5: The Reason for the Summoning

“I’m so sorry I’m late!”

As Calsedonia entered the third reception room, where Tatsumi and Giuseppe waited, she immediately apologized, bowing her head deeply.

“What kept you? The groom has been waiting here for quite some time,” Giuseppe chided his granddaughter with one of his characteristic soft chuckles.

“Well, um, actually, I was really enjoying my conversation with Giuseppe! So it didn’t feel like a long time at all...” Tatsumi chimed in hastily.

“Oh, really? Th-Thank goodness...” Calsedonia sighed in relief, placing a hand on her ample chest.

Giuseppe smiled as he watched the exchange. He gestured for Calsedonia to sit next to him. “Now that we’re all here, let’s go over the details.”

Tatsumi straightened up, listening intently to the older man. There was no longer any doubt in his mind that he’d been summoned to another world. The real question was *why* he’d been summoned. Surely not to fulfill some overused hero trope like defeating a demon lord... Right?

“First of all,” Giuseppe began, “welcome to the Kingdom of Largofiery, dear bridegroom. Both my granddaughter and I are truly delighted by your arrival.”

“Uh, well... thank you?” It was all Tatsumi could think to say. But both Giuseppe and Calsedonia burst out laughing.

“And at the same time,” the man went on, “we owe you our deepest apologies. After all, we summoned you here without your consent. We’re truly sorry.”

As he spoke, both Giuseppe and Calsedonia bowed their heads deeply in unison.

“No, please, don’t be... both of you, raise your heads!” Tatsumi replied quickly.

“But... we—no, I—summoned you here against your will, without even thinking about what you must be going through. I forced you to leave the life you knew,” Calsedonia murmured. Her head was still bowed.

Tatsumi was startled to hear her words. Slowly it dawned on him that maybe his summoning had been rather more irreversible than he’d assumed. Maybe that’s what Calsedonia meant by “give up the life you knew.”

“Still,” Tatsumi insisted, “you can stop bowing. And then... can you tell me? Why... why did you call me to this place? What was the reason?” Even if there was no way back, Tatsumi wanted to understand why she had brought him here.

Finally, both Calsedonia and her grandfather raised their heads to meet Tatsumi’s gaze. For a moment, a new tension filled the room—until suddenly a loud sound echoed from outside the window.

*Dong, dong, dong*—it was the sound of a bell ringing from somewhere. It sounded like it belonged to a clock, and it must have been somewhere inside the Savaiv Temple. As Tatsumi listened closely, he thought he could hear a chorus of similar sounds in the distance, perhaps other temples ringing their bells in unison. The bell rang three times. As its echoes faded, Calsedonia finally spoke, as if the tolling had given her the courage to do so.

“The reason... the *main* reason I called you to this world... was that I desperately wanted to see you again,” she admitted. Her hands went instinctively to her cheeks, which were flushed with embarrassment.

“What...? That’s... that’s it?” A puzzled expression crossed Tatsumi’s face. But really, if someone told you that you’d been summoned to another world just because they “wanted to see you again,” you’d probably be just as flabbergasted.

And, if he was being honest, Tatsumi was a bit relieved that this wasn’t a “become a hero and defeat the demon lord” situation.

“Yes... but also...” Calsedonia looked up at Tatsumi, radiating happiness. But in a moment, her expression turned more solemn. “I... I was worried,” she went on. “*Really* worried. That day... when I met my end in your hands... the look on your face, that pure desolation... I could never forget it. I was afraid you might take your own life out of grief. That thought... haunted me.”

As Calsedonia spoke, Tatsumi shivered involuntarily. He remembered the moment Chiko had died in his arms. Indeed, it had felt like his whole world was ending. And there really had been several times he’d considered ending his own life. He just hadn’t had the courage.

“I was worried about you being left alone,” Calsedonia continued. “Ever since I got my senses back, I’ve been looking into magic that can cross worlds. Luckily, my grandfather took me in and brought me to the Savaiv Temple when I was very young. They have an extensive collection of magical resources that has been invaluable.”

“Took you in...?”

“Yes,” Giuseppe interjected. “Due to... certain circumstances, I adopted Calsedonia when she was only a child.”

Ah, so that made Calsedonia more Giuseppe’s adopted daughter than granddaughter. But, given their age difference, this made more sense.

After giving her grandfather a grateful smile for the clarification, Calsedonia turned back to Tatsumi.

“At first, I wanted to cross over to your world. But no matter how hard I looked, I couldn’t find a method or a ritual in any document or record that would let me do it... In the end, all I found was...”

“A ritual to summon me to this world instead of you going to mine?” Tatsumi guessed.

Calsedonia nodded. Her search hadn’t been limited to the archives of the Savaiv Temple. With the help of her grandfather, the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple, she’d scoured every possible source, including the Royal Archives. However, all she’d found was documentation of a ritual to summon Tatsumi to her world.

“Still, I thought it was worth a try. From your point of view, I’m the one who summoned you here and forced you to give up your whole life back there. Even if you’re angry at me, or hate me for it, I wanted to see you again...”

Her voice dropped as she concluded, “And... I was worried about you.”

A weighty silence hung for a moment in the room before Giuseppe spoke. “Now then, young man. May I ask you a question?”

“Uh, sure, if I can answer it...”

“Why are you so calm? Given your situation, one would expect you to be more... agitated.”

“Excuse me?” A confused Tatsumi looked back at Giuseppe.

The elderly man’s gaze was no longer the warm, grandfatherly one from before. Instead, it carried a certain gravity, a sharp intensity directed at Tatsumi.

“Most people, if they were suddenly called to an unknown world, would be in a state of panic. But not you. You seem confused, yes, but you haven’t been truly distraught for one moment. You’ve been calm this whole time. Why is that?”

“Well, um...” Tatsumi blushed, then glanced around the room as he tried to gather his thoughts. He looked briefly at Calsedonia before turning back to Giuseppe.

“Well, sir, when I came into this world and someone so beautiful suddenly embraced me, I... was rather taken aback. But more than that...” His eyes darted back to Calsedonia.

“When I realized she was Chiko—well, to be honest, I haven’t fully accepted it yet. But if it’s true that she’s the reincarnation of Chiko, then how could I be mad at her? I’m actually grateful. Even if she looks different, I got the chance to see her again.”

“My Lord...” Calsedonia whispered, her eyes filled with emotion.

To be honest, Tatsumi was convinced that Calsedonia must be the reincarnation of Chiko. She knew things that only he and Chiko would be privy

to, and moreover, there was a palpable similarity in their aura. Tatsumi once more gazed deep into her eyes, and sure enough, he could feel the connection. In response, Calsedonia's eyes welled up with tears.

Giuseppe let out a hearty laugh as he watched them. "I understand your feelings, young man. But tell me, don't you have any lingering attachment to your original world?"

"No," Tatsumi answered without hesitation. "I don't regret leaving that world behind." In a world without his family, his friends, and especially without Chiko, there was nothing left for him.

Just then, a knock came on the door of the reception room.

"Yes?" Giuseppe called out.

"Sorry to interrupt your meeting, Your Excellency," came a young woman's voice. "Is Lady Calsedonia here?"

"Yes, I'm here," Calsedonia replied. "What is it?"

"It's almost time for the sermon. The congregation's already gathered in the chapel."

"Oh, right. I did hear the three bells earlier. Thank you, I'll be right there."

Calsedonia stood and bowed to Tatsumi and Giuseppe. "Excuse me, Grandfather, My Lord. I have my duties to attend to."

"Yes, serving as a mouthpiece for the voice of God is a great responsibility. Do not take it lightly," Giuseppe reminded her.

"Then, Chiko..." Tatsumi began, "Wait, should I still call you Chiko, or um..."

"No, Chiko is fine," Calsedonia said with a smile and a slight blush. "I'd actually prefer you to call me that." Bowing to both of them, she quickly left the room. Giuseppe noticed her rosy cheeks but refrained from commenting, only smiling.

As Calsedonia made her way to the chapel and her waiting congregation, the young priest trailed behind. She waited a few moments, then spoke hesitantly.

"Um... Lady Calsedonia...?"

“Yes? What is it?” Calsedonia asked, turning to face the young woman with a cheerful smile.

“Did something... something good happen today? You seem... different.”

The priest was puzzled. The Calsedonia everyone knew always wore a gentle smile and treated everyone with the same demeanor. Especially during sermons, she would deliver the words of the gods with authority and dignity. Her sharp and majestic aura was one reason her followers admired her so much. But she was reserved, and her beautiful face rarely showed emotion.

Today, however, the saintess was absolutely glowing. Her smile was bright, and she almost seemed to float as she walked. The priest, though not one of Calsedonia’s close friends, spoke with her enough to know something was very different.

In answer to her question, the priest saw yet another side of Calsedonia: a girlish timidity. Her ruby-red eyes shone with warmth, and her hands flew up to cup her rosy cheeks. Her gaze drifted far away, as if lost in a distant memory.

“It’s just... he *accepted* me. Not only that, he... he said I was beautiful...”

Calsedonia squirmed with joy. Seeing her like this, the priest couldn’t help but think, *This isn’t good. If she goes in front of the congregation like this, things might go wrong. What’s worse... the followers’ image of her might be shattered.*

She had to do something.

## Chapter 6: The Past

Her first memory of the boy came from when she was perhaps three or four years old—just as she was beginning to form memories and comprehend her surroundings. One night, in a dream, a boy who looked a little older than her stared back at her with shimmering obsidian black eyes.

“Come on, Chiko. It’s time to eat.”

Smiling gently, the boy held out a white spoon smeared with a pale, grainy substance.

*What is this? He wants me to eat that?*

It was some sort of grain that had been soaked in water, and at first glance it was sticky and thoroughly unappetizing. In the dream, however, her joy in eating it knew no bounds. Dreams don’t come with taste, of course, but she felt a deep satisfaction as she ate. As she ate, Calsedonia saw the boy’s face light up with happiness. In that moment she wanted nothing more than to keep him smiling, so she kept eating until she felt full.

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Calsedonia stood before a large crowd of followers, passionately delivering the gods’ words from the altar. In Calsedonia’s world, most people couldn’t read or write, so priests like her played an essential role in teaching the faithful the words inscribed in the scriptures.

Of course, Calsedonia wasn’t the only one preaching. Other priests and deacons also took turns. However, whenever she spoke, the temple chapel would be filled to the brim with worshippers, just as it was that day.

Most of the attendees were here to listen to the sacred words of the gods. But some had an ulterior motive—to catch a glimpse of the Holy Maiden, standing on the raised platform at the far end of the chapel. Every day she

preached, the number of faithful swelled, drawn like bugs to a flame by Calsedonia's reputation.

Today, however, everyone who had come to see her was a bit puzzled. They were used to seeing her shrouded in a solemn atmosphere, delivering the words of the gods in a calm and collected manner. Today, however, there was something... off about her.

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Time passed, and Calsedonia kept dreaming about the boy. As she dreamed it over and over, she realized that her dream-self was tiny—and not even human. The boy would lift her up to eye level on the palm of his hand, where she would eagerly peck at the seeds he offered.

And so, in the dream, Calsedonia was a small bird. Covered in silvery gray feathers, with something protruding from the top of her head that wobbled when she moved. She skillfully cracked the seeds open with her beak, ate only the inside, and happily chirped, “Hyo~!”

“Did it taste good, Chiko?” the boy would ask with a smile.

She—Chiko—was always with the boy; in the dream, she'd sit on his shoulder, on his hand, even on his head. She was always by his side.

As she grew older, so did the boy in her dreams. Years went by, and she slowly found herself falling in love with him. Over the countless hours they spent together, he filled her heart with warmth, and she became more and more drawn to him. As she approached the age of ten, she suddenly realized the truth: these recurring dreams weren't just fantasies; they were memories of her past. As soon as she realized this, the memories came in a flood. Among them, the most poignant was that of the boy—her owner and master—looking at her with infinite sadness, as if the world were ending. It shook her soul to the core.

That day, Calsedonia stood on the platform and preached as usual, but everyone knew something was wrong with her. Normally, she delivered the words of the gods with a calm and dignified presence—captivating her

followers with words that flowed like water as well as with her beautiful and commanding figure. Today, however, her usual serene expression and gentle smile were replaced with a feverish energy. Her moist eyes sparkled with an entranced light, and her mind seemed elsewhere as she stumbled over the divine messages. From time to time, a sultry sigh of deep emotion escaped her lovely lips.

Both acolytes and fellow priests tilted their heads in curiosity to see the Holy Maiden like this. Some, of course, were even more enchanted by the peculiar charm she exuded that day. But Calsedonia didn't see any of the myriad gazes directed at her; her mind was consumed by the memory of a young man—already an adult by the standards of this land—who had finally sprung from her dreams into her reality.

As she'd dreamt of the boy, two emotions had surged within her: a burning desire to be reunited with her beloved master, and a deep concern for the immense despair he would face in her absence. And so she'd poured herself into learning magic. In her world, the art of magic was practiced by many, and Calsedonia naively believed that magic would bring her master back to her. What she didn't know was that while world-spanning magic did exist, it involved legendary spells of immense complexity, long forgotten.

The first people she told of her plans to master magic were her parents, who were already well aware of her dreams of the boy.

At first, they'd been amused by her budding affection for the dream boy. But as she continued to speak of him day in and day out, they began to grow uneasy. And now, with her sudden desire to master magic for the boy's sake, they truly feared for her sanity. The only answer, they decided, was to let her go.

Calsedonia's family lived in a remote village in the Kingdom of Largofiery, and in places like that, rumors spread like wildfire. If word got out about her strange stories, not only would she be ostracized, but her entire family could also be scorned by the villagers. Despite her parents' warnings, she'd already been sharing her dreams with others. Now, they could see the villagers' coldness towards her growing.

They couldn't bring themselves to sell their daughter into slavery. But as luck would have it, a priest from the Levantis happened to be passing through their village, so they entrusted Calsedonia to him. They scraped together every bit of their meager savings to pay her way, and they begged him to find somewhere for her in the city, perhaps an orphanage. They made up a story for their daughter, but it contained elements of the truth—they said she needed to learn magic, but there was no way she could in such a remote village, so they were sending her to the city to further her craft. And so, hand in hand with the priest, Calsedonia had left the only home she'd ever known without a soul to say goodbye to.

As they walked, the priest barely spoke to her. Her parents had hinted that she was gifted but disturbed, and the man saw no reason to waste his breath on conversation. He gave her food and rest along the journey, and nothing more.

Soon after they arrived at the capital of the Largofiery Kingdom, Levantis, Calsedonia learned that the priest belonged to the Savaiv Temple. He had been summoned to a village not far from her own to perform a wedding for the son of a prominent figure. It was common practice with high-profile weddings for local elites, in order to display their wealth and power, to request a priest from the central temple to be a witness.

Calsedonia was immediately put to work as a temple servant. The money her parents had sent with her was supposed to pay for her food and lodging. However, since the priest had spent very little on her during their journey, he had quite a bit left over. Chuckling to himself about this windfall, he soon forgot all about the little girl.

The Temple already housed several children like her—children who had lost or been abandoned by their families for one reason or another. Among these children, she was just another face. However, her anonymity turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

As she worked, the young girl caught the eye of the temple's High Priest, who saw at once the rare magical talent she possessed.

"How could...? I had no idea she'd been through so much," Tatsumi muttered in disbelief when Giuseppe finished telling his 'granddaughter's' story.

“Don’t let her looks fool you; this girl has had her share of hardships,” Giuseppe remarked. “After I adopted her, she kept working hard at everything she did. Whether it was her daily dedication as a magician, her duties as a priest... she did it all without cutting any corners. And finally, she’s achieved the dream she’s treasured for so long.”

The summoning ritual had been buried in a corner of the royal library, waiting for years, and she had resurrected it. Calsedonia’s tireless efforts had finally paid off when she successfully used the spell to bring Tatsumi into this world.

“So, young man, I must once again express my gratitude to you.”

“Huh?”

“You, sir, accepted my granddaughter. Considering your situation, you could rightfully have scolded her for summoning you like that, and no one could have argued with that.”

Tatsumi had to admit he was right; any reasonable person who found themselves unexpectedly summoned from another world would have complained, “What have you dragged me into?”

But, far from complaining, Tatsumi was grateful to Calsedonia. He had accepted her without reservation, and for that, Giuseppe held a deep sense of admiration and gratitude for him.

“I really wish you would consider being her husband,” Giuseppe said, and his hearty laughter filled the room with cheerfulness. Tatsumi, however, was not in a laughing mood.

At first, he couldn’t quite grasp what Giuseppe was trying to say. But the meaning of the old man’s words gradually seeped into his mind. When he finally caught on, he spat out his tea, creating a sight that made Giuseppe laugh even harder.

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The dreams continued, albeit sporadically.

Following her adoption by the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple, Calsedonia began serious magical studies. Her latent talent as a mage blossomed, and she tirelessly honed her skills, looking all the while for ways to cross worlds. Of course, she also performed her daily priestly duties, and she occasionally used her healing magic on the injured and sick.

Her life was hectic in those days, and her dreams—or rather, her memories—were her greatest comfort. At least, even if it was only a dream, she could be reunited with her beloved master, the boy she thought she'd never see again.

As she grew older, the boy in her dreams aged as well.

She speculated that perhaps the deity who had extended a helping hand to her and the boy had reincarnated her to be the same age as him. Calsedonia expressed her gratitude to Savaiv, the only deity she had learned about in her village.

Being of a similar age in her dreams undoubtedly deepened her connection with the boy, and her feelings for him intensified. Each time she dreamt of her master, her affection for him grew stronger.

But not all the dreams were pleasant. She would never forget the day her master lost his family.

Only when Calsedonia was older did she understand just how badly her master and his family had been injured. His world didn't have the healing magic that hers did. Injuries like these took a long time to heal, if they did at all. While her master remained unconscious in the hospital, she was cared for by neighbors. At least these were people she knew; she remembered greeting many of them from her perch on the boy's shoulder when they went on walks.

After what seemed like an eternity, he returned—but in grief. They moved from the house they'd shared with his family to a smaller one. It was then that she began to dream of him every day—and to hasten her preparations to summon him. The moment of parting from her master in her memories wasn't far away, and she was worried about how he would cope with this new loss. She pushed ahead of schedule, taking only the bare minimum of rest, and finally the summoning preparations were complete. Meanwhile, in her dreams, the moment of their separation had already arrived.

In the dream, his grief at losing her was the widest chasm she had ever seen. Thinking only of comforting him, of giving him strength and being by his side once again, she began the summoning ritual.

It took several sleepless days and nights. Despite Calsedonia's overflowing magical powers and youthful stamina, the success of the ritual was not guaranteed. Moreover, it could only be attempted once. If the summoning failed, she would have to start the preparations all over again, which could take years.

As she focused on the spell, her mind filled with the image of her master grieving her. Why could she picture him so clearly in her waking state? She didn't know. Perhaps the ritual had created some connection between them.

The sight of him, lost in despair and devoid of spirit, was heartbreaking. She knew he spent every day staring aimlessly at the small cage she'd once lived in.

If she left him like this, she feared he would either waste away in despair or take his own life.

Tormented by this thought, she continued with the ritual.

And then...

Her fervent wishes finally reached him.

She would probably no longer see him in her dreams—for her beloved master now stood before her in reality.

## Chapter 7: Moving Forward

**A**fter the sermon, a stream of worshippers emerged from the entrance of the Savaiv Temple. All looked forward to catching even a distant glimpse of the Saintess, and to hearing a sermon delivered in her enchanting voice. Normally, after the sermon, they would have worn satisfied expressions, but today was different.

To be fair, there were those who looked as satisfied as always. Some had even been moved to tears by the divine words spoken by the Saintess. Some were, as usual, utterly enchanted by her beauty, their faces flushed with excitement. The majority, however, wore expressions of bewilderment.

“Hey, wasn’t the Saintess a little... strange today?” one of them remarked.

“Yeah. She’s usually so dignified and stern, but today she seemed... you know...”

“Sultry? Like there was a certain color to her sighs?”

“Exactly! The usual, dignified Saintess is great, but today’s version is... unique.”

“Yeah, today’s Saintess was different all right. But the way her face looked... maybe there’s a man in her life?”

“Well, she’s a living, breathing woman of age. It wouldn’t be surprising if she had feelings for someone. I envy whoever that might be.”

“Speaking of which, there are rumors about her and...”

“Oh, the ‘Free Knight,’ right? They’d definitely make a good couple.”

“A handsome man and a beautiful woman. It’s so romantic.”

The worshippers continued to trade gossip as they left the temple, each with their own thoughts and ideas about the Saintess’s personal life.

Meanwhile, Calsedonia returned to the reception room, where she rightly assumed her grandfather and Tatsumi would be waiting. But when she knocked and entered, Tatsumi turned and stared at her, his face turning a deep shade of red. The moment he saw her, Giuseppe's words came back to him. *"I really wish you would consider being her husband."*

"What is it, Master?" Calsedonia asked.

"Ah, no, it's... it's nothing," Tatsumi stammered, nodding awkwardly. Watching him, Giuseppe bore the expression of a child who's pulled off a successful prank.

"Now that Calsedonia is back, let's discuss your future, young man," Giuseppe declared.

*Future?* Tatsumi thought, taken aback. He felt no real attachment to his original world. Even if he was told that he would never be able to return, he wouldn't be deeply discouraged—just a touch of homesickness at most. So he'd have to live in this world from now on; so what? But for that, he'd need a way to support himself—in other words, a job. His face clouded over as he wondered whether there was a job in this world that a high school dropout like him could take.

Giuseppe must have sensed his uneasiness. "I can imagine what you're worried about," he said, "but we'll provide you with a livelihood."

"Master, you don't need to worry about your living expenses or anything like that," Calsedonia interjected.

"Huh...?" Tatsumi replied in surprise.

"Why so shocked? It's only natural, isn't it? After all, we summoned you here without your consent. We were prepared for at least that from the beginning," Giuseppe said with his usual hearty laugh. "Besides, given your unfamiliarity with this world, the tasks you could take on might be limited. But you can communicate with us, so you'll have no problem finding some kind of work."

Tatsumi suddenly realized that he was having a perfectly normal conversation with Calsedonia and Giuseppe, and not in Japanese. When he expressed his confusion about this, they explained that the summoning ritual had included

magic that allowed him to understand their language. However, this understanding was limited to spoken conversation; reading and writing would require additional study.

Apparently, the language they were speaking was the Continental Trade Language, a common language used throughout the Zoisalight continent. When Tatsumi concentrated, however, he found that he could still speak Japanese. It felt as if he could switch fluently between the two languages.

“I wish I could have learned to read and write as well...” Tatsumi sighed.

Calsedonia’s face fell. “I’m sorry,” she said. “The ritual was based on old texts and documents. It was impossible to refine it beyond that.”

“No, no, I wasn’t blaming you, Chiko,” he quickly reassured her, though deep down he secretly hoped there might be other “standard” powers or abilities that came with being transported to another world.

“As I said before,” Giuseppe interjected playfully, “I’d be thrilled if you would consider becoming Calsedonia’s husband.”

“Grandfather!” exclaimed Calsedonia, her voice a mixture of surprise and embarrassment. She blushed deeply and looked back and forth between the two men.

“To tell you the truth,” Giuseppe went on, “she’s on the verge of being considered an old maid around here. To put it bluntly, half the reason for that is because of you.”

According to Giuseppe’s explanation, in this world, especially in the Largofieri Kingdom, the age of majority was sixteen. By twenty, most people were settling down and starting a family. Calsedonia was nineteen. So, while she wasn’t actually an old maid, she was certainly feeling the pressure to get married.

Giuseppe’s gaze softened as he looked at his granddaughter. Tatsumi could tell that despite his words, he respected Calsedonia’s feelings far too much to pressure her into some political marriage.

“Wow, even royalty has proposed to Chiko? Well, with how beautiful she is, I guess that’s to be expected,” Tatsumi mused.

Considering her stunning beauty, her high magical abilities, and the fact that she'd been adopted by the highest-ranking priest of the Savaiv Temple, it would be more surprising if she *didn't* have any suitors. Although Tatsumi didn't really know the status of mages in this world, he assumed that high magical abilities were a bonus.

However, when he looked at Calsedonia, she stared back at him for some reason, her eyes wide open and her cheeks flushed.

"Hohoho, you seem to be quite adept with women, young man. You just complimented a lady and made it look easy. Were you a bit of a womanizer in your world?" Giuseppe teased.

"Wh-What?! No way... I've never even dated a girl before..." Tatsumi stammered.

"Hmm, so it's just your natural charm then," Giuseppe remarked with a mischievous grin, causing Tatsumi to shake his head vigorously in denial.

Giuseppe chuckled. "Just kidding. Given my profession, I pride myself on being a good judge of character."

Tatsumi nodded. Regardless of how he'd gotten here, if he'd been a troublemaker or an evil person, Giuseppe and the others could have easily abandoned him somewhere.

"For now, we'll call you a junior deacon of this temple," Giuseppe decided. "Even as a junior, being a deacon will let you live in the temple, and your meals will be provided. Of course, you'll have to perform your priestly duties. But if there's another job you'd rather do, you're free to pursue it. Some priests even juggle their duties with their family businesses."

It was good to know that Giuseppe was looking out for him, but Tatsumi found it hard to imagine a job in this strange world that he would actually want. Coming from Japan, where the concept of faith was somewhat watered down, he especially couldn't imagine being a priest for the rest of his life. He'd probably move on to something else, but first, he would have to find out what kind of jobs existed in this world and what he was good at. For now, it would be best to follow Giuseppe's advice, work as a helper at the temple, explore the city, and start looking at other careers.



As Tatsumi thought about this, Calsedonia, who had been blushing and silent, seemed to reboot.

“No, no!!! Like I said, you don’t have to work! I can support you!” she said confidently, puffing out her impressive chest. “I may not look like it, but I have a considerable income.”

Tatsumi hesitated. “I really don’t want to be a moocher or anything...”

Ignoring his protest, Calsedonia turned to Giuseppe and dropped another bombshell. “Grandfather, I’ve decided to leave the temple and live with him.”

Tatsumi’s eyes widened in shock, but before he could react any further, Giuseppe patted his knee in agreement. “That’s an excellent idea! Living together would allow you both to experience each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Then you could decide to get married. Do you have a place in mind for both of you? Judging from your tone, it sounds like you’ve already made some arrangements.”

“Yes, one of our devotees deals in real estate. I was thinking of consulting with them...”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Tatsumi interrupted, overwhelmed by the speed of the conversation. “Wait a second, Giuseppe! Are you really okay with your granddaughter suddenly deciding to live with a man she just met?”

*Wouldn’t a normal male guardian, especially a grandfather, have a problem with his granddaughter suddenly announcing that she wants to live with a man who popped into her life three hours ago?*

However, in stark contrast to the agitated Tatsumi, the other two just looked perplexed.

“Why are you making such a fuss? Haven’t I been calling you ‘son-in-law’ since we first met?” Giuseppe pointed out. “That means I already recognized you as a suitable partner for Calsedonia. And from the very beginning, I was helping bring you two together, wasn’t I?”

“Well... yeah, you were... but why did you accept me so easily? I mean, we just met.”

“But I’ve been hearing about you from Calsedonia for a long time. This hardly feels like our first meeting. Besides...” Giuseppe raised an eyebrow playfully. “You two lived together in the other world, didn’t you?” *And if you wanted to take advantage of her*, he added silently, *you wouldn’t have been hesitant to marry her*.

“No, it wasn’t like that... She was a cockatiel over there, not this stunning, perfectly proportioned, slightly older woman who is absolutely my type!” In his panic, Tatsumi blurted out far more than he’d intended.

Calsedonia blushed brightly at his frank confession, but she was obviously delighted.

Watching them, Giuseppe—who had officiated countless weddings as the High Priest of the god of marriage—felt certain that they would make a perfect pair. He silently prayed to Savaiv to bless the young couple’s future together.

## Chapter 8: Let's Learn About Magic

In the kingdom of Largofiery, magic was a common reality. One of the most important landforms of the northern part of the Zoisalight continent was the Great Ice Mountain Range, which attracted many ice spirits. Thanks to the influence of these spirits, the 'Evening Moon Festival'—winter—was especially harsh and long.

In Calsedonia's world, the seasons were shaped by the the spirits. When the power of the fire spirits was dominant, it was the 'Sun Festival,' or summer; when the earth spirits ruled, it was the 'Harvest Festival,' or fall; and when the wind spirits were strong, it was the 'Ocean Festival,' or spring. In addition to having a longer winter and a shorter summer, the Largofiery Kingdom experienced shorter transitions between each major season. That meant winter took up nearly half of the year.

Despite this, however, the vast lands of Largofiery were fertile during the other seasons, and the kingdom enjoyed abundant crops. Winter starvation was rare, even in the most remote and cold villages. The heavy snowfall also ensured an abundant supply of water, which was used in the kingdom's renowned brewing practices—the alcoholic beverages produced in Largofiery were considered among the finest of the Zoisalight Continent.

Largofiery was also known for its powerful knights and armies. These warriors underwent rigorous daily training to ensure the kingdom's continued strength.

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Tatsumi learned all this and more from Giuseppe and Calsedonia. But what interested him most was the existence of magic. As he'd quickly learned from his own summoning, magic was real here. Those who could use it were known as 'mages' or 'magicians.' Tatsumi's curiosity about the mystical power in this new world grew as he learned that both Calsedonia and Giuseppe were mages.

“Magicians are not numerous,” Giuseppe told him one day. “It’s said that only one or two out of a hundred people have the aptitude to become a magician.”

Furthermore, each magician had a specific type of magic in which he or she excelled. These types—sometimes referred to as attributes—came in six basic categories: *Light*, *Darkness*, *Earth*, *Water*, *Fire*, and *Wind*. From these, there were higher-and lower-order derivative types. It was said that the actual number of types was so large that no one knew it.

There were even ‘rare types’ that only one person had ever been known to have. One of these was ‘Heaven,’ which had become a semi-legendary type often mentioned in fairy tales.

“I have the aptitudes for five types: *Holy*, *Flame*, *Sea*, *Tree*, and *Thunder*,” Calsedonia announced. “My grandfather has the affinity for *Holy* and *Sea*.”

“Five, huh? Is that considered impressive?”

“It is,” Giuseppe said with a nod. “I know you’ll think I’m biased, but Calsey is what you’d call a prodigy. Most magicians have an aptitude for only one type—or at most two, like me. But she has five. In all recorded history, only one or two magicians have ever had that many.

“By the way, *Holy* is a higher-order type of *Light*, *Flame* comes from *Fire*, and *Sea*, *Tree*, and *Thunder* are higher-order derivatives of *Water*, *Earth*, and *Wind*, respectively.

“To activate magic, one must always recite a spell. That means that, no matter how skilled a mage is, he cannot use magic if he cannot speak.”

Giuseppe explained that when a mage committed a crime, they were always gagged when they were restrained, so they couldn’t use magic. The use of magic consumed the magical energy stored in the magician’s body. Therefore, the number and types of abilities, as well as the amount of contained magical energy, were crucial for a mage.

It was possible to activate magic outside of one’s aptitude types, but without the right aptitude, the effects and range of the magic were greatly reduced. More importantly, only with the correct spell chant and magical energy could magic be activated.

“In addition, each type of magic has a symbolic color associated with it.” Whenever magic was used, Giuseppe explained, it emitted its distinctive color. For example, the Holy type, the one Calsedonia was best at, gave off a silvery white light when activated. As for the rest of her aptitudes, Flame emitted a deep red, Sea a deep blue, Tree a bright green, and Thunder a deep purple.

“I see. So, by observing this light, you can more or less work out the type of magic being cast?” Tatsumi asked.

“Exactly,” Giuseppe confirmed. “Only mages can see this light. However, in exceptional cases, when a huge amount of magical energy is released at once, even non-magic users can faintly perceive its glow.”

Finally unable to contain his excitement, Tatsumi turned to Calsedonia. “Then, um, is it possible that I... I mean, do you think I have that kind of aptitude?”

Maybe it would be like in so many novels, he thought; since he’d come from another world, he would end up having latent magical talent. Or maybe there was a strong, otherworldly connection at play. If something supernatural like magic was a possibility, how could he not want to try it himself?

Unfortunately, the expressions on Giuseppe’s and Calsedonia’s faces were not very encouraging.

“Um... It’s a little difficult to say, but, Master, you... um...”

“I’ll be blunt, because it’s better to be clear,” Giuseppe said. “Young man, you can’t use magic. I can’t sense any magical energy from you, not even a hint of an aptitude type.”

Tatsumi’s face fell. He remembered being told that almost everyone here possessed some amount of magical energy, with very few exceptions—even though only a tiny fraction could become magicians.

It took at least some magical energy to activate magic. Apparently, Tatsumi had none. If you thought about it, magical energy didn’t exist in Tatsumi’s world—at least not the way it did here—so he shouldn’t have been surprised that he lacked it. Besides, skilled magicians like Calsedonia and Giuseppe would be pretty good at sensing the magical energy of others. Since they’d met Tatsumi, they hadn’t sensed any magic from him.

“Don’t let it get you down, young man,” Giuseppe said soothingly. “Like I said, everyone in this world has some magical energy. But for most, it’s minuscule, so small that they can’t cast even the simplest spells.”

“Yes, Master! If you ever need magic for anything, I’ll cast it for you!” Calsedonia meant well, but it did little to ease Tatsumi’s disappointment. He hadn’t realized until that moment how tightly he’d been holding onto the hope that he could use magic.

“Like I said before,” Calsedonia continued, “to cast magic, you have to recite a spell. That’s why the magic we use is called ‘Chanting Magic.’”

Originally, she explained, all magic had simply been called Chanting Magic. However, about ten years ago, a new type of magic had appeared. To distinguish between the two, classical magic had taken on the original name.

“A new kind of magic...?” Tatsumi inquired.

“Yes. It’s a magic that borrows the power of sentient magical energies—spirits—scattered throughout this world. Instead of Chanting Magic, we call it Spirit Magic. Apparently, it was brought to us by a woman who came from a faraway land.”

“Really? Do you think she came from another world—I mean, not from mine, but a different one?”

“Well, I can’t say for sure, as I’ve never met the woman myself,” Giuseppe cut in. “But rumor has it that she’s an incredibly beautiful woman. I’d certainly like to meet her at least once before I’m called to heaven.”

With that, Giuseppe gave one of his signature hearty laughs.

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“Well, we’ve been talking for quite a while now,” Giuseppe remarked, glancing out the window at the amber-colored sky. “Speaking of which,” he added, turning to Calsedonia, “you said you had some ideas about the house you’ll be living in with our young guest. Have you settled on one yet?”

“No, I’ve asked someone who deals in real estate to find some empty houses as possible options. I thought we’d visit them together and then decide,” Calsedonia replied.

“I see. For tonight, he can stay here in the temple. This temple is the headquarters of the Savaiv Temple on the Zoisalight Continent,” Giuseppe said, turning to Tatsumi. “We often have pilgrims and traveling priests from all over the continent. We have several guest rooms for them. Unless...”—he raised an eyebrow suggestively towards Calsedonia—“you’d prefer him to stay in your room? If our guest is all right with it, I wouldn’t mind.”

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What!? N-No, the guest room is fine! Please, the guest room!” Tatsumi shouted, his face turning red. Calsedonia turned a slightly disappointed expression on him.

“Hohoho, I was just joking. Calsedonia’s room is in the dormitory where the unmarried priests live. Even I wouldn’t dare send a man there,” Giuseppe chuckled.

Both the male and female priests who lived in the dormitory were unmarried. Savaiv, who was also the guardian of marriage, actually encouraged the clergy to marry. While some dedicated their purity to their deity, most priests eventually settled down. Once married, they moved out of the temple and established homes in the city. In other words, moving from the dormitory into the city was an unspoken indication that a priest was about to get married.

Living in the temple after marriage could be quite inconvenient, especially when it came to starting a family (Savaiv was also a God of Fertility and encouraged procreation).

So, the fact that Calsedonia, a priest, wanted to make a home with Tatsumi wasn’t unusual. The real issue was the fact that *she*, the Holy Maiden, was setting up a household.

But Tatsumi didn’t know this yet.

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The next day—Tatsumi thought it must have been around noon, if that was how they kept time—Calsedonia, having completed her priestly duties for the day, took him for a walk through the city of Levantis. They were on their way to meet the ‘person who dealt in real estate’ she’d mentioned. Tatsumi figured that they must be this world’s version of a real estate agent.

Tatsumi felt as comfortable walking side by side with Calsedonia as if he’d known her his whole life. She wore a bright smile, occasionally pointing out places and explaining them to Tatsumi. As for Tatsumi, he was mostly lost in thought, face flushed and eyes wandering. He was trying especially hard not to focus on one particular sensation—the unbelievably soft feeling pressing against his right arm, which was currently being embraced by Calsedonia.

Tatsumi would learn later that this world did have undergarments for the upper half of a woman’s body. However, unlike the bras from his world, these were simple wraps of soft cloth that didn’t provide quite the same level of support. As a result, the softness of what was underneath the cloth was transferred directly to Tatsumi’s arm without any buffer. He was trying desperately to ignore the sensation.

“Is something wrong, Master?” Calsedonia asked, noticing his awkward posture with a puzzled expression.

“No, it’s just... I’ve never walked so close to a woman before...” Tatsumi stammered. “It’s, well, a little awkward.” And it was true; this was the first time he’d walked arm in arm with a woman around his age. No way was he going to say, “It’s because I can feel your breast against my arm.” After all, he was a man too.

Unaware of Tatsumi’s inner turmoil, Calsedonia’s face lit up even more as she laughed. “Oh, come on! Don’t you remember? We used to go out like this all the time.”

“Well, back then, Chiko was tiny! And she didn’t walk next to me like this; she just sat on my shoulder or on my head!”

They bantered playfully as they walked. To anyone watching them, they would have looked like a happy couple. However, Tatsumi was too engrossed in his conversation with Calsedonia and the soft sensation against his arm to

notice the numerous eyes of the townspeople upon them. After all, there wasn't a soul in Levantis who didn't know who the Saintess was.

And so every head turned when they saw her walking happily arm in arm with a young man. But their surprise at seeing the happy Calsedonia only increased when they caught sight of the man beside her. Dressed in unfamiliar clothes, with his rare black hair, dark eyes, and pale amber skin, he was a figure of intrigue. Most inhabitants of the kingdom of Largofiery had shades of brown to red hair, with platinum blonde like Calsedonia's being quite rare. The majority also had fair skin tones.

That meant Tatsumi would have stood out even if he were walking alone. But now, he was arm in arm with the famous Calsedonia. Everyone in town couldn't help but stare in amazement and curiosity, watching the backs of the unusual couple as they passed by.

Before long, Calsedonia stopped in front of a building.

"Is this the place?" Tatsumi asked.

"Yes, this is the residence of the person who deals with real estate," Calsedonia replied.

The two stood in front of a large stone mansion. As they'd walked through the city, Tatsumi had noticed that most of the buildings were made of stone, mostly reddish-brown bricks, giving the city a warm hue like sunset. This building stood in stark contrast. Instead of bricks, it was made of carefully placed white stones. Although Tatsumi couldn't tell what kind of stone it was, it looked expensive. Looking around, he noticed that many of the surrounding houses were made of the same white stone. Was this a wealthy neighborhood?

"But this looks like a normal mansion..." Tatsumi mused aloud, looking up at the imposing structure. Shouldn't the real estate agent have some sort of storefront? But when he thought about it, he realized this made sense. Houses aren't like hats or other goods you could put in a store window. So why not conduct this business at a mansion?

As he pondered, Calsedonia approached the mansion's entrance and called out in her clear, bell-like voice, "Excuse me. I am Calsedonia Chrysopraxe of the Savaiv Temple. Is the master of the house at home?"

They only had to wait a moment before the mansion's door swung open vigorously, and a middle-aged man bounded out. With a balding crown, a protruding belly, and a stature shorter than both Tatsumi and Calsedonia, he cut quite a figure. His clothes, noticeably more luxurious than any of the townspeople they'd seen earlier, suggested that he was indeed wealthy.

“Ah, I've been waiting for you, Saintess! I'm truly honored that you've chosen to visit someone like me!” The man welcomed Calsedonia with a slick smile, rubbing his palms together with anticipation.

## Chapter 9: House Hunting

**B**ack at the temple, Calsedonia had given Tatsumi a brief rundown on this man: his name was Kashin Sankirai, and he was a baron.

Tatsumi watched as Kashin, sporting a broad grin, bowed repeatedly to Calsedonia. Although a baron was the lowest rank of nobility, the guy was still a true noble. Seeing him bow so readily made Tatsumi realize the importance of Calsedonia's status in this land.

"Congratulations on this auspicious occasion!" Kashin began, "But to think that the revered Saintess Calsedonia herself is getting married! Oh, how many of your faithful followers must be mourning this news. To be honest, I too shed a tear when I heard about it."

"Um, Lord Sankirai?" Calsedonia interjected, a hint of confusion on her face. "I haven't decided to marry yet..."

As she said this, she threw a meaningful glance at Tatsumi—who wisely decided to remain silent. The man in front of Calsedonia was a noble, he reasoned; it wouldn't do for Tatsumi, a commoner, to upset him with ill-considered words.

"Oh? Is that so? But if you, a priest, are considering moving out of the temple and setting up a home, marriage is surely on the horizon?" Kashin inquired with a mischievous smile.

"Well... I hope it turns out that way..." Calsedonia replied, her eyes flicking at Tatsumi again. This time, her look seemed to be tinged with joy... or at least that's how Tatsumi interpreted it.

"Who would refuse such an offer?!" Kashin exclaimed. "To not want *you* as a wife? There's no man out there who would think like that! By the way..." Kashin's eyes darted around. "Isn't the man who's to be your husband with you today?" he asked curiously.

“No, he’s right there,” Calsedonia said, turning her eyes to Tatsumi—who Kashin seemed to notice for the first time.

“Hm? That man is...”

“Yes, he’s...”

“Aha! A new servant you hired!”

“No... He’s not a servant, he’s...”

Calsedonia’s beautiful eyebrows knitted together in frustration. Oblivious to her irritation, Kashin continued to speak over her.

“But surely one male servant isn’t enough to do all the household chores, is it? How about it? If you wish, I can also provide you with maids and other servants.”

“No, thank you!” Calsedonia said, her voice suddenly sharper.

The baron seemed unable to understand why she was upset. “At... at least, would you like to take a look at the mansions I’ve prepared for you? I’ve selected a few that I think will meet your needs quite well. Come, this way... Oh, right! I’ll prepare a carriage for you right away. Just a moment, please...”

“No need, walking is fine! Just lead the way!” Calsedonia gave Kashin a piercing stare.

“Very well, then. This way...”

As if pushed along by Calsedonia’s very will, Kashin hurriedly led the way down the road. Calsedonia, who had been staring at his back, turned to Tatsumi and bowed slightly. The small tuft of hair on her head bounced gently.

“I’m sorry he mistook you for a servant...”

“Oh, it’s okay. I’m not dressed like much, so I can’t blame him for thinking that,” Tatsumi replied with an easy shrug.

It seemed that the standards of beauty in this world weren’t all that different from Tatsumi’s own, and his appearance was indeed quite ordinary. Compared to Calsedonia, who was addressed as Saintess and even approached by nobles with respect, Tatsumi might as well have been called ‘Citizen A.’

“Anyway, let’s get started. Honestly, I’m curious what kind of house we’ll see,” Tatsumi remarked, hoping to lift Calsedonia’s spirits. As she watched him, a small smile graced her lips.

“Hehe, I feel a little relieved now.”

“Huh? Why?”

“The you I saw in my dreams... you had this incredibly gloomy aura about you. You always seemed a bit down. But now you’re smiling,” she noted.

Tatsumi hadn't known he was smiling until she said that. Over the past twenty-four hours, he’d had more conversations than he had in weeks. Of course, the only people he’d spoken to were Calsedonia and Giuseppe, but even so, it was the most interaction he’d had since losing Chiko.

And, he realized, it was because he’d been reunited with Chiko that he could smile now. He’d only met Calsedonia yesterday, but everything about her—her appearance, her mannerisms, her voice—radiated the essence of Chiko.

In Tatsumi’s heart, Calsedonia *was* Chiko. And because she was Chiko, she was already a treasured member of his family. The joy and comfort of having her by his side, just like all the years they’d lived together, was indescribable.

So, Tatsumi told Calsedonia, his Chiko, plainly, “The reason I can smile like this is definitely because you’re here with me, Chiko.

“Master...”

Her ruby-red eyes stared deep into his, glistening with emotion. Feeling her gaze, Tatsumi’s cheeks flushed a deep red.

From a distance, Kashin tilted his head, curiously watching the intimate moment between the two.

Meanwhile, he was leading them to an even more opulent neighborhood, about a fifteen-minute walk from his own mansion.

“This area mainly holds the residences of high-ranking nobles, such as marquises,” he explained. “Of course, for someone like Lady Calsedonia, fitting into that category would be unquestionable.” Kashin gave an ingratiating grin.

However, Tatsumi was far more interested in the surrounding buildings than in Kashin's flattery. Each mansion was expansive, accompanied by vast, meticulously tended gardens. Interestingly, these gardens seemed to be designed to be viewed from the outside, with the flora of each house trimmed and artfully displayed.

*In Japan, the insides of gardens are usually hidden, and in Europe, gardens are meant to be displayed for onlookers, right?* As he pondered this half-remembered tidbit, he continued to admire the sprawling estates around him.

"And here we are," Kashin announced, stopping in front of one of the most grandiose mansions in this upscale—or rather, noble—neighborhood. "This residence once belonged to a marquis known for his extravagant lifestyle. However, it seems he was secretly involved in the underground slave trade. When the kingdom caught wind of this, the marquis's entire family faced retribution. The head of the household and all his family members were beheaded. Since then, this mansion has remained unoccupied."

"Wait... the whole family was decapitated!?" Tatsumi exclaimed. He couldn't believe how casually Kashin had revealed this last detail.

Calsedonia, on the other hand, didn't seem fazed by it. Maybe in this world, or at least in this kingdom, such a punishment was considered appropriate.

"As for the price of the villa," Kashin continued, "considering that Lady Calsedonia is our esteemed client, we've tried our best to offer a competitive price..."

Not knowing the local economy, Tatsumi had no way to tell whether the price Kashin mentioned was high or low. Of course, considering the size of the place, it wouldn't be cheap. But something else nagged at him.

"Hey, Chiko... Can I ask you something?" Taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, Tatsumi gently tugged at Calsedonia's sleeve, pulling her a little away from Kashin.

"This mansion... um... it's just for us, right? Giuseppe won't be living with us, will he?"

"That's right. Grandfather already has his own residence," she confirmed.

“Then... isn’t this mansion... a little too big for just the two of us?” Gazing up at the building once more, Tatsumi estimated that it had at least ten rooms. Where he had come from, living in such a huge space with just two people was beyond extravagant. Even cleaning the place would probably take an entire day.

“Or were you thinking of hiring servants like Kashin suggested?” he added out loud.

“No... I’d... I’d prefer it to be... just the two of us...” Calsedonia replied, covering her blushing cheeks with both hands and looking up at Tatsumi shyly.

“In that case, a smaller house would be enough, right? Besides, living surrounded by nobility feels too... stiff or something. Honestly, it’s a bit unsettling.”

“Got it! I’ll convey Master’s wishes to Lord Kashin right away!” Calsedonia said, smiling brightly.

It took some persuading, as Kashin seemed quite eager to promote the Grand Mansion to Calsedonia, but eventually Kashin turned to walk away, looking somewhat defeated. Tatsumi and Calsedonia followed close behind, their shoulders almost touching.

He showed them several more houses, but none seemed right to Tatsumi and Calsedonia. Each place that Kashin eagerly recommended was more like a mansion than a regular house, and all were located in the aristocratic district.

With each rejection, Kashin grew more and more puzzled, until finally he asked, “Exactly what kind of residence do you desire, Lady Calsedonia?” And yet, he never lost his ingratiating smile. Tatsumi had to admire the man’s persistence.

“My master would prefer a smaller, more commoner-oriented house,” Calsedonia replied.

“Commoner-oriented? But surely, for someone as distinguished as Lady Calsedonia and Lord Morganaik, you would need a large mansion? There may be many events, perhaps even soirees, at your residence. A commoner’s home might not—”

“Excuse me, Lord Sankirai,” Calsedonia interrupted. “Why are you talking about Morga? I have no intention of living with him.”

Kashin looked puzzled. “Huh? But isn’t the rumored Free Knight your intended partner?”

“No, he’s not. The one I’ll... I mean, the one I’m going to live with isn’t Morga, but...” Calsedonia stepped over to Tatsumi and snuggled up to his arm. “This is Tatsumi Yamagata. He’s my true master,” she explained, looking up at Tatsumi with joy.

Kashin simply stood there with his mouth agape and his eyes wide open. Like many others, he had firmly believed that Calsedonia’s future husband would be the famous Free Knight, Morganaik Taylor.

After all, he and the Saintess had long been rumored to be romantically involved. Kashin had heard these whispers, and upon learning that Calsedonia was house hunting, he’d naturally assumed that the two were finally getting married.

Hence his surprise to learn that Calsedonia’s chosen partner was this ordinary-looking man he’d never seen or heard of before.

True, the man’s black hair and eyes were a rarity in this land, and he wore unfamiliar clothing. He wasn’t very tall; even standing next to Calsedonia, there wasn’t much difference in height. Still, his appearance was pretty average, especially compared to the Free Knight.

Morganaik was known as the strongest among the priests and warriors of the Savaiv Temple. He was revered for his mastery of both sword and spear, as well as for his knowledge of various forms of magic. He was said to be kind to the weak... and extremely hard on himself and the strong. With his handsome features and slender build, he was immensely popular with the young women of the Largofiery Kingdom.

Kashin had once seen the Saintess and the Free Knight together in the temple and had been in awe of how picturesque they looked as a couple.

However, it seemed that the rumors were just that—rumors. Right now, before his very eyes, Calsedonia was gazing at the man she herself called

‘Master’ with an expression of awe on her face. She looked exactly like a young woman in love, an emotion that seemed too real to be an act.

It wouldn’t be long before this new information spread like wildfire. In fact, Kashin was already thinking about the future. He figured that gathering even a little information about Calsedonia’s husband-to-be might prove very beneficial.

With his signature ingratiating smile on his face, Kashin approached this ordinary-looking man who would marry the Saintess and rubbed his hands together.

## Chapter 10: Exorcist

**K**ashin had led Tatsumi and Calsedonia to a house not far from the city center. “How about this one?” he asked. “It’s more modest in design, as Mr. Tatsumi requested...”

The house was built with the familiar red bricks that were common in that part of the city, and it featured wood floors. Although Kashin had called it ‘modest,’ that was only in comparison to the grand estates they’d visited earlier. For a commoner, this still would have been an impressive house.

The place had four rooms: a large room directly accessible from the entrance, which probably served as the living area. Next to it, separated by doors, were two rooms that seemed to be bedrooms. There was also a small attic room, along with a kitchen and a toilet—not a modern flush type, but a pit toilet.

There was a small front yard and a back yard, the latter of which had its own well. Tatsumi already knew that most commoners used communal wells around town, so the presence of a private well would make this a house for the wealthier commoners.

What caught Tatsumi’s eye, however, was a large hollowed-out rock near the back courtyard. “What’s that?” he asked Kashin.

“That, Mr. Tatsumi, is a bathtub. The previous owner wanted one, so he had a magician with earth-affinity magic make this stone tub.”

“Wait, this is a... bath?”

“Yes, indeed. Forgive me for assuming this, but you may be from a foreign land and unfamiliar with our customs. In this land, during the Evening Moon Festival, the power of the ice spirits intensifies. This brings us heavy snowfall and bitter cold. It’s an old tradition here to warm up in a bath during these cold times. However, except for the nobility, few people have baths in their homes. Because of that, there are several communal bathhouses in the city.” | |

To fill the bathtub with hot water, Kashin explained, you either had to boil water in a large pot and pour it into the tub, or you had to hire a magician with fire-affinity magic to heat the water already in the tub. Both methods were labor-intensive, time-consuming, and expensive. As a result, only wealthy households who could afford servants—generally nobles—could maintain a personal bathtub.

“So, the previous owner must have been fairly well off,” Tatsumi remarked.

“Indeed.” Kashin nodded. “He was successful in business and had this house built as his retirement home after handing over the business to his son. However, after the owner’s death, the son suffered business setbacks and fell into substantial debt. To get out, he had to put this house on the market.”

While they talked, Calsedonia had been giving herself a thorough tour of the house. Returning, she turned to Tatsumi. “What do you think, Master?”

“I think it’s great,” he replied, looking around. “If you like it too, Chiko, let’s settle down here.”

“I have no objections. The temple isn’t far from here either,” Calsedonia added before turning to Kashin. “How much is this house, Mr. Sankirai?”

“Thank you for your consideration! As for the price of this house—”

Tatsumi left the haggling to Calsedonia and took another leisurely look around the house. It was comparable to a 3LDK or 4LDK house in Japan, certainly spacious for just the two of them. Although it was unfurnished, he couldn’t wait to plan its interior with Calsedonia.

However, he wondered how they would pay for the place. He wasn’t sure of Giuseppe and Calsedonia’s financial standing. Did this world have an equivalent of mortgages?

*I should ask Chiko later, he thought. I feel bad letting her pay for everything. I’d better find a job soon so I can carry my own weight. Until then, I might have to accept any work I can get at the temple.*

It would take some time for Tatsumi to realize that the cost of the house was equivalent to several years of living expenses for an average citizen. And he

would be utterly shocked by Calsedonia's ability to effortlessly cover such an amount.

Although they had bought a house, they couldn't move in right away. There were furnishings to consider, and since the house had been empty for a while, it needed some minor repairs. Calsedonia said she'd take care of the furniture, and Kashin assured them that he'd take care of the repairs. For the time being, Tatsumi and Calsedonia decided to return to the temple.

As they walked, Calsedonia noticed Tatsumi trudging along with his shoulders slumped. Her eyes filled with concern. "Is something bothering you, Master?"

"No, I'm fine... It's just... reality's hit me a little hard," he admitted.

Yesterday, Calsedonia had said something about earning a 'decent income,' but she was being modest. Tatsumi was just starting to grasp the fact that she'd agree to buy and pay for a house that someone like him, in this world, would need to save for decades for.

*Religious jobs must be profitable in this world too, huh?* In his original world, religion of any kind was considered a lucrative business.

But from now on, he would live with Calsedonia. She might have been his pet cockatiel once, but now she was undeniably human and incredibly beautiful. The idea of living with such a woman still felt like a dream to Tatsumi, but he knew that it wasn't.

In his heart, he already thought of Calsedonia as his family. But he couldn't rely on her for everything anymore. It was too pitiful, even for him. He had to earn his keep, even if his salary would never be equal to hers.

With this new determination, he accepted the challenge that lay ahead of him. Even to Tatsumi, who was unfamiliar with this world, it was clear that he would have to work hard.

"A job that's easy for me and pays well... Nothing like that exists, does it?" He sighed. *Even if it did*, he thought, *someone else would've snatched it up by now.*

"When it comes to being transported to another world, the classic job that comes to mind is... an adventurer, right?" he pondered. Was that a thing in this world? And if it was, how well did it pay?

“Hey, Chiko, are there any adventurers in this world?”

“*Adventurer*? I don’t know that term. What kind of people are they?”

Tatsumi thought for a moment. “Adventurers are jacks-of-all-trades who take on dangerous jobs for money. They deal with evil creatures that threaten humans, they offer protection to traveling merchants, and sometimes they go into ancient ruins or dungeons. There are things like labyrinths there, and they fight monsters to find hidden treasures.”

“Based on your description,” Chiko replied thoughtfully, “we don’t have adventurers per se, but the closest thing would probably be monster hunters.”

“Monster hunters?” Tatsumi repeated, his curiosity piqued.

If monsters or mystical beasts existed in this world, maybe it wouldn’t be that different from the stories Tatsumi was familiar with.

Chiko explained that while they also had normal wild animals, which came with their share of dangers, these so-called monsters were on a completely different level.

“Some of these mystical beasts can evoke phenomena similar to magic. When they show up near human settlements, they’re incredibly dangerous. It’s the natural order of things—survival of the fittest. These powerful creatures may prey on the weaker humans, but it doesn’t mean that humans should just stand by and become their fodder. So, the job of monster hunter was created so we humans could fight back.”

Of course, she explained, hiring these hunters wasn’t cheap. Monsters hunters earned a wage commensurate with the risks involved, which were very high. In addition, some monsters provided valuable resources. Their flesh could be eaten, and their fur, scales, claws, teeth, and bones were sought after as materials.

In fact, many monster hunters didn’t just work for hire, but actively sought out monsters to harvest their valuable parts. Sometimes, capturing a single creature could net a hunter a small fortune.

“Don’t the army or the local lords send soldiers to deal with the monsters?” Tatsumi asked.

“Yes, the king and the regional lords sometimes do send their troops,” Chiko replied. “But knights and soldiers are mainly trained to fight other humans. I’ve heard that, when confronted with monsters, they often can’t use their full potential. Besides, monster threats are usually extremely urgent. It’s usually faster and more efficient to hire monster hunters from the start.”

Tatsumi nodded in understanding. It seemed that bureaucratic processes were slow and cumbersome in every world.

“Besides,” Chiko continued, “our temple sometimes receives requests to deal with these creatures.”

“The temple?” Tatsumi raised his eyebrow in surprise.

“Yes. Although most of the requests we get at the temple aren’t for typical monster hunts but for exorcisms.”

She went on to tell him that in her world, there were beings without physical forms; they could be called spiritual beings, or more commonly demons. While they weren’t particularly dangerous on their own, demons could possess animals and monsters and turn them into much more formidable opponents. Creatures possessed in this way were called demonic beasts.

Demon possession intensified the host’s basic instincts, like hunger, the urge to destroy, and territoriality—turning it into an uncontrollable, rampaging beast. Even if you could defeat a demonic beast, you’d only be killing the possessed creature. The demon itself, being non-physical, would simply abandon its fallen host and seek another to possess.

To truly exorcise a demon, you had to use a type of magic called Exorcism, which fell under the realms of Light and Holy. While there were weapons imbued with the same effects as exorcism magic, they were rare and were often referred to as holy swords or holy spears.

“W-Wait, Chiko,” Tatsumi stammered as realization dawned. “Are you saying that you...”

“Yes, I have an aptitude for the Holy attribute, which allows me to exorcise demons. Those of us affiliated with the temple who banish these entities are known as exorcists.”

So that explained Chiko's considerable wealth; she was an exorcist. Of course, she also earned money from her healing magic services. Though she had to donate about half of her healing fees to the Savaiv Temple, her exceptional Holy aptitude—the strongest of her five—and powerful healing magic made her highly sought after. Chiko was rarely short of requests for her healing skills. Undoubtedly, her healing skills had combined with her reputation as an exorcist to give her the moniker of Saintess.

“Demons, huh?” Tatsumi mused. “This world is certainly filled with terrifying creatures... But how do you tell the difference between normal monsters and those possessed by these demons?”

Mistaking a demon-possessed creature for a normal monster could be fatal, he thought, especially if a monster hunter was ill-equipped to deal with the demon-possessed threat.

Chiko nodded in understanding. “Creatures possessed by these demons have eyes that glow a malevolent red. The glow's so obvious that it can be seen in broad daylight, so it's almost impossible to miss them.”

“Red eyes...?” Tatsumi found his gaze instinctively drawn to Chiko's ruby-red eyes.

In a rare moment of self-consciousness, Chiko cast her eyes to the side. “My eye color got me bullied pretty often when I was younger,” she admitted sadly.

“Ah...! I'm sorry!! I didn't mean to...!” Tatsumi stammered, realizing he might have unintentionally touched on a sensitive subject. He quickly bowed deeply in apology.

“It's all right. Not many people mention it these days,” Chiko said with a reassuring smile. But she knew all too well what some people continued to whisper about her. Envious of her immense magical abilities, they speculated that her powerful magic might be due to her being possessed by a demon.

Of course, that was pure nonsense. With her high affinity for the Holy attribute, Chiko was in many ways a natural opponent for such beings. Demons would not—could not—possess her.

“But the most terrifying thing,” she continued, “is when a demon possesses a human.”

“What? They can possess humans too?” Tatsumi exclaimed, startled.

“Yes. Unlike animals or monsters, humans have a wide range of desires. There’s a theory that if those desires become too strong, they can attract demons. However, no wise man has yet been able to prove it. There were also stories,” she said, “of battlefield corpses, abandoned and filled with resentment, attracting demons and being reanimated as a sort of monster.” Tatsumi realized that she was referring to what he knew as undead creatures.

“The stronger the possessed person’s abilities and the more intense their desires, the more powerful the resulting demon-possessed being becomes,” Chiko added.

“With that in mind, these demons sound like very annoying creatures,” Tatsumi remarked.

As the two continued their walk toward the temple, they delved deeper into tales of monsters and demonic beings, from actual encounters Chiko had faced to legendary, mythical beasts from fables and lore.

Listening to her stories, Tatsumi’s curiosity about the invisible monsters grew exponentially. No matter how he had ended up in this world, he wanted to witness these magical beasts and creatures that he could never have seen in his original world.

The time passed quickly, and soon the temple began to appear in the distance. When Tatsumi first heard about the temple, he’d imagined something like the large Christian churches of his world. However, the structure in front of him looked more like a European castle—albeit with a slender tower jutting from its roof, and a large bell hanging from it that was much more reminiscent of a church.

*Well, until my home is ready, I guess I’ll stay and work at the temple.*

“Do your best, okay? If you ever need help or get into trouble, I’ll be there to support you,” Chiko said, encouraging him with a warm smile.

As the duo approached the temple's main entrance, gatekeepers stood with menacing stares and halberds at the ready. With Chiko at his side, however, Tatsumi didn't expect any problems. After all, the doors of the temple were open to everyone.

"First, we should probably tell Giuseppe about our buying the house," Tatsumi said.

"Yes. This time of day, Grandpa should be in his office," Chiko replied.

As they set off toward Giuseppe's office, a young man's quiet and deep voice echoed from behind them. "Calsey? I haven't seen you today. Were you out somewhere?"

## Chapter 11: Free Knight

The voice sounded like it was coming from someone a bit older than Tatsumi, maybe in his late teens or early twenties. Chiko turned first, and Tatsumi, walking behind her, noticed the smile that lit up her face. Intrigued, he turned around to see who had addressed them.

Standing there was a young man, probably about twenty years old. He was over six feet tall, with a slender but well-toned physique. He wore plate armor, and a sword was strapped to his side. His hair was a striking shade of red, cut short in a style that complemented his handsome features. His amber eyes looked warmly at Chiko.

Tatsumi's first impression was that the man looked like a prince or a hero from a story.

"Oh, Morga. Have you finished today's priest-warrior training?" Chiko asked in a voice that suggested this was an old friend.

"Yeah. It was quite rigorous today," Morga replied, stretching.

"I bet you mean you trained the other priest-warriors rigorously, not the other way around," Chiko teased.

Tatsumi realized he was standing between the two of them. As he stepped aside, he realized that he recognized the name Morga. This was the 'Free Knight,' the guy Kashin (and apparently many other people) had assumed Chiko was going to marry.

For a moment, Tatsumi was too lost in his thoughts to notice Morga's gaze on him. The two locked eyes, and a silent exchange began between them.

"By the way, Calsey," Morga began, "who is this with you? He's dressed rather unusually... Is he a guest from another country visiting our temple?"

"Ah! I completely forgot... My apologies," Chiko mumbled, embarrassed. She turned to Tatsumi and bowed deeply.

“Tatsumi, allow me to introduce you to Morganaik Taylor. He’s a priest-warrior of the Savaiv Temple, and like me, he’s also an exorcist.”

“Wait, like you, Chiko?”

“Yes. Whenever we receive a request for an exorcism, Morga and I always work together,” Chiko explained. She threw Morganaik a playful smile. In return, Morganaik smiled warmly, his gaze meeting hers.

Tatsumi felt like he was watching a celebrity couple.

Morga took a step toward him. “I’m Morganaik Taylor, as Calsedonia said. Pleased to meet you, foreigner,” he said, extending his right hand.

So, shaking hands was a common greeting in this world as well. Tatsumi took Morganaik’s hand firmly. “The pleasure is mine. I’m Yamagata Tatsumi... or should I introduce myself as Tatsumi Yamagata?”

Earlier, when Calsey had introduced him to Kashin, she had called him “Tatsumi Yamagata.” It seemed that in this country, names were given in the Western style, first name, then last.

“So, Lord Tatsumi, what brings you to our country? If you’re here with Calsey, are you seeking an audience with His Highness Chrysopraxe?” Morganaik inquired.

Everyone in the temple knew that Calsey was Giuseppe’s adopted daughter. Giuseppe saw many visitors, and most were escorted to him by Calsey.

“Wait... His Highness Chrysopraxe... that’s Giuseppe, right?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Calsey replied with a smile. It was a simple exchange, but the effect on Morganaik was profound. In the Kingdom of Largofiery, such a casual reference to Giuseppe Chrysopraxe, the pinnacle of Savaiv’s followers, was unthinkable. The High Priests of the religious orders, including the god Savaiv, held authority comparable to the kings of their lands.

Who was this black-haired young man who had just called the High Priest ‘Giuseppe’? Another thing that bothered Morganaik was Calsey’s behavior toward this stranger. Although she was the adopted daughter of Giuseppe Chrysopraxe and was known throughout the Largofiery Kingdom as the

Saintess, she interacted with the young man as if serving him was the most natural thing in the world—and as if there was nothing she would have enjoyed more!

Calsey could usually be found smiling, and her disposition was warm toward everyone. But that was her duty as a priest. In her private life, she rarely got close to members of the opposite sex. The few men she confided in included her grandfather Giuseppe, his close associates, and a handful of archpriests who had adored her since childhood. Most of them were much older, so she wouldn't have thought of any of them in romantic terms.

Morganaik had always prided himself on being the young man closest to Calsey. Over the years, he had partnered with Calsey on numerous exorcism missions. Their bond had been one of mutual trust and respect. But to see her act this way around a stranger was perplexing and, admittedly, a little unsettling.

It was fairly common knowledge that Morganaik and Calsedonia were a demon-slaying power duo. Both monster hunters and exorcists faced formidable opponents, and they tended to work in groups. Of course, there were those who would stubbornly work alone, but they were either exceptionally skilled, a bit antisocial, or just eccentric.

Morganaik and Calsedonia had both been exorcists for several years, and they had worked together from the start. Sometimes their assignments would take them on days-long journeys, just the two of them, wandering through forests and wilderness until they had defeated their monstrous or demonic target. At first, they were awkward with each other and spoke minimally, but as they took on more missions, fighting monsters side by side and risking their lives together, they'd opened up and come to trust each other immensely.

Morganaik held this fact in solid confidence within himself. Calsedonia, the adopted daughter of Giuseppe Chrysopraxe, the head of the Savaiv Temple, was said to be inundated with marriage proposals on a daily basis. Fortunately, Giuseppe had no political ambitions, so it seemed he had no intention of using her in a political marriage. And of all the men Calsedonia knew, Morganaik was the one she was closest to.

Naturally, rumors had spread throughout the city and beyond that the two were romantically involved. But for Morganaik, these weren't just rumors; as he and Calsedonia had grown close, he'd gradually come to harbor feelings for her.

Although she was called "Saintess," her character was no different from that of any ordinary girl. Anyone who was hurt would receive her healing touch and kindness. Morganaik found himself especially drawn to these aspects of her.

Sometimes she'd go a little too far and make a mistake, then try to cover it up with a cheeky stick of her tongue, revealing her innocent side. And most of all, it was the moments when he caught a glimpse of her genuine smile, hidden behind her polite façade, that truly captivated him. Without realizing it, Morganaik had begun to see Calsedonia not only as a colleague but as a woman.

"Yesterday, when we passed each other, it seemed like His Excellency had some business to attend to, so we couldn't really talk..." Morganaik whispered to himself, now getting lost in his thoughts. *But now that I think about it, I haven't seen Calsey in the last few days.* Nonetheless, he suppressed the rising questions in his heart as he turned his attention back to Calsedonia.

"Yes, my grandfather instructed me to go and welcome Lord Yamagata here," Calsedonia explained.

At this point, only Giuseppe knew that she had successfully performed a summoning spell to bring Tatsumi to this world. Although the existence of summoning magic was known, as far as anyone knew, no one had managed to use it for hundreds of years.

If word got out that Calsedonia had successfully performed a summoning spell, it could cause an uproar, so Giuseppe decided to keep it under wraps. Of course, there was also no guarantee that Calsedonia would be able to successfully perform another summoning spell in the future, nor was she confident that she could summon anyone other than Tatsumi.

The spell might have been successful only because the one calling was Calsedonia, and the one called was Tatsumi.

So, while Calsedonia had actually spent several days underground for the summoning spell, she had officially followed Giuseppe's orders to go and greet

a guest. It wasn't a complete lie; after all, Tatsumi had been able to come to this world because Calsedonia welcomed him.

"You can just call me Tatsumi," Tatsumi said with a smile.

"All right, Tatsumi. Then you can call me Morga," Morganaik replied with a warm smile. For a brief moment, however, his auburn eyes shone with a powerful glow that didn't go unnoticed by Tatsumi, who was standing directly in front of him.

After a bow, Morganaik turned and left the couple. Tatsumi watched him go, tilting his head as he tried to decipher the meaning behind Morganaik's momentary intense gaze.

"Is something wrong, Master?" Calsedonia asked, glancing sideways at him with a worried expression.

Tatsumi opted to steer the conversation in another direction. "Ah, no, it's nothing. But hey, this Morga, he's called the Free Knight, right? What does that title mean exactly?"

"Master, you're well informed about him... Ah, that's right. Lord Sankirai mentioned something about him today," Calsedonia noted, her eyes flickering as she began to explain.

Originally, knights were individuals who served kings, countries, or nobles. They pledged their loyalty and martial prowess to their masters, becoming their shield and sword. Knights were expected to possess both noble spirits and strong physiques, and they went through strict training and discipline to meet these demands.

Of course, not all knights met these criteria, but in general, knights held a gallant and brave image, and were immensely popular with women and children.

A free knight, however, was different in that he did not serve a lord. Instead, free knights took up their swords to help the weak and those in need. However, not everyone could claim this title.

Free knights, having no lord to serve, also lacked a steady income. Even a child knows that it costs money to live. And so free knights tended to have an

unenviable financial situation. While just honorable and prestigious as regular knights, free knights tended to make a more modest impression. Because of this, few openly identified themselves as free knights, and even fewer aspired to become one.

*They sound more like heroes than knights*, Tatsumi thought when Chiko had finished her explanation.

“Morga’s defeated too many monsters and beasts to count for the sake of those in need. He never asks for money for his services, he just helps because there are people in need. Of course, if it’s an official request, the temple will provide a reward. But even without a request from the temple, he takes up his sword on his own initiative to help those in need. I think it’s only natural that he’s become known as the Free Knight,” Calsedonia explained.

“So, when he fights for those in need... Chiko, you’ve been there with him too, right?”

“Yes... as a priest... and as his friend... I wanted to help him... B-But!!” Calsedonia turned to Tatsumi with a panicked expression. “I-I mean, strictly as a friend... It’s definitely not like the rumors going around... There’s absolutely no truth to... those rumors about him and me!!! What I feel is...”

Her face was bright red, and although she was clearly confused, Tatsumi understood what she was trying to say. He smiled warmly and replied, “Don’t worry, I understand. Rumors are just rumors, right?”

“Y-Yeah...!! D-do you really believe me...?”

“Of course I believe you.” Tatsumi gently ruffled Calsedonia’s hair while she looked up at him with big eyes. The gesture reminded him exactly of the first time they’d gone out into the city together.

“Anyway, let’s hurry and tell Lord Giuseppe that we found a house.”

“Yes!!”

Just like before, Calsedonia snuggled up to Tatsumi and wrapped her arm around him.

## Chapter 12: Glimpse

Tatsumi swung his hatchet down on a log about half as long as his arm. It split neatly in half, and the blade bit lightly into the ground beneath. He set up another halved log and swung again, the satisfying thunk accompanying the transformation of the half-circle log into a quarter-circle segment. Gathering the four quarters, he tossed them aside and prepared a new log for splitting. The resonant crack confirmed another successful split, and Tatsumi paused to wipe the sweat from his brow.

He was currently engaged in what was known as ‘chopping firewood.’

Following his decision from the day before, Tatsumi was now working as a laborer for the temple.

“Do I... have to split *all* of this...? All of it...?” he asked, voice hoarse, staring at the mountain of unsplit logs that in front of him.

“Yep, all of it! The temple is a big place, you know. We go through a tremendous amount of firewood every day, so chopping wood is an important job here, rookie.”

The answer came from a middle-aged man with a stern face and a large build, and it was accompanied by a hearty laugh and a friendly slap on the back. The man’s name was Bogard, and he was the one who’d led Tatsumi into the temple’s rear courtyard.

Caught off guard by the slap to his back, Tatsumi stumbled, causing the holy seal around his neck to sway and jingle.

“Your name was Tatsumi, right? Here, use this,” Bogard said, offering Tatsumi a well-used axe. “With this one, you have to split all these logs into quarters, lengthwise.

“You can take a break in the fourth hour, so hold on until then,” he added before striding away on long legs.

[For reference, the fourth hour in this context is roughly noon in Japanese time.]

According to Tatsumi's watch, the sun would show its face around 6 a.m. Every two hours throughout the day, bells would ring from each temple. One chime at 6 a.m.—they called this the first hour, two at 8 a.m.—the second hour, and so on, until seven chimes signaled sunset at 6 p.m. There were no bells after that, and as far as Tatsumi could tell, the night hours had no names.

Calsedonia had explained that the time for ringing the bells was measured using a sundial. For cloudy or rainy days, there was a magical item with a timer-like function; however, this was an extremely rare and expensive item that only the High Priest was allowed to touch. Not even Calsedonia had seen it.

Just as on Earth, this world seemed to have twenty-four hours in a day. Tatsumi wondered if the changing seasons brought any variation in the length of day. He had only been in this world for three days, so it was too soon to tell. Or perhaps this world operated on a geocentric model, with the celestial bodies moving in a regular pattern around a stationary Earth.

In fact—as Tatsumi would learn later—the generally accepted view was that the continents and oceans floated in something called the Star Realm. At the northern and eastern edges of the sea, massive waterfalls emptied into it from an unknown source. At the southern and western edges, the waterfalls flowed in the opposite direction—out of the sea and into an unknowable abyss.

Some sages speculated that the water that fell from the southern and western edges traveled through a void to reenter the sea in the north and east, but since no one had ever seen these colossal waterfalls at the ends of the sea, this remained a theory.

Beyond the Star Realm, it was believed that there was a Divine Realm where the gods resided.

Putting aside these cosmic thoughts, Tatsumi stared blankly at the pile of logs in front of him.

Tatsumi sighed. No matter how long he looked at them, they wouldn't split themselves. He made up his mind, rolled up the sleeves of his robe, and channeled all the determination within him.

He was no longer wearing the clothes he'd come to this world with, but a priest's robe that Giuseppe had provided. Yesterday, when he'd gone to the city with Calsey, he had also bought several sets of everyday clothes and underwear, but it was mandatory to wear the priestly robe when working at the temple.

The wardrobe change wasn't just for show. Tatsumi had also been officially appointed as a deacon by Giuseppe. Although he held the lowest rank of the lower priests, it did a lot to establish his status in this world. Since the temple was independent of the state, simply belonging to the temple was something; deacons were generally considered to have the same level of knowledge as sages.

Of course, not just anyone could walk in and join the temple; usually, you had to pass an examination. The fact that Tatsumi had been able to bypass that and gain the status of even a low-ranking priest was undoubtedly because some high priests had pulled some strings.

Now that Tatsumi was once again facing the mountain of logs, he looked down at his white priestly robe. He wondered if it was really okay to get it dirty, even for work. Or rather, if he wanted to get it dirty; his particular variety of robe, along with the holy seal he wore, was for lower priests. Although the robe was white, it was recognized as 'work clothes,' meaning no matter how dirty it got, Tatsumi wouldn't be in trouble—but he would have to wash it himself.

Realizing there was no point in worrying any longer, Tatsumi swung the hand axe Bogard had given him a few times to get a feel for it. Satisfied, he stood a log upright on the ground nearby, gave a light swing, and brought the axe down. When the blade bit into the log, it split beautifully in two.

*Huh...? But I didn't use that much power...* Tatsumi tilted his head in confusion, staring at the cleanly split log.

"Well, whatever. I won't complain if they split easily," he muttered to himself and kept working.

Rather than splitting logs directly on soft ground, most people use a stump or a piece of wood as a base. But Tatsumi didn't know any better, so he continued to beat log after log against the ground.

The temple bells rang twice, then three times, but Tatsumi was too absorbed in his work to hear them. Finally, a few minutes after the bells had rung four times to signal noon, Bogard leisurely reappeared in the courtyard.

“Hey, newbie. How much progress have you... Whoa!?” Bogard did a double-take when he saw the mountain of split wood.

Every log in Tatsumi’s mountain had been neatly split into quarters. It was a sight that would have surprised anyone.

“Ah, Bogard. Just like you asked, I’ve split all the logs,” Tatsumi said, standing up from where he’d been sitting on the ground and calmly addressing the stunned Bogard.

“Wh-What? You split them all up? You mean to tell me that you split the entire amount in half a day...?” Bogard looked back and forth between Tatsumi and the cut firewood in disbelief.

This young man with rare black hair and black eyes, a sight almost unseen in the Kingdom of Largofiery, had suddenly appeared in front of him this morning. He was a new junior deacon, here to do the menial work at the temple starting today. Apparently, someone of higher rank than Bogard had instructed him to follow Bogard’s lead and do whatever he asked.

Bogard crossed his muscular arms and scrutinized the bold-looking young man. Despite his intimidating size and fierce demeanor, Bogard was kind and considerate to his subordinates. He was the kind of man who rewarded those who worked diligently. Part of his job was also assigning the right tasks to the right people. This morning, he’d looked Tatsumi over before him putting him on firewood duty.

The guy wasn’t particularly tall; in fact, he was a good head shorter than the towering Bogard. His body was slender, his arms only about half as thick as Bogard’s—almost like a woman’s. So strenuous physical labor, Bogard had figured, would be out of the question for him. Chopping wood required considerable strength, but it was certainly more manageable than hauling water from the well or carrying the priests’ daily supply of food. If Tatsumi, with his slender arms, had finished a quarter of the work by noon, Bogard would have

been impressed. Instead, he had finished *all* of it. Even for Bogard, such a feat would have been impossible.

For a moment, the supervisor could only stare at Tatsumi and the pile of logs. But soon, a manly smile spread across his stern face.

“Hahahaha! You’ve done quite well, newbie—no, Tatsumi! You’ve earned my respect!” Bogard exclaimed, giving Tatsumi a hearty pat on the back before gesturing for him to sit down again. “You must be starving after all that work. How about we eat something?”

As Bogard spoke, he unfolded a bundle of cloth and pulled out what looked like a sandwich.

After taking a hearty bite, he noticed Tatsumi standing there in a daze. “What’s wrong? Sit down and eat. We don’t have all day for a break, you know?”

“Ah, well... actually, I didn’t bring any food with me...” Tatsumi admitted, scratching the back of his head with an embarrassed expression. Until that moment, he had completely forgotten about the need to eat during one’s break.

It seemed that people in the Kingdom of Largofiery ate three meals a day—the first between the first bell (around 6:00 a.m.) and the second bell (8:00 a.m.), the second around the fourth bell (noon), and the final meal after the seventh bell (6:00 p.m.). In addition, they sometimes ate a light snack between the fifth bell (around 2:00 p.m.) and the sixth bell (around 4:00 p.m.).

Of course, Calsedonia had told Tatsumi all this yesterday, but he’d completely forgotten. As he stood there wondering what to do, Bogard looked up at him with a sigh.

“What is it? Didn’t you bring anything to eat? That means we’ll have to go all the way to the dining hall.”

Tatsumi remembered walking past the dining hall inside the temple, which provided meals for the priests, but he hadn’t used it yet. Since he’d arrived, Chiko had prepared all his meals. The dining hall was run by the deacons, who took turns as part of their training, but it was quite far from the back courtyard.

“Well, the work I had planned for you is all done, so I guess it doesn’t matter if we take longer at lunch... Or if you want, I can share some of mine with you. Mind you, my wife made it, so I can’t guarantee the taste,” Bogard added with a hearty laugh. He gestured again for Tatsumi to sit down.

“No, no, I couldn’t take your food,” Tatsumi said. “I’ll go to the dining hall.”

“You sure? Well, take your time and enjoy your meal,” Bogard replied with a nod.

With that, Tatsumi started to walk toward the dining hall—or at least he intended to.

Just as he turned toward the door that connected the back courtyard to the temple, it swung open by itself. Of course, doors didn’t just open by themselves. Someone must have opened it from inside the temple. That someone poked their head out and looked around curiously. A tuft of hair was sticking out of their head, swaying back and forth.

The moment they spotted Tatsumi, their face lit up with a radiant smile.

“Master! I’ve brought you your meal!”

“Chiko, did you really come all this way just to bring me food?” Tatsumi asked, eyes wide with surprise.

“Yes! I didn’t know where Master was working, so I looked everywhere, and it took me a while. I’m sorry for the delay,” Calsedonia replied, her voice filled with apologetic tones as she fluttered closer to Tatsumi. She gave a little bow and presented him with a wrapped package.

“Thank you, Chiko. By the way, have you already eaten?” Tatsumi inquired.

“No, um... If Master doesn’t mind, I was thinking... maybe we could eat together?” Chiko suggested shyly, her cheeks immediately taking on a light blush.

Of course, Tatsumi had no reason to refuse her offer. “Sure, join us.” Then he remembered Bogard. “Oh, by the way...” But when Tatsumi turned to ask his supervisor if Calsedonia could join them, the man had turned into a statue.

Bogard was standing with his mouth gaping open, eyes flicking back and forth between Tatsumi and Calsedonia. His hand went slack and a half-eaten piece of bread fell to the ground, and as if that were a signal, he finally moved.

“Lady Ca-Ca-Ca-Ca-Calsedonia!? Wh-Why is the Saintess bringing Tatsumi his food...!” Bogard exclaimed, eyes wide open in shock.

Calsedonia tilted her head in confusion. “Master?” she said, turning to Tatsumi, “Who’s that?”

While Calsedonia would have been pressed to find anyone in the temple who didn’t know her, she herself hadn’t met many of its denizens. Her acquaintances here were mostly limited to those in much higher positions than Bogard’s.

“Ah, this is Bogard. He helped me with my work today,” Tatsumi explained.

“Oh, is that so? Lord Bogard, thank you for taking care of my master,” Calsedonia said gratefully, giving the man a bow.

“M-Master...!” Bogard was stunned, his voice trailing off in disbelief.

It seemed that he had taken her use of the word ‘master’ to mean ‘husband.’ She had meant it in the sense of an owner—particularly a pet owner—but in this context, anyone would probably have had the same misunderstanding as Bogard.

“So Tatsumi is—no, *Lord* Tatsumi is...” Bogard began hesitantly. When he and Calsedonia took a seat nearby, Tatsumi waved his hands in a dismissive gesture.

“Come on, don’t start calling me ‘Lord’ all of a sudden.”

“But, you know...”

“It’s okay. I’m just a newcomer doing physical labor. Calsedonia and I... we’re different people.”

“O-Okay, if you say so... But, Lady Calsedonia, is that really okay with you?”

“Yes. As long as Master says so. I’m here to respect and follow Master’s wishes.”

“Sigh... To think that the Saintess herself would go so far...”

Bogard rubbed his thick chin with his thumb as he took another glance at Tatsumi and Calsedonia. The usually dignified Calsedonia was now the picture of a girl in love, while Tatsumi seemed to be completely at ease, despite the fuss she was making.

The couple looked, at least to Bogard, like they had been together for many years.

As the three of them enjoyed the mealtime together, Bogard slowly warmed up to Calsedonia. Of course, he was still on his most polite behavior, considering he was in the company of the High Priest's granddaughter and the renowned Saintess.

Eventually, the pleasant meal came to an end, and after cleaning up, the three got up to leave.

"All right, Tatsumi. To tell you the truth, all the work I had planned for you today is already done. What do you want to do now?"

"If there's anything else I can do to help, I'd be happy to lend a hand."

"Is that so? Well, if you don't mind, could you take about a quarter of the firewood you chopped to the kitchen? The rest needs to be taken to the firewood storage area. I'll show you where that is after. Once that's done, you'll be done for the day."

As Tatsumi and Bogard discussed the afternoon's tasks, Calsedonia watched them with a gentle smile.

"All right! Let's give it our all this afternoon as well!" Tatsumi declared, slapping his cheeks with his hands to pump himself up.

"Yes, do your best—" Calsedonia started to cheer him on but then stopped mid-sentence.

"What's wrong, Chiko?"

"Oh, n-nothing..." she began, her words trailing off. Tatsumi tilted his head inward but decided not to press her any further, choosing instead to follow Bogard to find out where the firewood storage area was.

Watching Tatsumi's retreat, Calsedonia muttered to herself, her words barely audible.

*Just now, for a moment... just a moment, I thought I felt magical power from Master... Was it just my imagination?*

## Chapter 13: A Change in the Air

Tatsumi soon found himself making numerous trips between the courtyard and the kitchen, using a carrying frame he'd found at the wood storage area. Even though he'd been loading the frame with as much wood as it could hold, the sheer amount of firewood to be carried soon made it clear that two or three trips just wouldn't be enough.

By now, he had made at least ten trips, but Tatsumi didn't feel as exhausted as he expected. Furthermore, even loaded to its maximum capacity, the frame didn't feel as heavy as it looked. Tatsumi somehow had a vague feeling that his strength and stamina seemed to have *increased* since he'd chopped wood in the morning.

*Could this be...? Is it really... that?* he wondered, thinking about the so-called 'isekai boost' often seen in novels about transitioning to another world. This is when one's physical abilities, among other things, become vastly superior to what they were in their home world.

According to Giuseppe and Calsedonia, Tatsumi had no magical power, and he had no reason to doubt them. However, maybe an isekai boost was different from magic. An increase in physical abilities alone—it seemed plausible that the two mages might not be able to detect such a change.

Excited to think that things were finally taking a turn for the isekai, Tatsumi quickened his pace. With another load of firewood piled up like a mountain on the frame, he made another trip from the courtyard to the kitchen, his steps light. The low-ranking deacons working in the kitchen, as well as other priests passing by, stared at him as if they had seen someone from another planet.

"Man, you're unbelievable. Isn't that heavy?" a deacon with brown hair and brown eyes asked Tatsumi in amazement.

"I can feel the weight, but... it's not as heavy as I expected," Tatsumi replied.

“Really?” The deacon put down the knife he was chopping with. “Can I give it a try?”

“Sure,” Tatsumi nodded.

Squatting down to strap the frame in, the deacon took a deep breath and stood up, then immediately lost his balance and started to fall. Tatsumi quickly reached out to steady him, but the deacon still ended up sitting on the floor after he’d taken off the frame.

“Hey! This is *heavy*! How is this possibly not heavy to you?” the deacon complained, looking up at Tatsumi.

Tatsumi smiled wryly as he helped the man up. “Well, I don’t know what to tell you... It really doesn’t feel heavy to me.” He shouldered the frame and lifted it again to demonstrate, even adding a few light jumps to emphasize how unburdened he felt.

“Wow, are you some kind of magician? Are you using magic to lighten the load or something?” the deacon wondered.

“No, I’m not a mage. In fact, I’ve been told that I don’t have any magical powers at all.”

“Hmm? Well, whatever the case may be, it’s clear that you’re no ordinary person. By the way, my name is Barse. It looks like you’re a deacon as well?”

Barse held out his right hand as he spoke, and Tatsumi shook it firmly. “Tatsumi Yamagata. I’m new to the country.”

“Aha, so you come from another country. I thought so, judging by your black hair and eyes.”

Barse gave a friendly smile. He seemed to be about the same age as Tatsumi, and Tatsumi felt right away that they could become good friends.

Normally, Tatsumi was a very outgoing person. But when he had lost his family and began living on his own—well, with Chiko—the pressure of this reality, coupled with the fear of whether he could really handle it, had gradually turned his personality inward. It didn’t help that none of his close friends from

his middle school days had gone to his new school. Perhaps if even one of them had been there, he wouldn't have dropped out.

Now, in this new world, after being reunited with Chiko, Tatsumi was slowly returning to his extroverted self. Even now, following positive interactions with people like Bogard and Barse, he could feel himself opening up more and more.

"Oops, if I laze around here too long, I'll get scolded by the temple master or the priest," Barse said. "Let's meet some other time when we're both free and have a meal together, Tatsumi."

"Sure, sounds good. See you later, Barse," Tatsumi said with a quick wave, before starting to unload the firewood from the carrying frame.

Once he had delivered all the firewood to the kitchen and stacked the rest in the storage place Bogard had shown him, he felt tired—but not nearly as tired as he should have felt, considering how much work he had done. However, just as he thought the isekai boost might actually be working, a sudden and overwhelming wave of fatigue hit him.

"What the...?"

Caught off guard, Tatsumi collapsed on the spot. He tried to get up, but his body didn't have the strength.

"What's happening to me...?"

It took several moments of sitting there, catching his breath in deep gasps, before Tatsumi finally felt able to move his body again. Staggering slightly, he managed to stand up and began to walk slowly, using the outer wall of the temple for support.

*I have no idea what's going on... but it's lucky this happened after I finished work...* Tatsumi thought as he tried to collect himself.

If this had happened a couple of hours earlier, he might have been crushed under the firewood he was carrying. Okay, maybe not *crushed*, but there would have been a good chance he would have been injured in the fall.

Bogard had said there was nothing else that needed to be done for the day, so Tatsumi slowly made his way to the main gate of the temple, where he and

Chiko had agreed to meet after work.

He was now walking considerably slower than when he'd been carrying the enormous pile of firewood, but finally Tatsumi came within sight of the main gate. Chiko was already there waiting for him. Her face lit up when she saw him, but she quickly realized that something was wrong and rushed to him in a panic.

"Master! What happened to you?" she exclaimed, concern etched into her face.

"I'm not really sure... I just suddenly felt exhausted the minute I finished working..." Tatsumi explained in a weak voice.

Chiko quickly examined him to confirm there were no visible injuries. "It looks like you're suffering from extreme fatigue..."

She was used to seeing injured and sick people. Temples served not only as places of worship, but also as medical facilities. As part of their duties, the clergy, including Chiko, who had some medical knowledge, treated the injured and sick. So, she knew better than anyone what was wrong with him.

"Rest here. I'll treat you right away."

Chiko raised her right hand in front of Tatsumi's forehead and began to chant an incantation in a clear, resonant voice. As she chanted, her right hand was enveloped in a silver light that gradually made its way toward Tatsumi and flowed into his body.

Soon, Tatsumi's body had completely absorbed the silver light. It felt like a massive weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Thank you, Chiko," he breathed. "Was that healing magic just now?"

"Yes. That was a Light Holy series spell called Vitality Revival. It has the effect of relieving fatigue. However, it only provides temporary relief for the duration of the spell."

"Yes, even that helps a lot. I imagine my strength will come back on its own after a while."

"So, what did that do to you? Did you maybe push yourself too hard today?" Calsedonia asked with concern as she helped Tatsumi stand up.

When Tatsumi had finished telling her about his day, she furrowed her brow and thought for a moment. “Hmm... from what you’ve told me, it *seems* like simple exhaustion. However, the symptoms are quite similar to what often happens to beginners who use magic recklessly without knowing their limits.”

Calsedonia explained that the use of magic exhausted both magical power and physical strength. This depletion of physical strength, however, was reduced as one got used to casting spells.

Thus, a beginner who used magic to their limit might end up in a state of extreme fatigue, just like what Tatsumi had experienced.

“But I don’t have any magic power, right? And I don’t remember using magic... I mean, I *can’t* even use magic,” Tatsumi pointed out.

“That’s true...” Calsedonia agreed, placing her index finger under her chin as she sank into thought.

What bothered her was the moment after lunch when she’d thought she felt a hint of magical power from him. At the time, she had dismissed it as her imagination, but if it wasn’t her imagination, then...

Once again, Calsedonia scanned Tatsumi’s entire body, using her skill as a magician to try and sense any magical power within him. But even with her senses at maximum, she felt nothing.

“Indeed, Master, I can confirm that you don’t possess any magical power,” she concluded.

“Well, standing here won’t solve anything. Shall we go shopping as planned?” Tatsumi suggested, ready to change the subject.

Earlier, he’d promised Calsedonia that they would go to the city and start looking at the things they needed for the house, like furniture and dishes.

“Master, if you’re feeling tired, you don’t need to push yourself to go shopping. We still have plenty of time to get everything ready for the house,” Calsedonia said.

Kashin had sent word that the house would require about three days of work—which would give them plenty of time to buy everything they needed.

“Well, I don’t have anything else planned for today. If possible, I’d like to take this opportunity to get a better feel for the city...” Tatsumi said, his voice trailing off.

*And most of all, he was about to say, I was hoping to spend more time with Chiko.* But Tatsumi hastily swallowed these words, feeling a little embarrassed—no, extremely embarrassed—to say them aloud.

Calsedonia watched Tatsumi blush, her ruby-red eyes filled with curiosity. It was as if she could see right through his heart. With color still on his cheeks, Tatsumi quickly began to walk forward.

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*Who on earth is that man?*

The man who walked amiably with the Saintess was being watched intently by another. The observer scrutinized the black-haired, black-eyed foreigner’s back, his gaze sharp as a dagger.

He was a stranger, brought directly from the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple. The only features that stood out about him were his rare hair, eyes, and skin color. He didn’t seem to be very strong, nor did he seem to be an outstanding magician.

Hearing that he had been personally invited by the High Priest, one would naturally assume that he was of considerable status. Yet, he had been seen diligently performing menial tasks while wearing the robes of a mere deacon.

So why had High Priest Chrysoprase personally invited this man from a foreign land? And why was Calsedonia so devoted to him, with such a happy expression on her face?

Questions abounded in the observer’s mind, but answers were nowhere to be found. This only increased his frustration.

*Could it be...?*

He had deliberately avoided thinking about it until now, but the thought inevitably crossed his mind. *Maybe High Priest Chrysoprase is planning to marry*

*Calsedonia to this man?*

But he quickly tried to dismiss the thought, telling himself that it made no sense. Calsedonia had rejected proposals from royalty. It seemed utterly implausible that she would marry a *deacon*.

The man's identity remained a mystery, and his frustration grew. At the same time, the fear that Calsedonia might be taken away by this man tightened its grip on his heart.

Seeing the Saintess cling to a man's arm like some kind of backstreet harlot was something he didn't want to witness. Yet he found himself unable to look away.

And then it happened.

As he stared intently at the backs of the two figures walking away, a voice—or rather, an inaudible whisper—reached his ears.

*If you're afraid of her being taken away, why don't you take her away first?*

## Chapter 14: Hidden Feelings

“**S**o how is our son-in-law doing?” Giuseppe inquired, accepting the tea his assistant Baldio was handing him.

“He seems to have done some manual labor today,” Baldio answered. “He worked until about the fifth hour, then went into town with Calsey... Forgive my rudeness, but who exactly is this man, Your Holiness?”

“Oh? Are you worried about our son-in-law?”

“Of course I am. I’ve known Calsey since you adopted her. She’s like a little sister to me. When I see her getting close to a man and I don’t know where he’s from, it’s only natural that I’d be a little concerned.”

Giuseppe replied with a warm smile. “While I appreciate that you’re concerned for her, now that our son-in-law is here with us, there’s no stopping Calsey. Once she sets her sights on a goal, she’ll overcome any obstacle in her way—no, she ‘ll break through it if she has to, just like she always has. You know that as well as I do.”

“Indeed... She can be quite radical.” Baldio couldn’t help but chuckle wryly as he remembered a few of Calsedonia’s past exploits. “But you saying that only makes me want to know more about who he is.”

“Ho, ho, ho. I’m afraid I can’t tell you everything about our son-in-law just yet; not even you. But I can tell you this much: he comes from a faraway land. And Calsey has been working hard for years to meet him.”

“I see... But what about *him*?”

“Morga, huh...” Remembering the man who secretly harbored feelings for Calsedonia, Giuseppe frowned.

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Upon returning from his shopping trip with Calsedonia, Tatsumi returned to his assigned guest room and immediately collapsed on the bed.

Since he was about to move into a house in a few days, instead of sleeping in the dormitory, he was allowed to continue using the guest room Giuseppe had shown him that first day,

In this world where mattresses with springs were a luxury, beds were made by stuffing well-dried and kneaded hay into a bag-like sheet that functioned as a futon. More luxurious mattresses might use feathers instead of hay, but those were high-end products used only by nobles and the like.

Every time Tatsumi lay on the bed, the unique fragrance of hay enveloped his entire body. Moreover, the hay used in this particular bed seemed to be mixed with herbs that had the effect of relieving fatigue, allowing him to sleep soundly every night.

As Tatsumi lay spread-eagled on the hay bed, he couldn't help but think about his own bed and the guitar he had brought with him to this new world. Giuseppe was apparently keeping them for him, and they would be moved to the house he and Calsedonia were to live in as soon as it was ready.

Tatsumi missed his old bed, but he was also developing a fondness for this hay bed, so he had the luxury of being torn on which one he should use in the future.

However, today had been his first day of manual labor at the temple. Unaccustomed to the work and still plagued by an unexplained fatigue, he soon began to doze off while lying on the bed.

“No, no, I've got to at least take a bath before I go to sleep...”

Pulling his consciousness back from the brink of sleep by sheer force of will, Tatsumi staggered out of the guest room.

In one corner of the Savaiv Temple, there was a large bathhouse for the resident priests.

The bathhouse was a communal facility used by everyone from the High Priest on down, and of course it was divided into separate areas for men and women. The highest-ranking priests, such as the High Priest and Archpriests,

each had small bathrooms in their private rooms, and many of them also had homes outside the temple, so they rarely used the common bathhouse.

In terms of status within the temple, the hierarchy from highest to lowest was: High Priest, Archpriest, High Priest, Priest, Assistant Priest, Senior Deacon, and Junior Deacon. Of these, there was only one High Priest per sect, and Archpriests often served as heads of temples in different regions. In small local chapels, it wasn't uncommon for a priest, or even an assistant priest, to be in charge.

The water in the bathhouse was heated by priests using fire-related magic on a rotating basis, and apparently this duty sometimes fell to Calsedonia as well. After undressing in the dressing room, Tatsumi entered the bathhouse with only a hand towel.

Priests who served the gods were expected to keep their bodies clean. Therefore, the bathhouse was busy in the evening hours with people washing off the fatigue and dirt of the day. Soon, Tatsumi found himself immersed in one of the tubs, blissfully soaking in the soothing warmth. His world may have changed, but the comfort of a bath remained the same. Suddenly, Tatsumi was taken out his thoughts by someone calling his name.

"Um, Tatsumi, is that you? Are you here for a bath as well?"

When he turned around, he saw Barse, the junior deacon he had met in the kitchen earlier. Barse seemed to have no qualms about exposing his naked body as he joined Tatsumi, offering a friendly smile.

"You're here too, Barse?"

"Yep. Nothing like a bath to relieve the tiredness of a day's work."

Encouraged by Barse, Tatsumi looked around and indeed noticed that everyone was seeming to enjoy the bath.

"Huh, so baths are popular in this country too."

"Oh? So, there are baths where you're from as well?"

"Yeah, people take baths every day. Some even bathe during the day."

“That’s quite a luxury, isn’t it? Boiling water for a bath is such a hassle here that people only bathe at certain times of the day; it’s just common sense in this country.”

Unlike Japan, where you could easily heat water by pressing a button on a panel, here there were limited ways to boil a large amount of water. This explained the crowded conditions in large public bathhouses like this one.

“But, well, being able to take a bath like this every day, despite all the hard training and work, definitely made it an easy choice to become a priest,” Barse continued.

“So, you mean you couldn’t bathe every day before you became a deacon?”

“Nope. I come from a small village in the countryside. There aren’t any public bathhouses like there are here in the capital, so we had to wash in the river. I literally dreamed of taking a bath like this every day.”

As he stretched out in the hot water, Barse wore the serene face of someone whose dream has come true.

“By the way, Tatsumi, how long have you been in this temple? I hadn’t seen you here until recently.”

“Oh, I came here two days ago.”

“Heh, I thought so. But I guess we’ll be working together a lot from now on, right? Nice to see you again, then.”

“Ah, about that...”

Tatsumi told Barse about his plans to move out of the temple and into a house soon.

“Wait, what? You just got here, and you’re already going to live in a house? You have a family name, Tatsumi. Were you from a noble family in your hometown?”

The way Barse asked, Tatsumi guessed that commoners didn’t have family names in this country.

“Where I come from, even commoners have family names. So no, I’m not noble or rich or anything like that.”

As he splashed his face with water, Tatsumi stretched out in the bathtub just like Barse, truly appreciating the necessity of baths for Japanese people.

“But hey, Tatsumi? Living in a house... You mean you won’t be living alone, right?”

In the bath, Tatsumi’s body, which had been completely relaxed, tensed in an instant. Noticing this, Barse flashed a sly, meaningful grin.

“Oho. I take it you definitely won’t be living alone, huh? So, who’s the other person? Someone from this temple maybe?”

“N-No, it’s just...”

Tatsumi was torn about whether or not to mention Calsedonia’s name. Judging by Bogard’s reaction that afternoon, Barse would be blown away to learn that ‘the other person’ was the Saintess. Besides, there were lots of other people in the bathhouse. If word got out that he was marrying Calsedonia, it might cause quite a stir.

While he was sweating in the hot water, desperately trying to think of a way to defuse the situation, Barse playfully patted Tatsumi’s shoulder as if to say, “I understand, no need to explain.”

“Well, as soon as you’re settled in after the move, invite me over to your place, okay? And introduce me to your wife. Oh, do you need any help moving?”

“Uh... sure. I appreciate it.”

Having gotten through that situation, Tatsumi let himself sit back and relax again.

Afterward, he and Barse washed up—with soap, which Barse made sure Tatsumi knew was considered a luxury item outside the temple—dried off, and got dressed. All the while, they made small talk.

But when Tatsumi and Barse stepped out into the hallway, they were surprised to run into a certain someone.

“Oh, Master? Did you take a bath as well?” Wiping her wet hair with a towel, Calsedonia greeted him with a gentle smile.

Her cheeks, flushed a soft pink from the bath, and her damp hair made her look even more alluring than usual. Seeing her like that made Tatsumi's heartbeat quicken and thump loudly in his chest.

Tatsumi was afraid everyone in the bathhouse would be able to hear his beating heart, but he managed to answer, "Ah, yeah. Chiko, were you in the bath too?"

Calsedonia lowered her face shyly as she continued speaking. "Um... if it's all right with you, Master... can I visit your room later? There are several things I'd like to discuss about our life together... Oh, I'll bring you some baked sweets and tea that I've made. Or would you rather alcohol?"

"No, no, tea is fine."

"Great. I'll see you later then."

Calsedonia's face lit up with a radiant smile upon receiving Tatsumi's approval. She bowed gracefully and left with a spring in her step.

Tatsumi watched her leave, a warm smile on his face, then turned to go back to his room—only to find Barse standing there with eyes open wide in shock.

"Hey, hey, Tatsumi... that was... the Saintess... Lady Calsedonia... right?"

"Uh, yeah, um... yeah, that's right..."

"From the way you two were talking just now... don't tell me... the person you live with is... could it really be..."

How could he talk his way out of this? No, at this point, it was probably impossible, Tatsumi thought, letting out a deep sigh of resignation.

From the exit of the bathhouse, Barse couldn't help but watch the man's retreating figure with a critical eye.

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A wild flame raged in his heart, and he fought desperately to suppress it. If it were possible, he would have liked to strike this man down immediately,

strangling him until he drew his last breath. But considering the number of people around him, he couldn't do anything just then.

He hadn't intended to eavesdrop, but he had accidentally overheard this man's story. The topic of conversation between him and another young man, who seemed to be a junior deacon, was something he couldn't just ignore.

Yes, it was about this man's impending move to a single-family home.

He was well aware of what it meant for a priest to move into a single-family home, and he knew exactly who this man would be living with when he did.

This man had been personally invited from a foreign land by Giuseppe Chrysoprase, the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple. Moreover, Giuseppe had not hesitated to refer to this man as his "son-in-law."

In other words, this man had been brought from a foreign country by Giuseppe, the adoptive father of Calsedonia Chrysoprase, to be her husband.

He deeply respected and admired Giuseppe as the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple. Calsedonia, Giuseppe's adopted daughter and the one known as the Saintess, was also someone he respected. But more than that, he had secretly loved Calsedonia for quite a while now.

He couldn't allow her to be taken away from him by a man from who knew where.

His back teeth ground together, making a noise that caused a nearby colleague, soaking in the bath, to turn to him with a puzzled expression. Realizing who he was, the colleague quickly looked away.

He wasn't going to stand by and let Calsedonia be taken away. Whatever sort of relationship this man and Calsedonia might have, it was irrelevant to him.

The flame raging in the depths of his heart grew hotter, and without his realizing it, his mouth formed a dark, sinister smile as he imagined himself embracing the Calsedonia he loved so dearly.

## Chapter 15: Falling Into Evil

**“H**ey, Tatsumi?”

“What’s up, Barse?”

Tatsumi pulled another bucket of water up from the well, pouring its contents into the bucket he’d brought with him. Then he threw the empty bucket back into the well and waited for it to sink so he could repeat the process.

“Why are you doing such a menial job?” Barse asked from his place in line behind Tatsumi.

“What do you mean ‘why’? Isn’t that our job?”

This morning, just like the day before, Tatsumi had shown up at Bogard’s place. Bogard had greeted him with a warm smile and assigned him—along with Barse—the task of carrying water.

“Considering how you handled yourself yesterday, I figured you’d be up for some manual labor, right?” Tatsumi asked his new friend.

After receiving instructions and the necessary equipment from Bogard—a water bucket and a carrying pole—Tatsumi made his way to the well in the rear courtyard of the temple. On his way there, he’d met Barse.

“Yeah, but your future wife... she earns a pretty penny, doesn’t she? So, you don’t really need to do this kind of hard, menial work, do you? I mean, you could live comfortably without working at all.”

“No way; I can’t just let Chiko work while I do nothing... I have no intention to be a kept man.”

“A ‘kept man’?”

“Oh, right. In this world—I mean, in this country—they don’t call a man who lives off a woman’s earnings a kept man, do they?”

“No, we don’t really have a term like that. Men who live off women will certainly get the cold shoulder here, but if the woman happens to be a mage, that’s a different story. Just being a mage is special enough.”

As Barse explained, in this land, a mage could live quite comfortably on his or her skills alone. For example, even a small fire-starting spell to light candles or stoves could bring them money, household items, or food from grateful neighbors. In a world without the convenience of lighters, as Tatsumi knew, the ability to create fire with magic was highly valued. In addition, if one could cast the ‘Light Sphere’ spell, they could make a decent amount of money in just one night by standing at a street corner and selling magical light.

As he listened to Barse talk about the status of mages in this country, Tatsumi poured the next bucket of water into his larger bucket.

“I may not be able to do much, but I still want to help Chiko as much as I can.”

“Is that so? Well, I like that about you. Do your best to support your wife, okay?”

“Yes.”

Taking heart from Barse’s encouragement, Tatsumi braced himself and lifted the carrying pole with renewed strength. The large buckets hanging from it were quite heavy, but just like the day before when he’d been chopping and carrying firewood, he hardly felt the weight. Marveling at the mysterious strength of his body, Tatsumi strode off away from the well. Watching his retreat, Barse tilted his head in sudden curiosity.

“By the way, why does Tatsumi call the Saintess ‘Chiko’?”

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Tatsumi carried the water to several places, including the kitchen and the bathhouse. The bathhouse in particular required a significant amount of water, which necessitated many trips back and forth. But Tatsumi hardly broke a sweat as he completed trip after trip, to the astonishment of his junior deacon peers.

Even Tatsumi found his own body’s abilities mysterious, just as he had felt the day before. Speaking of mysteries, he remembered the intense fatigue he had

felt after that day's work. According to Calsey, it was akin to the exhaustion a novice magician might feel after overusing magic. However, Tatsumi was sure that he hadn't used any magic; he didn't even know how to use magic.

At first, he'd thought that it might be due to a boost in his physical abilities from being in another world, but that didn't seem to be the case. No matter how much he thought about it, the answer to his questions remained elusive. He decided to focus his thoughts elsewhere as he continued his task of carrying water.

"I'm going to live with Chiko... Me and her, together..." he murmured to himself, his mind filled with the image of a beautiful woman with silver-white hair.

She had a tall, slender figure with a soft body that had just the right amount of flesh. Her beauty was incomparable, her voice clear as a bell. However, what stood out most in his mind was her chest—not too big or small, but the ideal size that Tatsumi found attractive.

He was aware that he would soon be living under the same roof as her. Though he had agreed to it—albeit somewhat swept along by the enthusiasm of others—he couldn't deny that he felt a little daunted by the prospect.

Many people, Giuseppe foremost among them, assumed that he and Calsey were meant to be together, and that assumption weighed heavily on his mind.

Of course, if asked if he disliked Calsey, his answer would have been a firm no.

There was no doubt in Tatsumi's mind that she was Chiko reborn, and it was impossible for him to have any dislike for someone who showed him such devoted kindness. Besides, her appearance was exactly to his liking. As a young man, his heart couldn't help but flutter under these circumstances.

However, he still felt intimidated—probably due to the sudden prospect of marriage looming in front of him. Just a few days before, Tatsumi had almost lost the will to live. For someone in his situation, the idea of marriage was difficult to grasp, to say the least.

Besides, she might have been Chiko in a previous life, but in this one, they had only met a few days ago. Anyone would feel the same way as Tatsumi did now if

they were suddenly forced into an arranged marriage and then told that they would be married a few days later.

Nevertheless, Calsey was already part of Tatsumi's family. Chiko, his last small piece of family, had been reborn as Calsedonia. She retained many of Chiko's mannerisms and much of her aura, and even though her appearance had changed, she was still Chiko.

But there were other things on Tatsumi's mind. Calsey was at the top of her world's religious order. Her name was known not only across this city but throughout the whole country. If the Saintess were to suddenly marry a man from who knew where, it would undoubtedly lead to all sorts of speculation and unfounded rumors.

Tatsumi didn't want to think about how this could affect her standing and reputation in the long run.

*However, I gotta admit, as things stand now, relying on Chiko and the others is the only option I have...*

Tatsumi had gained status in this world, but it wasn't enough to live on. And even that was thanks to Giuseppe's kindness.

"Well, since it's Chiko herself who seems to be happy about it... it should be okay, right?" he murmured in an attempt to calm himself down.

Yesterday, when he'd gone shopping with her in the city, Calsedonia had been truly delighted as she picked out household necessities. If all this had been an act for some reason, Tatsumi would no doubt have found himself distrustful of women. But Calsedonia seemed to have such a positive attitude toward the idea of marriage that it was hard to imagine why her not wanting to marry him.

So Tatsumi decided not to think things over. He would live with Calsedonia, his family, sometimes supporting her, sometimes being supported by her. After all, a married couple was just another form of family.

This time, he was determined to protect his precious family no matter what.

With renewed determination, Tatsumi readjusted the balance pole and headed toward the bathhouse.

Unbeknownst to him, someone was watching him intently from the shadows.

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Calsedonia walked through the temple corridors with her usual calm expression. But when she heard a familiar voice calling her name, she stopped and turned. The moment she saw him, her stern expression relaxed.

“I need to ask you something... Do you have a moment?” he asked.

“Yes, I don’t mind,” she replied.

They both knew the hallway wouldn’t be the most appropriate place to talk, so they moved into the temple garden. The garden, however, also served as a social space for the worshippers, and groups of believers were scattered across it, chatting and enjoying each other’s company.

When the Saintess appeared in the garden, all eyes turned to her. Moreover, she was walking side by side with a man, which caused the believers to whisper among themselves and exchange various speculations.

Of course, some of the believers were simply mesmerized by the sight of Calsedonia.

Calsedonia confidently walked through the stares and hushed conversations around her. When she found an empty bench in a secluded corner of the garden, she and the man accompanying her took seats side by side.

“So, what did you want to ask me?” she asked with a gentle smile.

“I heard that you’ll be leaving the temple soon to establish a home. Is that true?” the man began, his voice carrying a hint of hesitation.

“Yes, that’s true. Did my grandfather tell you?” Calsedonia replied, her smile softening.

“No, I didn’t hear it directly from His Highness...” he admitted.

“It is true. And... I’ll be living with a gentleman,” Calsedonia revealed, her expression becoming tender and genuinely joyful as she thought of the young man she would be living with.

When the man beside her saw her radiant smile, his heart ached, and he felt a dark, unsettling feeling stir in the depths of his soul.

“The man you’re going to live with... it’s him, isn’t it? The junior deacon who arrived at the temple a few days ago and has been working as a servant since yesterday...” he asked, his voice tense.

“Yes, that’s right. You’ve met him, haven’t you? This man... he’s the one I’ve been looking for all this time,” Calsedonia replied, her smile bright and unwavering.

His heart clenched even tighter as he heard her words, and his demeanor grew more rigid.

“Are... Are you serious?” he asked, his tone unusually harsh.

“What do you mean?” Calsedonia looked at him, puzzled by his reaction.

“To think that someone like you... a woman revered as a Saintess... would choose to be with a lowly servant, a junior deacon... Can you really find happiness in that?!” His voice was stern, a stark departure from his usual gentle demeanor.

Despite this, Calsedonia maintained her cheerful smile as she replied firmly, “You’ve got it a bit wrong. Or maybe not wrong at all. It’s not about him making me happy; it’s about *me* making *him* happy. And... and if he can be happy, then that’s the ultimate happiness for me.”

After enduring a painful year, Tatsumi had been brought to this world by Calsedonia, who wanted to lead him to happiness. If he had lived a happy life in his original world, Calsedonia would not have summoned him. While reuniting with Tatsumi was certainly her deepest desire, she understood that it wouldn’t have been worth destroying his happy life for it.

“Living together with him is the greatest happiness for me,” Calsedonia affirmed with a serene smile.

“Is that so... Your resolve hasn’t wavered, has it?” he replied, his voice low. He sighed forlornly, looking down and covering his face with his hands.

Then the man’s entire body began to shake violently.

“What’s... What’s wrong?” Calsedonia asked, suddenly concerned. She’d never seen him act like this.

She had first met him when she was taken in by Giuseppe. They had known each other for a long time since then, and in her memory, he had always been a quiet individual with a gentle smile. She had never seen him radiate such an eerie aura.

Feeling that something was terribly wrong, Calsedonia reached out to touch his trembling shoulders. Just then, she noticed that he was muttering something in a low voice, his face still turned to the ground.

“She... is... mine....”

His voice, eerily resonant as if from the depths of the earth, sent shivers down Calsedonia’s spine. Reflexively, she pulled her hand back and stood abruptly.

“You... You can’t be...” Her voice trembled as the words fell from her delicate lips.

Reacting to her voice, he lifted his face, his eyes filled with madness as he looked at Calsedonia, and grinned, “Calsedonia... I won’t give you to anyone... You are... You are mine...”

In his gaze, Calsedonia saw a red light that should not exist in the eyes of a human, and she realized that the situation had taken a dangerous turn.

## Chapter 16: Demon

Silver flashed in the sunlight as he pulled his hand from his pocket, revealing a short, sharp-edged dagger. Calsedonia gracefully dodged the surprise attack, putting distance between herself and him. At the same moment, a high-pitched scream came from one of the believers in the garden. In seconds, all heads had turned to the unfolding battle. The scattered believers stood in mute horror.

“Everyone! Get out of here! Hurry, please!” Calsedonia called out, never taking her eyes off the gleaming dagger or the ominous red light in the man’s eyes.

For a few seconds, the believers were too stunned to do anything but stare at Calsedonia and her assailant. But as they realized the gravity of the situation, they began to scream and run.

At least the commotion would alert the temple’s warrior priest, Calsedonia thought, and it wouldn’t be long before they arrived. However, she intended to settle this matter before then. If only she could exorcise the demon, the man before her would return to his usual gentle self—the one she had known since childhood. As she continued to dodge his advances with the deadly dagger, Calsedonia began to chant a spell, her delicate lips trembling.

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After Tatsumi had poured all his water into the bathhouse tub, he was on his way back to the well to get more when he noticed a man standing in his way.

“Hey, is that you, Morga?”

The Free Knight stared at Tatsumi, his expression inscrutable.

“Lord Tatsumi, I’m sorry if this comes across as rude, but I have to ask, and I hope you can answer me honestly. Who exactly are you?”

“Me?” Tatsumi pointed at himself in confusion—a normal reaction for anyone suddenly asked about their own identity.

“I heard that Lord Chrysoprase personally sent Calsey to greet you, which made me think you might come from a noble family in another country. But I’ve been watching you these past few days, and you’ve been doing manual labor all day without a single complaint. Things that anyone of noble birth would never stoop to. I know, I know, once you’re part of the temple, your background should be irrelevant, but let’s face it, social status doesn’t just go away.”

While the temple did indeed operate separately from the secular government of the kingdom, there was some truth to what Morganaik said; politics often did count for something here. When royalty or nobility joined the temple for any reason, they were usually given a rank somewhere around the level of priest or high priest from the start. They were rarely seen performing the menial tasks assigned to deacons.

“If you really are of common birth... I’m sorry to say this, but I don’t understand why Lord Chrysoprase would take such an interest in you. You also don’t seem to be a very exceptional mage.”

Morganaik was a mage himself. From what he could see at the moment, the amount of magic power emanating from Tatsumi was minimal—meaning he should only be able to cast the most basic spells, if any.

“I’m not one to beat around the bush. So let me ask you directly, Lord Tatsumi. Who exactly are you? And... and what’s your relationship to Calsey?” As he finished his question, Morga’s serious auburn eyes pierced through Tatsumi.

Looking into those eyes, Tatsumi could clearly feel the intense feelings the Free Knight had for the Saintess. He resolved to be honest, to tell him how important she was to him, that she was his only one.

But he wasn’t quite sure how to do it...

Just as Tatsumi was about to attempt putting his feelings into words, the sound of hurried footsteps echoed through the temple’s corridor. A moment later, an armed priest—a temple knight—hurriedly approached Morganaik.

“Lord Morganaik! Something terrible has happened!”

“What is it?” Morganaik shifted his gaze, now filled with a different kind of severity, from Tatsumi to the temple knight.

“We got a report that someone possessed by a demon is rampaging through the temple gardens!”

“What did you say?” Morganaik’s eyes suddenly shone with a completely different light than before. Even Tatsumi, with his complete lack of battle experience, could see the change. It was as if the Free Knight had switched from peacetime mode to wartime mode.

“Who is it? Who’s been possessed? Is it one of the believers?”

“It’s... the one... The one possessed by the demon... is Lord Baldio, Lord Chrysoprase’s assistant!”

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Calsedonia calmly dodged the approaching blade as she continued her chant. For anyone inexperienced in magic, a moment of distraction could lead to a failed incantation. But for a practitioner as skilled as Calsedonia, maintaining an accurate chant while performing evasive maneuvers was well within her abilities.

Though primarily a rearguard fighter, Calsedonia had mastered enough martial arts to protect herself. Along with Morganaik, she was one of the most skilled and accomplished exorcists in the Savaiv Temple.

Calsedonia took a few graceful steps back, keeping her gaze fixed on the eerie red light that filled Baldio’s eyes. Their friendship went back many years. She had first met him when she was placed under Giuseppe’s care. At that time, Baldio was an apprentice assistant to Giuseppe, and had often looked after the young Calsedonia.

Baldio had been appointed assistant to the High Priest in his mid-teens, and everyone had said he had great prospects for the future. Born into a commoner family, he had diligently worked his way up, achieving that high positionHigh Priest through his tireless efforts.

To think that this same Baldio was now possessed by a demon... Even though she saw his red eyes, Calsedonia found it hard to believe.

*Just wait a little longer, Lord Baldio. I'll have that demon out of you soon.*

With determination shining in her ruby-red eyes, Calsedonia released the final phrase of her chant. As soon as the incantation was complete, the very windless air around her seemed to shake. In fact, it was the trees and shrubbery that had been planted around the temple garden that were shaking.

The undergrowth grew quickly, reaching out lush green vines toward Baldio. The trees rustled their branches, stretching them out with creaking noises. Every plant in the garden was trying to entangle Baldio; Calsedonia had cast a Tree Magic spell called Entangling Foliage, which used branches and grass to restrict the target's movement.

Baldio did his best to cut away the advancing undergrowth and branches with his dagger, but no matter how much he cut, the flora kept growing back and reaching for him. Soon he found himself entangled in vegetation. Still, he struggled with unnatural strength to free himself. But the plants were tough, and Baldio's body was unaccustomed to full-scale combat. In less than a minute, the demon had met its host's limits, and Baldio's movements ceased.

Satisfied that he wasn't going anywhere, Calsedonia began to chant another spell. This one belonged to the Light and Holy types. Its name was simple and its purpose clear—Exorcism. It was designed to tear away the demon that had possessed the target's flesh. Exorcism required precision, and it would have been difficult to aim when the target was still flailing about.

Under normal circumstances, Morganaik would have restrained the target so Calsedonia could focus on the exorcism. In his absence, however, she'd had to make do.

Inside Calsedonia, the Holy magical power was gradually rising. Sensing this, Baldio—or rather the demon possessing him—made last one desperate attempt to shake off the impending threat.

But it was too late.

As Calsedonia finished the Exorcism spell, a pure silver light rose from beneath Baldio's feet.

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"Calsedonia is...?" Morganaik's stern expression softened slightly upon hearing the temple knight's report. Tatsumi's face, meanwhile, turned ashen in an instant.

"What? Calsedonia is facing a man with a blade?" For a brief moment, an image of Calsedonia lying on the ground, bloodied and motionless, flashed through Tatsumi's mind.

With a clatter, the bucket and the balance pole that he had been carrying fell to the floor of the temple corridor. He tossed them aside reflexively, ready to make a dash for the temple garden where Calsedonia was.

But Morganaik's calm voice stopped him.

"No need to panic, Lord Tatsumi. Even if he's possessed by a demon, Baldio has only basic combat training. There's no way he'll be able to defeat Calsedonia."

"But... what if... what if something happens!?" Tatsumi raised his voice in excitement, to which Morganaik replied with a surprised look.

"I'm not saying that we shouldn't go and help. But what do you think you can do if you go unarmed, Lord Tatsumi?"

Tatsumi stopped at these words.

Morganaik was dressed in plate armor, as a free knight should be, and had a long sword at his waist. Tatsumi, on the other hand, wore only the standard robes of a priest and had no experience in close combat.

"At least take a weapon to protect yourself."

Morganaik borrowed a short spear from the temple knights who had brought the message and threw it to Tatsumi.

“You wouldn’t listen if I told you not to follow me, would you? Then at least learn how to protect yourself.”

Tatsumi had to admit he felt a bit intimidated by the spear’s ominous glow, but he gave a firm nod of agreement to Morganaik’s words.

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The divine silver light of the exorcism gradually faded. When it was completely gone, Baldio stood there, looking dazed. Calsedonia watched him carefully, observing his condition.

Her Exorcism spell was extremely powerful, but it didn’t guarantee the expulsion of a demon every time. If the strength of the demon was unexpectedly formidable, it could resist even this powerful magic.

The Entangling Foliage spell had also worn off, leaving Baldio unchecked at the moment. Calsedonia prepared to cast another spell if necessary—while keeping a close eye on Baldio and his surroundings. After what Tatsumi’s world would have called five minutes, Calsedonia saw that the red glow had disappeared from Baldio’s eyes and she let out a sigh of relief, the tension in her shoulders dissipating.

“Lord Baldio? Are you alright?” she asked.

“Ca... Calsedonia...” Baldio’s gaze, which had been wandering, now focused on her.

It seemed he was safe. Calsedonia was about to breathe a sigh of relief when Baldio suddenly let out a sharp scream.

“Run, Calsedonia! The demon... it’s... it’s still inside me...!”

## Chapter 17: Reinforcements

The strength of a demon was not fixed. Each had its own variations—though it would be a stretch to call them ‘individuals’ since they had no physical form—and their power was further influenced by the size of the desires of the beings they possessed.

Under normal circumstances, Calsedonia’s Exorcism spell would have no problem banishing any demon to oblivion. However, she had failed to exorcise the one that had attached itself to Baldio. The Saintess had exorcised too many demons to count, and this was a first for her.

Was it the demon itself that was so powerful, or was it Baldio’s desire that was so immense? Perhaps it was a combination of the two.

In any case, the demon was still nesting in Baldio’s body.

It seemed that Calsedonia’s solo battle would continue.

At Baldio’s warning, Calsedonia tried to dodge. But she was an instant too slow—before she could fully turn away, Baldio’s hand reached out and jerked on the shoulder of her robe.

With a rip, the shawl-like fabric draped over her priestly robe was torn away, exposing her delicate shoulder. A small wound opened in her chest, causing the curves of her breasts to sway slightly.

Perhaps out of feminine instinct, Calsedonia covered her chest with her hands. She narrowly avoided the complete destruction of her robe’s neckline, but any violent movement might cause it to come apart.

A woman’s instinctive modesty momentarily became her greatest vulnerability. Baldio’s other hand reached out with unnaturally gnarled fingers, digging into Calsedonia’s slender wrist.

A sharp pain shot through her skin, causing her to freeze for a moment in shock. Baldio took advantage of that moment to pull her close and wrap her in

his arms.

The red eyes of possession again shone brightly, and Calsedonia's heart filled with sadness as she stared into them.

Baldio had been like an older brother to her, and he had always had a smile for her. Of course, she'd never held the same feelings for him as she had for Tatsumi, or even Giuseppe, but still, she thought of him as family.

But now, Baldio's face was twisted into a lecherous grin that Calsedonia would have never imagined in a million years. Her calm, gentle older brother was staring straight into the deep valley of her breasts.

The fact that a man—any man—was peering into her bosom made her feel disgusted (although she might have felt differently if it had been Tatsumi), and Calsedonia called upon every ounce of strength in her arms to shake off her attacker.

But her slender arms couldn't free themselves from the grasp of a grown man whose strength had been augmented by a demon.

The moment she realized this, Calsedonia silently apologized to Baldio and began chanting another spell.

She chose Lightning Palm from the Lightning spell type. It was a basic attack spell that gave its target a mild electric shock.

Lightning Palm didn't have the power to knock out an opponent with a single hit. However, the shock would be enough to make Baldio flinch and loosen his grip, giving her a chance to escape without causing him any more damage than necessary.

As gently as she could, Calsedonia pressed her palm to the part of Baldio's abdomen that pressed against her.

A momentary, vivid flash of purple flashed from the point of contact, and Baldio released Calsedonia with a groan, stumbling back several steps.

Taking advantage of the distance she'd created, Calsedonia began to chant another spell, still protecting her chest with her right hand.

This time, it was the same Entangling Foliage spell from earlier. Her intention was to restrict Baldio's movements once again and make another attempt at Exorcism.



But it seemed that the demon had anticipated her strategy.

With a speed that Baldio had never shown before, he closed the distance between them in an instant, stretching out both hands and twisting his fingers ominously toward her.

Quickly realizing that she wouldn't be able to finish the incantation in time, Calsedonia stopped the chant so she could focus solely on dodging.

She was a skilled enough mage to continue the chant while performing evasive maneuvers. However, in this moment she needed to do everything she could to minimize her chances of being hit. After witnessing Baldio's surprising speed, Calsedonia didn't want to underestimate this demon.

And yet, Baldio's speed continued to increase, overwhelming Calsedonia's focused evasion.

With a dexterity that surpassed Calsedonia's battle-honed body techniques, Baldio closed in. His hands reached smoothly to the chest area of her nearly torn robe.

Did he intend to tear the garment further, exposing her ample breasts to the sunlight?

This version of Baldio, eyes bloodshot and drool dripping from the corners of his mouth, was operating on pure male savagery.

Evasion was no longer an option. But Calsedonia was undaunted. She stared down the advancing hands with a fighting spirit burning in her eyes.

And just then, a streak of silver flashed by Baldio's oncoming advance like a shooting star, intercepting their advance.

The flash of silver had come from the blade of a sword.

Both fighters turned in unison toward the source of the silver meteor. There, as Calsedonia had predicted, stood the figure of the Free Knight, who had drawn his sword in a defensive move.

"Morga!" Calsedonia cried, her face lighting up with joy. Morganaik returned her smile gently, but his expression hardened as he fixed his gaze on the possessed Baldio.

“Baldio, even someone as devout as you couldn’t resist the whispers of the demon...”

Morganaik’s face showed his pain as he spoke. He, too, knew Baldio well; the man had done almost as much for him as he had for Calsedonia.

The Free Knight repositioned his sword to ready himself for battle. Without taking his eyes off Baldio, he said, “Step back, Calsey. I’ll get Baldio’s attention and buy you time to cast the Demon Exorcism spell.”

Calsedonia nodded silently and quickly put some distance between herself and Baldio, moving behind Morganaik.

It was then that Tatsumi finally arrived, out of breath.

“Ch-Chi... ko... are... you... okay...?”

Tatsumi hadn’t had far to travel. However, he’d spent the past several months locked in his apartment and was quite out of shape.

“Master!? Why... why are you here!?”

Calsedonia was astonished to see Tatsumi appear—even more so because he was holding a short spear that was completely impractical for the situation at hand.

“This place is dangerous! Get out of here, now! Please!!”

“I... can’t... just... leave... Chi... ko... behind... and run...”

Tatsumi spoke in gasps as he struggled to regain his breath. Calsedonia cut him off with a stern voice.

“Frankly, you’ll only be in the way if you stay! Leave now, please!”

“Chi... ko...” Tatsumi panted, stunned by Calsedonia’s harsh dismissal.

It was then that Morganaik spoke. “You heard Calsey, Tatsumi. There’s nothing you can do here. At least stay out of our way somewhere safe.”

At least Morganaik’s words were more considerate than Calsedonia’s. Deep down, however, he knew it wouldn’t matter how nicely he asked; Tatsumi wasn’t going anywhere.

“Calsey!” he called. “Forget about Tatsumi for now; your priority is to save Lord Baldio!”

While he spoke, Morganaik unleashed a quick series of slashes with his sword blade turned backward.

In the Kingdom of Largofiery, the most commonly used swords were straight, broad, and single-edged. However, most fighters in this land preferred spears or polearms as their primary weapon.

This preference was due to the harsh cold of the land during the Evening Moon Festival. Metal weapons became very cold when used outdoors for long periods of time, and a mere careless touch could cause the skin to stick to the metal. Spears and polearms had more wooden parts than metal and were therefore easier to handle over the long winter. For the same reason, leather armor was preferred to metal. Some even used armor made from the materials of magical beasts, such as fur and fangs.

The plate armor that Morganaik now wore was akin to a “uniform” for temple knights, who were required to wear metal armor engraved with sacred symbols within the temple.

When he worked outside the temple, Morganaik preferred leather armor reinforced with metal at key points and made from magical beast skins. He also switched between a sword and a long spear, depending on the situation.

Morganaik was using a sword now partly because he didn’t have his preferred long spear at hand, but mostly because he wanted to use the back of the blade, in a maneuver known as a blunt strike, to avoid causing Baldio unnecessary damage.

Most people would have found Morganaik’s precise swordplay impossible to dodge, but the possessed Baldio boasted superhuman reflexes. Of course, Morganaik held back a bit; even a flat blow with a metal sword could easily break bones if delivered with full force.

But it didn’t matter if Baldio dodged. Morganaik’s goal wasn’t to defeat him, but to restrict his movements, to give Calsedonia time to cast her spell, and to make sure that Baldio was caught in its effect.

With a speed that matched, or perhaps exceeded, Baldio's, Morganaik swung his sword, steadily filling the space with his blows and cutting off Baldio's avenues of escape. His movements were powerful, yet they carried an elegance that made Tatsumi stare in awe. Was this the true skill of the man known as the Free Knight?

Behind the Free Knight, positioned to keep a close eye on the unfolding battle while she continued to chant, stood the Saintess. Without ever taking her eyes off the two fighters, she maintained the most advantageous position, adapting to the situation as she continued to cast her spells.

The Free Knight seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, because he seemed always to position himself perfectly between the Saintess and Baldio. In this way, he protected the Saintess behind him, serving as both her sword and her shield, while constantly holding Baldio back.

Tatsumi once again found his gaze captured by the seamless coordination between Calsedonia and Morganaik. While he stood in awe, Calsedonia finished her Exorcism spell. At the conclusion of the chant, a brilliant light of purification surged from beneath Baldio's feet, stronger than before—though imperceptible to Tatsumi's eyes.

As the light erupted, Morganaik moved away from Baldio and positioned himself next to Calsedonia, standing protectively with his sword pointing at Baldio.

When the light gradually faded and finally disappeared, Baldio could be seen collapsed on the ground.

"How is he?" Morganaik asked, not taking his eyes off the fallen man.

"I put a lot of magic into this exorcism. I can't imagine it would be resistant..." Calsedonia replied, her eyes also fixed on Baldio. Having just experienced resistance to her magic, she wasn't taking any chances.

Just as they thought it safe and began to approach Baldio, Tatsumi, who had been watching from further back, suddenly shouted, "Don't get too close! There's something near him!"

Calsedonia and Morganaik stopped instantly. “Master!? Do you see something?” Calsedonia asked.

“Could it be... Is he a Seer?” Morganaik wondered aloud.

Tatsumi could clearly see what looked like a black mist swirling above Baldio’s prone body. If he focused intently, he could make out the outline of a living creature within that black mist.

“A hungry ghost?” he murmured.

It had the small body of a young schoolboy with a grotesquely large head. Its eyes glowed a malicious red, and although its limbs were thin as wires, its belly was unnaturally swollen.

A single demonic horn protruded from the forehead of the creature. Indeed, it bore an uncanny resemblance to the hungry ghosts Tatsumi had once seen in a movie.

Morganaik couldn’t be sure that Tatsumi had really seen the demon, but he didn’t think Tatsumi would lie in this situation. Once again, he distanced himself from the fallen Baldio and remained on high alert. Calsedonia, who hadn’t doubted Tatsumi for an instant, was already standing several feet away.

“What’s this Seer thing he’s talking about, Chiko?” Tatsumi asked.

“Demons without a physical form usually can’t be seen with the naked eye. They sneak up silently and whisper temptations into the ears of their chosen victims,” Calsedonia explained.

As she spoke, he, Calsedonia, and Morganaik all kept their eyes fixed on the demon.

“However, some people are born with the ability to see or hear those demons. It’s not due to magic or magical powers, but more of an innate, almost supernatural talent that’s even rarer than being a mage.”

For a demon whose form was normally invisible, being able to see it was an invaluable asset in battle. Even Tatsumi could easily understand this.

As he once again focused on the demon, it glided through the air with a sneering grin on its face.

*“Kekeke. Here lies one with great desires.”*

Tatsumi clearly heard this voice... although it wasn't quite a voice.

“Morganaik! Run!” he shouted.

As the demon moved slowly but directly toward the Free Knight, Tatsumi didn't realize that he was the only one who could see it. Morganaik, sword in hand, kept a watchful eye around him, unknowingly allowing the demon to approach.

Unnoticed, the demon merged with the Free Knight in a sinister embrace, wearing a hideous grin.

## Chapter 18: The Demon's Whisper

**“T***his woman... don't you long for her soft body?*” the voice—not quite a voice—whispered in his ear, and his heart gave a particularly strong throb in response.

With a stiff, creaky movement, he turned to see her standing a short distance away.

She had been his partner ever since the temple had first entrusted him with the mission of exorcism. She was the one he had always, *always* desired. And there she was, right by his side—within reach, if he would only reach out.

*“Yes, make this woman yours. Look closely,”* the voice went on. *“See how her breasts seem to spill out of her torn clothes? She's showing them to you, tempting you. Go ahead and accept her invitation. That's what she wants...”*

Nodding in agreement, Morganaik took a step toward the Saintess, sword still drawn.

But after just one step, he stopped. That whispering in his ear—he should have known what it was, but his confused mind couldn't conjure up its true nature. Still, an alarm sounded somewhere inside.

Dropping his sword, the Free Knight clutched his head with both hands. He mustn't listen. He shouldn't heed the voice whispering so close to him. Still, even though he knew this, the voice had an eerily soothing effect on him. Gradually, its thoughts took the place of his own.

*“What's the matter? Don't you want this woman? Haven't you always desired her? Now you can have all of her. There's no need for restraint. Claim her completely as your own.”*

Led on by the voice, Morganaik's gaze fell on Calsedonia—the woman he had longed for more than ever. Now that he thought about it, his love for her had probably bloomed the moment he met her.

He wanted her to be his, to keep her in his embrace, away from every other man forever. He had secretly sworn to his god to protect her from all danger, and he wanted nothing more than to make good on his word. And yet...

These conflicting feelings waged a fierce battle within Morganaik. As the scales in his heart tipped toward the desire to cherish her, something flickered at the edge of his vision.

It was a man.

A newcomer to the temple who had grown *very* close to Calsedonia. Frankly, Morganaik didn't find it amusing. The slight ripple in his heart was quickly noticed by the... thing that was interfering with his desires.

*"Displeased with this man? Then... why not get rid of him? Should you allow a gnat like him to linger around your precious wife?"*

Impossible. It was unbearable to have such a *nothing* man hanging around his precious woman.

*"That's right; crush that annoying gnat now. Your precious lady is bothered by him, too, isn't she?"*

Just like the dozens of nobles who had been pestering her since the day she came of age, Calsedonia must have been disturbed by this man's attentions.

*"That's right. Dealing with this gnat will protect your precious lady. You know she'll thank you. She'll open her heart even more."*

Eliminating this man would make Calsedonia happy! Picturing her delighted yet shy, blushing expression, Morganaik picked up his beloved sword from the ground.

"Morga...?" Abruptly, Morganaik's expression went blank. Then slowly, he turned his head and fixed his gaze on Calsedonia. Gradually, a light began to return to his empty eyes, but it was a sinister red rather than the usual stern yet kind light of his eyes.

"Mor... Morga...? Could it be... not just Lord Baldio, but you too...?" The light in his eyes could mean only one thing. The greatest warrior in the land, the man Calsedonia had fought side by side with, was becoming a monster.

Unable to immediately accept this reality, Calsedonia stood frozen, staring at Morganaik. Then the Free Knight shifted his gaze to Tatsumi, who was standing behind her. The moment he recognized Tatsumi, fierce anger flashed across his face. He raised his sword, charged at Tatsumi with terrifying speed, and lunged with a demonic grimace.

The fear that surged within Tatsumi bound his heart and body like chains. Before he could think, the sword was swinging down toward Tatsumi's head. But just before the blade hit home, a bolt of purple lightning tore through Morganaik's body, flinging him off his feet.

Finally freed from his fear, Tatsumi looked toward the source of the lightning to see Calsedonia standing with her right hand outstretched.

"Even if it is Morga, I will *not* allow anyone to harm my master!" she vowed, stepping between Morganaik and Tatsumi as she began to chant a new spell.

Calsedonia might have been stunned a moment before, but she had come to her senses in the face of her beloved young man's danger.

With the completion of the spell, lightning burst from Calsedonia's hand again, striking Morganaik's fallen body. With each strike, Morganaik's body convulsed like a fish out of water.

"Hey, Chiko... isn't that a bit too much...? Is Morga okay...?" Tatsumi asked with concern.

"But he tried to hurt my master! And I'm holding back; this is nothing!" Calsedonia stood firm, her eyes filled with determination.

Tatsumi made a face as if to say, "Oh boy," but said nothing more, just praying for Morganaik's safety. Even as they spoke, the possessed man was struck by lightning several more times. By now, he wasn't even groaning.

Even as strong as Morganaik was, Tatsumi feared this might be too much. Finally, Calsedonia's chanting stopped, and so did the barrage of electric attacks.

"Now that he's weakened, his resistance to spells should be lowered. I'll take this opportunity to exorcise the demon that possesses him," Calsedonia explained, beginning the incantation for another exorcism.

*Ah, so she wasn't just trying to hurt him; she was weakening him so he'd be less resistant to the spell.* While Tatsumi questioned her logic, the spell was completed and a cleansing light enveloped the fallen Morganaik.

The silver light of the Exorcism spell would trap and eventually destroy any demon caught within it. While some powerful demons could endure exorcism, endure was all they could do; once they were trapped in the light, there was no escape.

But now, from within the silver light of Calsedonia's exorcism, something burst forth with renewed vigor.

The "something" that burst forth—Morganaik, roaring like a beast—lunged at Calsedonia. The pain and suffering of the demon, who had been burned by the purifying light, and most of all its rage, were transferred to Morganaik, who had now lost himself completely. He turned the tip of his sword toward the woman he loved.

It was a total surprise attack. Since no demon had ever escaped the purifying light before, even Calsedonia had let her guard down a bit. Had Morganaik's well-trained body accomplished the impossible?

Calsedonia's best friend approached her with a devilish expression, his hand holding a sword that glowed with ominous light. Calsedonia's eyes widened in shock, her body immobilized as if held by some unseen force.

In front of Calsedonia, Morganaik spread his arms wide, sword in hand, ready to unleash a horizontal slash with divine speed that could easily cut her slender body in half.

The evil blade slipped sideways. The Saintess stood still, unable to dodge.

The sword edge quickly gained speed, turning into a silver bolt of lightning like the one Calsedonia had unleashed moments before.

And then the blade of the demon-possessed Free Knight struck the body of the Saintess.

The being secretly smiled.

The human it had chosen as its new prey harbored even greater desires than the previous one. Desire was its sustenance.

All creatures lived with some degree of desire.

Even wild animals had desires—for example, hunger and the urge to reproduce. However, these were related to the instinct for survival and not particularly strong as far as desires went.

Among all living things, human beings undoubtedly had the most intense and complex desires. A whirlwind of desires—hunger, greed for money, lust, ambition, and so on. The more complex and confused the negative desires were, the more delicious they became to a demon. And so, they secretly waited for opportunities to possess people.

The desire of the last human this demon had inhabited was delicious, but this new human's desire felt even better. Pure affection for a woman could sometimes turn into dark possessiveness.

The demon stimulated and amplified the pure feelings of its host, turning them into dark, negative desires. It then fed on these desires as they became more negative.

Even now, it had turned the love this person had for a woman into an intense and ugly possessiveness. However, the mental strength of this human was much more robust than the demon had anticipated. The human was trying to turn its tainted affection back into pure emotion.

Therefore, it changed its goal. Instead of increasing the possessiveness toward the woman, it fanned the flames of jealousy toward the man hovering around her. After all, jealousy was, in a sense, a form of possessiveness. With the demon's incitement, jealousy burned fiercely in the heart like a dull flame.

And this jealousy tasted more delicious to it than any desire it had ever experienced.

*“Now, kill the man. And after that, defile the woman as well.”*

By gradually eliminating the human's logic, it thought the human would eventually turn into a demon, obediently acting on its own desires.

With an evil grin, it continued to sip at the dark desires bubbling in the human's heart.

The Free Knight's sword was swung with conviction.

Calsedonia lay on the ground, stunned by the scene unfolding above her. Crimson blood sprayed all around her, but somehow it stayed clear of her face. Just as Morganaik's sword was a mere second from striking her, an unexpected force suddenly shoved her body to the side.

A warm, viscous red liquid rained down upon Calsedonia's prone body. At the same time, the tang of iron filled the air—a smell she was all too familiar with from her countless encounters with demons and monsters as an exorcist.

And what she saw as she looked up was the sight of her beloved young man, his chest ripped open by the sword of the Free Knight, falling to the ground as blood gushed from his wound.

## Chapter 19: Awakening

Just before Morganaik's horizontal slash could reach Calsedonia, Tatsumi acted on instinct, pushing her aside. Caught off guard, she failed to keep her balance. But Tatsumi didn't have the luxury to attend to her; he had placed himself in the path of the deadly blade of the Free Knight.

He experienced an intense, painful sensation as his chest was cut open and blood gushed out. Tatsumi's strength faded in heartbeats. His knees weakened, and he collapsed forward.

Morganaik, mind consumed by madness, was barely aware of what he saw as he gazed at the figure lying in the pool of crimson. If anything, he saw an insect that had gotten too close to his beloved flower. If not stopped, he would certainly make the flower wither.

But now everything was okay. He had successfully eliminated that idiotic insect. With the pest gone, the flower would surely rejoice.

Satisfied with himself, Morganaik turned his triumphant gaze to his flower, who lay on the ground. But what he saw made him do a double-take. He had imagined his flower smiling at him, but instead her eyes were wide with shock, fixed on the insect now lying in a pool of blood.

*Ah, I understand.* His delicate flower must have been disturbed by the grotesque sight of the insect's carcass.

Oh well, that was no worry; he would just have to get rid of the carcass quickly. But when he looked around to find someone to clean up the dead insect, he realized they were alone in the temple garden, just him and his flower.

That was when he recalled.

He had asked his fellow temple knights to guard the garden and make sure no one else came inside. It was to protect the honor of someone he knew well who

kept others at a distance.

He couldn't remember who it was. It must have been someone he knew well, someone who had helped him in more ways than he could count.

But such details didn't matter in that moment. All that mattered now was to protect his flower.

"No, nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!" Suddenly, his flower let out a scream. Ignoring the red liquid soaking into her white priestly robes, she knelt down and reached for the fallen insect carcass.

"Hold on for me! *Please!* I'll cast healing magic right now!"

His flower began to chant a spell. When he followed her gaze, he saw that the pest he'd thought was dead was in fact moving its chest, albeit weakly.

Like a true pest, it was tenacious if nothing else. As he contemplated this, he approached his flower, who was now cradling the pest.

Noticing his approach, the flower glared at him fiercely, yet continued her chant. Again he was taken aback. He'd been expecting a grateful smile for what he'd done for her. Instead, she had looked at him as if he'd just tried to kill her parents.

His irritation grew with her attitude.

*Why? Why are you looking at me with those eyes? I was thinking of you, worrying about you, and I exterminated the pest for your sake.*

Somewhere near his ear, someone seemed to be laughing gleefully, but that sensation quickly faded from his consciousness.

Driven by his anger, he grabbed his flower's hand and pulled it toward him.

With a thud, something warm and soft collided with his body—of course, it was the body of his flower.

At the same time, there was another thudding sound. It must have been the body of the insect falling to the ground.

"Let go!" his flower cried, struggling desperately to free herself from his grip. "If I don't use my healing magic fast, my master will...!" Without even sparing

him a glance, she turned her anguished eyes back to the fallen insect.

*Why? Why is she so intent on saving this bug?*

Morganaik's confusion only added to his irritation.

*"That's right. Make her understand how you feel. Use force to make her understand,"* a pleasant voice echoed in his ear. He agreed with the voice. He had been able to resist before, but now he had no power—or need—to resist. As the voice suggested, he could simply take his flower by force and make it truly his.

A red light flickered in his eyes, quickly growing brighter.

He clasped her hands together with one hand and reached to her breast with the other, to the torn part of her priestly robe where a deep cleavage was exposed.

He grabbed the torn fabric of the priestly robe and tore it viciously.

His flower screamed again.

Two white, large, well-formed fruits, barely covered by a thin white cloth, were exposed under the bright light.

Her upper body was almost naked as the priestly robe was torn further. However, she made no attempt to cover herself; her only thought was to rush to her beloved young man.

Normally, she could have calmly cast an offensive spell. But with her love on the brink of death, all calm had left her.

She had to heal him with magic soon, or he would be drawing his last breath.

This single thought raced through her mind, and she didn't even consider attacking the Free Knight bewitched by "magic" with a spell of her own.

Tears streamed down her smooth cheeks like a waterfall, but she was unaware of them.

The remnants of her robe, barely clinging to her waist, fluttered with every movement of her body.

Did she notice, or was she driven by an even more urgent desire? The unrestrained hand of the Free Knight now reached for her lower half.

She didn't notice this either. For her, all that existed was the image of her beloved young man, with whom she had long dreamed of being reunited.

And finally, when the Free Knight's hand reached what was left of her clothing, her resistance inexplicably ceased.

She stopped the desperate movements of her body and stared intently at a single point.

Suddenly, with the halt of her resistance, a vestige of reason began to assert itself.

Had she finally given up resisting? As he looked into her eyes, the Free Knight thought that yes, she had.

The agony that had been there before was gone, replaced by astonishment.

Following her gaze, he looked at the fallen insect.

"No, don't... now..." A faint but urgent voice escaped the lips of the flower. "Moving now is only going to make your injuries worse...!"

*Now.*

The insect, which had been lying in a pool of blood, tried sluggishly to lift its body.

※ ※ ※

He heard a voice.

It was the anguished cry of his dear family. That voice was barely holding together the edges of his consciousness, barely stopping him from collapsing into utter darkness.

Still, blood continued to flow from his torn chest, adding to the red pool around him.

Still, he fought desperately to stand up and answer his family's agonized cries.

His fingers, thoughtlessly outstretched, made contact with a short spear that lay on the ground. He grabbed it, used it as a staff to try to stand... and collapsed back into his own pool of blood.

Again, and again.

Trying to stand and then collapsing, trying to rise only to fall.

After repeating this cycle several times, he finally managed to stand.

As his head spun, he could make out the figure of his precious family through his blurred vision.

But the top half of her robe had been ripped apart mercilessly, exposing her beautiful white twin mounds of breast, barely protected by her underwear.

When he saw this, he was driven more by anger than lust. However, this anger was not directed at the Free Knight who was holding her from behind, but at himself.

Because of his own inadequacy, he had allowed her to be harmed.

*I'm sorry*, he told her silently. *It's all because of my weakness that I made you suffer.* Then he took a step forward.

It felt like he was walking on a sponge; his footing was soft and unstable, and felt sure he would fall at any moment.

He concentrated all the strength left in his body into his hips and legs to stay upright, inching closer to her.

*I can't take it anymore*, he thought as memories of losing his parents and sister came flooding back. *I absolutely refuse to lose anyone else.*

He remembered lying on a hospital bed, shortly after regaining consciousness, and having the police and hospital staff come to tell him the hard truth.

The sense of loss he had felt. The overwhelming despair, as if his world had fallen apart.

But the reason he had found the strength to live was because of her—who had just been a little creature at that time.

The last family he had left. His precious little family.

He had decided to spend his life with this little member of his family. But then the time had come to say goodbye to the last of his family, who had lived out her natural life. Once alone, he had contemplated suicide, however brief the thought.

But then a ray of hope had appeared.

His little family member, reborn as a beautiful woman in another world, had called him to that world.

Reunited in another world with his beloved little family member. She was no longer the little being he knew so well, but she was still her.

That was why.

That was why he'd decided.

To live with his family in this other world. This time, no matter what, he would protect his precious family.

Indeed, being suddenly summoned to another world had come with confusion. There had been fear.

But as long as she was by his side, as long as his precious family was there, he could live in another world.

But that was on the premise that she would be there.

Now she was in need. There was no way he could just lie down and relax. He couldn't just lie down.

*Yes, I am weak. I may be weaker than the Free Knight, perhaps weaker than anyone. But even so, I've decided to protect you at all costs. I don't want to feel the pain of losing my family ever again.*

One step. And another, each footstep unsteady... but each step was still bringing him closer to her.

And finally, his steps brought him to her side.

"Let go... of... Chiko..."

A voice so small it was almost nonexistent. A weak voice, befitting a beetle.

The beetle that had gotten up walked toward him with an unsteady gait.

A failed killing, but that was just as well. It would give him the opportunity to strike the final blow.

He tossed aside the flower he had been holding and drew his beloved sword from its sheath once more.

Now the beetle came closer, vulnerable as ever, staggering slowly. Intent on splitting the body vertically this time, he raised the sword high above his head with both hands.

As soon as the beetle's foot stepped within reach of his sword, he timed the moment and swung the sword vertically.

Just as his sword was about to touch the bug's head...

Suddenly, there was a burst of light, and the bug's form was wiped from sight.

Thrown to the side and with her chest still exposed, Calsedonia forgot to cover herself as she watched the scene unfold.

Her dear young man approached unsteadily, and the Free Knight swung the sword raised high above his head down upon him.

For a moment, she imagined her young man being cut in half from head to groin.

But just before the Free Knight's sword could touch the young man's head...

It overflowed from the young man's body.

"No... it can't be..."

Now, to her mage's eyes, it was clear. The brilliance of the magic power overflowing from the body of her precious young man.

"Ma-Master has magical power... and, and such great power..."

Finally, she could sense the magnitude of the magic power emanating from him.

It was so immense that it easily surpassed her own. But that wasn't the only thing that amazed her.

"Golden magical light...? Could it possibly be...?" she muttered in bewilderment, and at that moment, the young man's figure disappeared, and

the sword of the Free Knight sliced through the air.

As the Free Knight swung his sword with all his might and missed, her dear young man appeared behind him.

The sound of the young man's shoes could be heard, hitting the ground one after another in a steady, insistent rhythm.

Coming up behind the Free Knight, the young man grabbed the short spear with both hands and brought the butt end down hard on the Free Knight's head.

## Chapter 20: Heaven

In the realm of magic, each type was characterized by a distinctive color—every magician knew this.

The golden light that Tatsumi's entire body now radiated was a color of magical power that everyone knew, but no one had ever seen.

It belonged to the Heaven system of magic, which was said to have only ever had one practitioner.

※ ※ ※

A sideways strike with the short spear.

As he lacked any knowledge of martial arts, let alone spearmanship, Tatsumi's next move was a simple bludgeoning attack far removed from the spear's intended use—basically a baseball hit.

At the last second, Morganaik barely managed to force his sword between his head and the spear. Of course, the Free Knight was no amateur like Tatsumi, but an experienced warrior. Monster or no, he was still in full possession of every fighting technique he'd learned over the years. And perhaps his physical abilities were even sharper thanks to the demon possessing him.

In any case, although Morganaik completely blocked Tatsumi's full-powered blow, he was thrown off balance and took several staggering steps back—a rare sight for the Free Knight.

However, he quickly regained his stance and turned around. He swung his sword quickly through the air again—Morganaik was still close enough to Tatsumi that a quick step forward could bring him well within range of his target.

But the sword only cleaved the air as Tatsumi vanished.

The Free Knight's glowing red eyes widened in astonishment. Behind him, Tatsumi reappeared.

This time, the young man was unarmed... except for his tightly clenched right fist, wrapped in a golden glow. Tatsumi threw a punch at Morganaik's face with all his might.

A surprise attack from behind that even the Free Knight failed to react to in time.

Still, Morganaik managed to tilt his head to minimize the impact. Besides, Tatsumi's blow wasn't very powerful—it was the blow of an untrained fighter, after all, and even a direct hit to the face wouldn't have caused Morganaik much damage—or so one would think.

But the moment Tatsumi's fist made contact with the knight's face, the golden light within it exploded, effortlessly blowing Morganaik's body backwards.

The Free Knight tumbled on the ground several times to break his momentum, then shook his head and scrambled once more to regain his footing and face his enemy.

Or at least he tried to... but the figure of Tatsumi that had been there a moment ago had disappeared again.

Morganaik stood for a moment in disbelief, but his warrior instincts soon picked up a presence behind him.

He threw himself forward, rolled on the ground to recover, and looked back. There was Tatsumi, fist still outstretched in front of him.

Meanwhile, Calsedonia had forgotten to get up; her eyes were glued to Tatsumi's movements. She was close enough to him and Morganaik to get a clear view of their battle; in fact, Tatsumi's lightning-fast movements were more obvious to her than to Morganaik, who was facing him directly.

One moment Tatsumi seemed to vanish in thin air, and the next he was behind Morganaik. To Calsedonia, this didn't just look like a high-speed movement; it completely transcended this realm.

“Oh, that’s... could it be... Instantaneous Transmission...?”

The words slipped from her lips almost without thought.

They were unmistakably the name of a spell belonging to the Heaven system of magic.



Tieto Zamui.

The name had once belonged to a great wizard. Also known as the Great Magician, he was said to be the sole wielder of Heaven Magic, a type considered of a higher order than Holy and the pinnacle of Light. In the fairy tales Calsedonia knew, Heaven ruled time and space.

The magic depicted in these tales frequently involved leaping across spaces or transcending time itself. In fact, the ritual Calsedonia had used to summon Tatsumi was a legacy of the Great Magician. It was a process that, by design, required the power of Heaven to work. However, she had successfully replaced this with Holy—considered the closest system to Heaven that anyone today could wield. She'd accomplished this by combining her own considerable magical power with the immense energy flowing through the temple's sacred underground site, essentially forcing the spell into action through sheer magical strength.

Her skill as a mage, of course, had played a significant role in Tatsumi's successful summoning. And now, before Calsedonia's very eyes, Tatsumi was flickering in and out of existence... a feat that, as far as she knew, could only be accomplished with Heaven's Instantaneous Transmission.

How could Tatsumi, a man with no magical abilities, suddenly perform magic, let alone a spell of the legendary Heaven Magic? The reasoning was beyond Calsedonia's comprehension. But there was more. When she looked at his chest, she saw that the bleeding from the wound there had stopped. Had Tatsumi unknowingly activated a healing spell? The only known magic systems with healing properties were Light and Water, including their higher-order and derivative systems.

Heaven was considered superior to Holy and Light, so it wouldn't have been all that strange if Heaven also possessed healing magic.

*Could my master be the second person in history to possess the power of Heaven?* Calsedonia mused. As she continued to watch Tatsumi with fervent eyes, she momentarily forgot her own predicament, and her cheeks flushed a deep red.

Tatsumi's tactic of disappearing and reappearing for surprise attacks was only effective the first few times. After all, he had never learned martial arts, let alone been involved in a serious fight. His attacks were nothing more than amateurish punches and swings, nothing like the practiced punches of karate or boxing and certainly nothing that could keep an experienced warrior like Morganaik at bay.

Even now, Morganaik was easily dodging another of Tatsumi's surprise attacks from behind; the moment Tatsumi had disappeared, the Free Knight anticipated his appearance in his blind spot.

This should have given Morganaik the leeway to counterattack. However, each of his attacks was dodged by Tatsumi, who simply disappeared to avoid them.

No matter how many times Morganaik swung his sword, the blade never cut through his enemy. Whether he slashed down, slashed up, swept horizontally, or thrust forward, it was as if he was slicing through smoke. Tatsumi remained unharmed, beyond the blade's reach.

At the same time, Tatsumi's attacks were child's play for Morganaik. Now that the element of surprise was gone, the clumsy flailing of fists posed no real threat. It seemed unlikely that such a strike would ever catch Morganaik off guard again.

Still, Morganaik's frustration grew with each attack that failed to land. The indignity of being defeated by this mere *insect* gnawed at him. How dare this insignificant creature, who could do nothing more than buzz around and annoy him, evade him so easily!?

Morganaik unleashed another flurry of sword strikes, but once again, Tatsumi vanished into thin air. Where now? Where would he appear next? Morganaik looked around with increasing unease, but this time he couldn't detect Tatsumi's presence.

*"What are you playing at? Kill that mosquito now."* The urgent whisper in his ear only increased his irritation.

*"I know, you don't have to tell me!"* he told it silently as he continued his search for Tatsumi.

The demon possessing Morganaik was just as excited. The power emanating from Tatsumi was a greater threat than even Holy magic, the natural enemy of demons. Every time the golden-glowing Tatsumi struck Morganaik, the demon felt a searing impact—far more intense than the blow from the priest lying on the ground nearby.

The demon's panic and frustration amplified Morganaik's own, gradually staining the last vestiges of his will.

"Gaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" Morganaik roared, a beastly cry to the heavens.

Suddenly, however, his roar stopped, and his eyes, red with pent-up rage, widened in shock. Morganaik looked up, and what he saw would remain imprinted in his mind forever.

Above Morganaik, Tatsumi plummeted straight down from the sky, feet first. He hadn't teleported behind Morganaik, but directly above him. Humans rarely thought to look up; it was a blind spot not of vision, but of perception. For an amateur like Tatsumi, the only way to hit the Free Knight was with a surprise attack that surpassed all expectations.

Whether Tatsumi had teleported up on purpose remained unclear, but the bold move proved effective.

"Aaaaaahhhh!!" It was Tatsumi's turn to roar. Having teleported into the air, he now had the advantage of falling speed as he descended upon the surprised Morganaik.

The Free Knight tried desperately to move away from the landing site. But the distance between them was too short to escape. Like a raptor swooping down on its prey, Tatsumi's heel, enveloped in golden light, struck Morganaik's face after less than a second.

The site of impact erupted in golden light that spread like a shockwave, shaking the trees and flowers in the temple garden. But it wasn't the flora that was most affected by the golden explosion—it was the demon lurking within Morganaik as the magical power in Tatsumi's foot surged through Morganaik's body.

The golden light went directly to the demon hiding in his innermost depths, expelling the darkness. Like countless needles, the light pierced the demon's incorporeal essence, causing it to crumble begin falling apart. The demon uttered an inarticulate scream as it writhed in agony.

For ages, it had possessed being after being after being, feeding on their twisted, grotesque desires.

Gaining strength over time, it had eventually evolved to possess humans. Even then its power continued to grow, eventually becoming strong enough to have withstood multiple exorcisms by Calsedonia.

Now this demon was helpless before Tatsumi's golden light, evaporating like mist in the morning sun.

"What is this light? What kind of power is this?!" it cried. In its agony, the demon decided to abandon the human body it possessed. But it was too late. The inside of the Free Knight was flooded with golden magical power, leaving the demon with no way out.

Swallowed up by the golden torrent from all directions, the demon's existence was gradually eroded and shattered... then it vanished from this world once and for all.

Calsedonia lay on the ground, struggling against the tempest of heavenly light. When the blast finally subsided, she slowly rose to her feet and surveyed her surroundings. The place where Tatsumi and Morganaik had been was now a shallow crater, the nearby undergrowth torn away and most of the leaves blown off the trees.

Her ruby-red eyes quickly found Tatsumi lying in the depression. "Master!?" she called, hurrying over to him. Her large white breasts bounced as she moved, and suddenly Calsedonia was reminded of her current condition. She wrapped her arms around her ample chest and knelt beside the young man. Leaning in close, she checked his breathing.

"I'm sorry, Master. I need to borrow this for a moment." As she gently lifted Tatsumi, she removed his junior deacon's robe and draped it over herself.

The fact that Tatsumi's robe was stained red with his blood didn't bother Calsedonia. She hated to remove Tatsumi's clothes from his unconscious body, but it was necessary to examine the wound on his chest. As an added benefit, she could use it for herself; although torn at the chest, the robe still managed to cover Calsedonia's upper body.

She carefully examined Tatsumi's wound. The large cut across his chest wasn't yet completely closed, but it also wasn't bleeding anymore. His heart was beating steadily, and though his breathing was labored, it wasn't shallow. Concluding that his life wasn't in danger, Calsedonia began chanting a healing spell. A pale silver light gathered in her hands and seeped into Tatsumi's wound, healing it before her eyes.

When only a scar was left, Calsedonia stood up with a sigh of relief and looked around. Tatsumi lay at her feet, with Morganaik nearby and Baldio even farther away—three men, all unconscious. After making sure Tatsumi was okay, she checked on Baldio, then Morganaik last—which might or might not have had to do with her lowered opinion of him.

As a precaution, she bound Morganaik's body with a vine binding spell. Both of the other men appeared to have only minor injuries and weren't in life-threatening condition. However, when a person turned into a monster by a demon was exorcised, they could end up like a shell of a person if their connection to the demon was too strong and their mind had been completely overtaken.

Calsedonia couldn't assess the mental state of the two still-unconscious priests. For now, she had to think about moving them to another location along with Tatsumi. However, she couldn't carry three men alone, so she would have to get someone to help.

"Master, wait a minute for me, okay?" she murmured. "I'll get someone as fast as I can, and we'll move you somewhere you can rest comfortably. And..."

After making sure that they were alone, Calsedonia knelt down beside Tatsumi again and gently pressed her cherry-colored lips against his cheek.

"Thank you... for saving me... I was... truly... very happy." She blushed as she whispered the words into Tatsumi's ear.

Determined to secure help in transporting the three men and to tell her grandfather Giuseppe what she had seen, Calsedonia quickly left the temple garden.



## Chapter 21: The Guiding Beacon

Slowly, ever so slowly, there was a sensation of rising as Tatsumi's consciousness rose out of its warm and comfortable slumber. The darkness that had enveloped him thinned, gradually giving way to light. As the light grew, so did the clarity of Tatsumi's consciousness.

Suddenly, he thought he could hear someone calling his name. Was it his dad, his mom... maybe his sister? It must have been someone he had known his entire life. As his consciousness rose, the voice grew louder, all the while calling his name.

Just before Tatsumi reached full wakefulness, an image flashed in his mind—a beautiful woman with long platinum hair and red eyes.

The moment he lifted his eyelids, a bright light pierced his eyes like needles, and Tatsumi reflexively closed them again. But that brief glimpse had revealed that he was in his room in the Savaiv Temple.

Tentatively, Tatsumi tried to open his eyelids again. At first, the brightness caused his eyes to flicker, but he soon got used to it and kept his eyes open. Suddenly, he felt uncomfortable lying down, so he tried, slowly, to sit up.

In an instant, however, a deep weariness enveloped him, as if his core were filled with lead. Pushing past the exhaustion, Tatsumi managed to sit on the edge of the bed, where he began looking around the room. Suddenly, the door to the guest room opened and the woman with the familiar platinum hair walked in.

When she saw Tatsumi trying to sit up in bed, her eyes widened in shock.

"Master...?" came her rough voice through cherry-colored lips. Then, clear tears began to flow freely from her ruby-red eyes.

Before Tatsumi could say anything, she—Calsedonia—rushed to throw her arms around him. Caught off guard by the sudden embrace, Tatsumi couldn't

stay upright and fell back onto the bed.

“I’m so glad... really, *really* glad... that Master is awake... really...” Calsedonia murmured through her sobs.

Tatsumi was hit by a sudden, sharp pain in his chest, as if it were trying to remind him of a recent trauma to the area.

*Why does my chest hurt?* It was then that he finally remembered the whole ordeal. The deadly battle against Baldio, Giuseppe’s assistant, and Morganaik, the Free Knight—both of them possessed by a demon.

“Master...? Is something wrong?” Calsedonia noticed the sudden change in Tatsumi and lifted herself from him, concern etched on her face. “Is that wound on your chest is hurting...? I’m so sorry!!! How careless of me...” Flustered, she got off the bed and bowed deeply.

“It’s okay, Chiko. It hurt a little, but the pain helped clear my head. Besides, I’m just glad you’re safe,” Tatsumi reassured her.

“Thank you. But just to be sure, let me check the wound again,” Calsedonia suggested. Tatsumi nodded and took off his upper garment.

Looking down, Tatsumi saw a straight scar running across his chest. Calsedonia leaned in to examine the wound, brushing her fingers ever so lightly across it.

“It’s fully closed now,” she confirmed. “Still, given how deep it was, you might feel some pain for a while...”

“Well... that’s inevitable. Just to be alive after getting cut like that is a victory in itself.”

“But... there’s still a scar, isn’t there...” Calsedonia gently ran her fingertips over the scar on Tatsumi’s chest, her expression pained.

“For us men, it’s no big deal to have a scar or two,” Tatsumi assured her, enduring the ticklish sensation of her smooth fingertips on his chest—then he remembered his current situation.

He was sitting up in bed, shirtless, and Calsedonia, under the pretext of checking his wound, was leaning in with her beautiful features.

This meant, of course, that they were extremely close to each other. With only a slight shift of his gaze, Tatsumi could see the beautiful curves of Calsedonia's breasts asserting themselves through her priestly robes.

Tatsumi became aware of his heartbeat accelerating.

"Is something wrong? You've gotten really warm all of a sudden...?"

"N-No, no, no, no! It's, it's nothing, really, yeah!" Tatsumi's face flushed red as he desperately tried to appear nonchalant.

But some things couldn't be hidden, no matter how hard one tried.

Calsedonia, realizing where Tatsumi's gaze had been and remembering her own state, blushed deeply.

"Really... Master...!"

As she covered her chest with both hands, Calsedonia's face turned red with a slight anger. At the same time, she also managed to look pleased and shy.

"If M-Master wishes... that is... if you wish... I-I mean... it's not that I... I would mind..."

"C-Calsedonia..."

Both blushed deeply as the distance between their faces gradually decreased. Just when they were only a fist's breadth apart, a sudden, deliberate cough echoed through the room. The two of them jumped apart, startled.

"It's fine that you two are close, and I'm glad to see it, but at least close the door first. After all, this is a sacred place, a house of God, a temple."

Giuseppe was standing in the open door wearing a look of annoyance. Apparently, Calsedonia, in her surprise to see Tatsumi awake, had forgotten to close the door when she came in.

She now got up quickly, picked up a chair, and moved it next to the bed. As Giuseppe sat down in it, his granddaughter stood behind him and waited attentively.

"First of all, I'm glad to see that our son-in-law is back with us," Giuseppe began.

As Tatsumi noted the way Giuseppe spoke and Calsedonia's earlier confusion, a sudden question came to his mind. "Have I... been asleep for a long time?"

"Indeed. It's been three days since the commotion in the garden. You've been asleep the whole time," Giuseppe replied.

"Three days...? That long...?" Tatsumi marveled. The incident with the demon felt like it had happened mere hours ago.

"As one of the people involved, you should be informed about what's happened since then. But before that, what do you remember?"

Tatsumi did his best to put that day's events in order. He remembered hearing that Baldio, Giuseppe's assistant, had been possessed by a demon and attacked Calsedonia in the temple garden. He remembered being with Morganaik at the time, and the two of them heading for the garden to help Calsedonia. Together, they had successfully banished the demon from Baldio's body. But then the demon had possessed Morganaik and attacked Calsedonia again. In a moment of selflessness, Tatsumi had jumped in front of her and taken the blow meant for her.

That was as far as Tatsumi's clear memories went. He vaguely remembered confronting Morganaik in a desperate attempt to save Calsedonia, but the details were fuzzy.

"So you don't remember using magic?" Giuseppe asked.

"Me, using magic? But I don't *have* any magical power..."

"That's true. We can't feel any magic power from you now, and we couldn't while you were asleep either. But..."

"But I saw it clearly," Calsedonia cut in. "Master used magic... and not just any magic, but a Heaven Magic spell."

Calsedonia and Giuseppe then explained Heaven Magic to Tatsumi. It was a mythical, or rather legendary, category of magic that only one other person had ever been able to use. They claimed that Tatsumi had used this very type of magic, albeit without knowing it.

It was hard for Tatsumi to believe such a claim, but he couldn't fathom that Giuseppe and Calsedonia would be lying. If this were true, then he had indeed used magic so legendary that it was almost unbelievable.

And Tatsumi wasn't the only one who was confused. To Calsedonia, there was no doubt that Tatsumi had used Instantaneous Transmission. She had seen it with her own eyes. However, she still couldn't feel any magical power emanating from him, and a person without magical power shouldn't have been able to use magic.

"Hmm?"

"Huh?"

Giuseppe and Calsedonia, who had been staring at Tatsumi in confusion, let out small sounds of surprise. Without noticing their gaze, Tatsumi opened and closed his hand as if to confirm something. Finally, he thought he could barely detect a hint of magical power in his own body.

It was an extremely faint amount of power, so faint that even its color couldn't be seen. However, Giuseppe and Calsedonia, too, were sure that they'd seen a glimmer of magic emanating from the supposedly magic-less Tatsumi.

"Grandfather... what does that mean...?"

"Hmm... Honestly, I'm not sure. But I definitely felt a hint of magical power from our son-in-law," Giuseppe replied, stroking his long white beard in deep thought.

There was a saying in Tatsumi's homeland that experience was the best teacher, and Giuseppe was a testament to that. The man hadn't been passing his years idly; he had a wealth of knowledge from his long life, and now he searched his vast memory for a phenomenon similar to what had happened to Tatsumi.

Finally, a possible explanation appeared in his mind.

"Could it be... that our son-in-law is interacting with Outer Essence instead of Inner Essence...?"

“Wh-What?!” Calsedonia exclaimed in shock.

Tatsumi turned to her, surprised by her reaction. “Hey, Chiko? What did he mean, ‘Inner Essence’ and ‘Outer Essence’?”

“Ah, yes. Inner and Outer Essence are, well...”

In this world, magic power was abundant everywhere—in the grasslands where herbivores roamed, in the high mountains that were accessible only to birds, in the vast oceans that were a paradise for fish, and even in the cities where humans thrived. The magic that filled the natural world was called the Outer Essence, while the magic contained in the bodies of living beings like humans was known as the Inner Essence. Of course, the world itself held far more magic than a single person could ever contain.

Even the magic within Calsedonia, which stood at the highest of any individual’s capacity, was like a handful of water against the vastness of the ocean. If Tatsumi was in fact using the Outer Essence...

“If that’s the case, no wonder we haven’t been sensing any magical power from him. He probably only draws on the magical power around him when he needs it. Of course, there’s no definitive proof, but that’s the explanation that makes the most sense... At least I can’t think of any other reason,” Giuseppe concluded, his tone a mixture of amazement and disbelief.

“So, Chiko... interacting with this Outer Essence... is it really that rare?”

“It’s more than *rare*. Normally, humans can’t manipulate the Outer Essence at all.”

While it was possible to collect Outer Essence through the use of magic circles during ceremonies, there was no precedent for an individual handling it directly. There may have been magicians capable of this feat in the past, but if so, they hadn’t made it into the history books. If Giuseppe’s speculation was correct, Tatsumi would be the first Outer Essence user in known history.

“If Grandfather is right, then Master has a virtually inexhaustible supply of magical power. He can gather it from his surroundings whenever he needs.”

“But don’t be overconfident,” Giuseppe warned. “There are places, like the basement of the temple, for example, where magic is dense, as well as areas

where magic is sparse or totally absent. In places like that, even you would find it difficult to gather magic.”

In other words, Tatsumi would have an almost limitless supply of magic, but he would never be able to accumulate a fixed amount of it. To be precise, he could temporarily store magic in his body just before using it, but that magic would quickly dissipate if not used. In that sense, he would be at a disadvantage compared to normal mages.

Tatsumi nodded solemnly at the old man’s advice, but his face still glowed with anticipation. The prospect of wielding the unknown power of magic, which only days ago had been out of his reach forever, was beyond exciting.

Giuseppe fell into thought. *Upon closer examination, my son-in-law is quite a rare being. A user of Heaven Magic, and now a user of Outer Essence. And, according to Calsedonia, he’s also a Seer.*

It was unclear whether all people from Tatsumi’s world were like that or if Tatsumi was an anomaly. To find out, they would have to summon more humans, but that was practically impossible.

Giuseppe’s expression had been gentle until now, but suddenly he looked at Tatsumi with a new intensity. As if influenced by this change, Tatsumi and Calsedonia tensed up as well. His voice clear and strong, Giuseppe made a proposal to Tatsumi.

“How about it, son-in-law? Would you consider becoming an exorcist like Calsedonia?”

## Chapter 22: Tatsumi's Decision

“I’m against it!!” Upon hearing Giuseppe’s suggestion, Tatsumi and Calsedonia had both been momentarily stunned, but when Calsedonia finally realized what her grandfather was proposing, she would have none of it.

“I can’t allow Master to be put in that kind of danger! Why, Grandfather, would you even *consider* turning Master into a magical exorcist?”

Tatsumi was taken aback by Calsedonia’s vehement opposition.

“Calm down and think about it, Calsey,” Giuseppe told her. “There’s no one better suited to be a magical exorcist than Tatsumi. He’s a Heaven Magic user, an Outer Essence user, and a Seer. For a demon, your fiancée would be the natural enemy.”

“I recognize Master’s potential too, but surely you’re not thinking of exploiting him, Grandfather...?” Calsedonia stood up, approaching her grandfather with an almost threatening intensity. But Giuseppe, seasoned by his years, remained cool even in the face of her fervor.

“Really... You get too extreme when it comes to your master,” he said with an exasperated sigh. “I’ll always respect his wishes. If he doesn’t want to become a magical exorcist, I won’t force him to.”

Giuseppe turned to Tatsumi. “What do you say? You won’t have to fight any demons right away. Start with the basic training, then gradually build up your combat experience. You can train with the temple warriors for combat skills, and Calsey and I can teach you magic. There’ll be no need to rush. Just slowly improve your skills as an exorcist. How about it, son-in-law? Will you give it a try?”

“Master, you don’t have to rush it. If you don’t want to, it’s okay to say no,” Calsedonia said, her solemn gaze fixed on Tatsumi.

It was possibly the most important decision of his life, so Tatsumi took his time, pondering and looking back and forth between Giuseppe and Calsedonia.

“You don’t need to decide today,” the latter said, probably seeing his hesitation. “Take your time to think about it—”

“No, sir. I’ll do it. Please, let me do it. Make me an exorcist like Chiko.” Tatsumi sat down formally on the bed and bowed deeply to Giuseppe.

“Master... why...?” Calsedonia asked, her expression sad. Tatsumi, who had settled back into a comfortable position on the bed, smiled at her as he began to explain.

“You see, Chiko, I want to become stronger.”

“Stronger...?”

“Yeah. I’ve realized that this world is filled with more dangers than the place I came from, Japan. To protect my precious family... to protect you, Chiko... I must be stronger.”

Upon hearing Tatsumi call her “precious family,” Calsedonia’s cheeks flushed and her red eyes moistened.

“And after actually fighting a demon... I realize how terrifying they can be.”

It would not be an exaggeration to say that no one in this world was completely virtuous. Everyone had some darkness in their heart. This was true of Giuseppe, Calsedonia, and even Tatsumi. As humans, they all had shadows lurking somewhere inside of them.

Demons stimulated and magnified that darkness. Your kindest family member or neighbor could suddenly turn into a monster. Such was the true horror of demons. In fact, two noble individuals, Baldio and Morganaik, had just fallen victim to one’s influence. Anyone could be the next victim of a demon’s whispers.

“If I have the power to resist demons, I want to develop it. I don’t think I can help every demon-possessed person in the world, but if there’s anything I can do within my power, I want to do it.”

Tatsumi laid his upper body back down on the bed. Then, with only his head turned toward Calsedonia, he flashed a mischievous, playful smile.

“Actually, that’s just the official reason. What I really want to protect... is just one person.”

“Wha...?” Calsedonia’s heart skipped a beat. Tatsumi’s serious look was aimed directly at her, silently telling her who this ‘one person’ he wanted to protect was.

“I’m glad that you care about me, Chiko,” he continued. “Back when I went to the garden with Morganaik to rescue you, you said I was a hindrance, but you were just being harsh to make me leave, weren’t you? To keep me out of danger.”

Now, Tatsumi understood why Calsedonia had bluntly called him an obstacle back then.

“You were right, too. From where you stand, I *am* nothing but an obstacle right now. But one day... I want to be strong enough to fight at your side—no, like Morganaik, to protect you while you fight demons.”

Tatsumi vividly remembered the skillful teamwork of Morganaik and Calsedonia. He didn’t know when he would reach that level, but that was his new goal.

“That’s why... I’ll become an exorcist. I’ll become a man who can protect not only Chiko, but also Calsedonia, as a woman... I *will* show you that I can!” he concluded, turning a determined gaze to Calsedonia, then Giuseppe.

It was at this moment that the future exorcist, who would later be known as the Sky Soarer, set his sights on his path.

Giuseppe’s stern expression returned to his usual calm demeanor, and he nodded in satisfaction. “I understand your determination, son-in-law. However, someone with no proven experience can’t suddenly be treated as a magical exorcist. First, you’ll need to go through a series of training regimens here at the temple, and then you should gain practical experience as a monster hunter in the city. It’s the same for everyone, including Calsedonia here and even the Free Knight—Morganaik. Every exorcist starts out as an urban monster hunter.”

Giuseppe was right. The path for anyone aspiring to become a magical exorcist was to first gain experience against magical beasts, which were considered less formidable than demons, before taking on the demons themselves.

“In Levantis, there are several taverns and inns where monster hunters gather. Once you’ve developed some skills, you should visit these places to find work,” Giuseppe suggested.

This advice held true not just in the Kingdom of Largofieri, but in most of the larger towns and villages on the Zoisalight Continent. These taverns and inns often received requests to kill magical beasts—perhaps it was these requests that attracted the hunters.

Tatsumi was surprised to learn that Morganaik had started out as a simple urban monster hunter. Apparently, his skills had been recognized, and he’d been recruited to become an exorcist affiliated with the temple.

“Ah... that reminds me...”

“What is it?” Calsedonia tilted her head, her signature ahoge.

“I just remembered—what happened to Morganaik and Baldio after that?”

Had they been held accountable for crimes they’d committed due to their possession? Tatsumi wondered. He didn’t know much about the laws of this land, and he was worried about them. Even as he asked the question, he saw Calsedonia’s and Giuseppe’s expressions darken.

“You don’t mean... Morganaik and the others have been accused of serious crimes...?”

“No, it’s not that they’re being accused of a crime... but there is a complicated issue at hand. I didn’t just come here to see how you were doing, son-in-law... I also came because I wanted to discuss something with you once you were awake.”

“Discuss with me?”

When Giuseppe nodded, the usual calm smile was missing from his face.

According to the laws of the Kingdom of Largofiery, a person who committed a crime while possessed by a demon was generally not held accountable unless the crime was exceptionally grave. Destroying an entire city, for example, wouldn't result in exoneration, but the punishment might only be ten years in prison. Since it was easy to tell if someone was possessed by a demon by looking into their eyes, using possession as an excuse for committing a crime didn't work.

At first glance, this law seemed quite merciful, but there was an unknown backstory to it. Several generations ago, a king of Largofiery had been known for his greed. He wanted all kinds of rare treasures and beautiful women, and he would get them by any means necessary, often using his royal authority.

But as greedy as he was, he was morbidly afraid of being possessed by a demon. He feared that his deep desires would attract one, and that he would one day turn into a monster. Instead of curbing his desires, however, this king enacted the law that anyone possessed by a demon should not be punished for what they did. Suddenly, the demon was to blame, not the host. In essence, he was creating a legal safeguard for himself in case he ever became possessed.

But others, especially the common people, perceived this law as compassionate and widely accepted it. Some even forgot the king's previous greed and praised him as a merciful and kind ruler.

Regardless of the reasons for its enactment, this popular law continued to be enforced in the Kingdom of Largofiery even after the king's death.

"Neither Baldio nor Morganaik has any mental abnormalities from the possession, and their injuries are minor. Legally, they won't be punished and can continue their normal lives... but..." Giuseppe sighed tiredly.

"Legally, they won't be held accountable. However, the incident took place in the garden of this temple. It's the sacred ground of the gods, beyond the reach of the nation's laws. It was here that a man—a priest, no less—assaulted Calsedonia, a young woman. As servants of God, we can't simply overlook such acts..."

"What...? Then Morganaik and Baldio are...?"

“Baldio is deeply sorry for his actions. To atone and reform himself, he voluntarily resigned his position as my assistant. He’s decided to travel as a simple pilgrim priest. He probably doesn’t intend to return to this temple ever again.

“He was a promising figure for the future, but his decision is firm and unlikely to change. I’ve decided to let him follow his chosen path,” Giuseppe added, his shoulders drooping.

Sitting on the bed next to Tatsumi, Calsedonia looked rather sad. Baldio was not only a subordinate she relied on as an assistant but also someone she revered like a brother. It was clear that Calsedonia, the actual victim, held no grudge against him, and Tatsumi could understand why she would be discouraged by his departure.

“Well, that settles Baldio’s situation... but the problem is with Morganaik.” Giuseppe again gave a heavy sigh and turned to Calsedonia, who was standing behind him.

“Could you tell Morganaik that our son-in-law is awake and ask him to come here?”

“I will.”

After bowing to Tatsumi and Giuseppe, Calsedonia quietly left the guest room.

“The situation with Morganaik is more complicated than with Baldio...” Giuseppe remarked, his shoulders still slumped. He waited till Calsedonia’s footsteps had receded down the hallway, then asked Tatsumi, “You must have heard of Morganaik’s fame in this temple—no, in this country?”

The noble Free Knight of the Kingdom of Largofiery and the pride of the Savaiv Temple. His fame was widespread, and bards competed to sing of his and the Saintess’s exploits.

“If the news of the Free Knight being possessed by a demon spreads... it won’t just be a matter of Morganaik’s personal reputation falling to ruins.”

The spread of this incident could undermine the authority of the Savaiv Temple itself, Giuseppe explained. Moreover, if it became known that even

someone as revered as the Free Knight had failed to resist a demon, the resulting turmoil among the people might be unpredictable.

“So... after consulting with the kingdom, we decided not to publicize this incident... especially the part about Morganaik falling into the demon’s clutches.”

Fortunately, or unfortunately, Morganaik had arranged to keep people away from the garden at the beginning of the incident. His original intention had been to help the possessed Baldio save face, but it inadvertently worked to keep Morganaik’s own possession a secret.

Now only the parties directly involved—Tatsumi and Calsedonia—knew that Morganaik had been possessed by the demon. Others privy to the incident were a select few within the Savaiv Temple and the upper echelons of the Kingdom of Largofiery. They planned to keep Morganaik’s incident non-existent, as far as the commonfolk were concerned, to protect the temple’s authority and prevent public unrest.

As for Baldio, although he had been seen attacking Calsedonia while under the influence of the demon, he wasn’t as famous or recognized as the Free Knight. Therefore, his actions would not have a significant impact on the temple or the people. Also, it had been decided that no further punishment would be meted out, since he had chosen to make atonement by going on a pilgrimage.

Therefore, the official explanation of the incident would be that a priest had succumbed to a demon, and the demon was subsequently exorcised by the Free Knight and the Saintess.

“I understand that it could be difficult for you to accept this as someone who was directly involved and severely injured... but we must ask you to understand. Of course, I’ll do whatever I can to help. Can you accept this decision, son-in-law?” Giuseppe asked, bowing deeply to Tatsumi.

## Chapter 23: And So It Begins

Tatsumi understood the reason for Giuseppe's request. Even if the Savaiv Temple and the Largofiery Kingdom both decided to erase Morganaik's incident, the word could easily spread if Tatsumi talked about it in the city. Of course, Tatsumi had no intention of doing that, but Giuseppe didn't know him that well yet, so it made sense that he was being safe.

While Tatsumi might have been upset if this was only about preserving the image of the temple or the kingdom, he found it more acceptable if it was about preventing public unrest.

"Can I ask a question?" he now asked Giuseppe.

"What is it?"

"About the demon that possessed Baldio and Morganaik... are all demons that powerful?"

This demon had easily possessed Baldio and Morganaik—two formidable individuals—and had withstood more than one of Calsedonia's exorcisms. If every demon possessed such strength, then they were indeed terrifying beings.

"Not necessarily," Giuseppe replied. "I only heard the reports; I didn't confront this demon myself, so I can't be sure, but the one involved this time was probably one of the more powerful individuals among the demons."

In general, demons avoided possessing humans. While humans had the greatest desires of all living creatures, they also had access to magic that could be effective against incorporeal demons.

Furthermore, demons weren't numerous in this world. The few that existed usually attached themselves to wild animals and accumulated power bit by bit. Only those who had built up considerable power dared to try possessing a human being. Given these factors, when a human became a monster, it often

led to disaster. Therefore, the demon involved in the recent incident had probably been exceptional.

Most importantly, it had survived not one, but two of Calsedonia's attempts at exorcism. No demon had ever survived her exorcism before.

"Stronger demons are said to amplify petty desires and distort pure intentions," Giuseppe continued. "These inflated desires and twisted emotions become food for the demon. But all this is conjecture based on past incidents. No one's ever had a calm conversation with a demon to confirm those theories."

"Does that mean that Morganaik and Baldio weren't to blame for what happened?"

"I can't say they were completely blameless. Everyone has desires, to some degree or another. But it's true that they were extremely unlucky to encounter such a formidable demon."

"I see... In that case, I accept your request, sir."

Tatsumi knew that making a fuss would only lead to him being labeled as a threat by the higher-ups in the Savaiv Temple or the kingdom at large. In the worst case, he could even be targeted by assassins. Okay, this idea might be a bit far-fetched—but he couldn't completely rule out the possibility. Besides, he owed it to Giuseppe, who had shown him so much kindness and was now bowing so earnestly.

"Are you sure? I apologize for disturbing you so soon after your arrival. Do you have any special requests in regard to this?"

Tatsumi chuckled inwardly at the idea of being paid hush money.

"No, I don't have any special requests."

Giuseppe looked astonished at Tatsumi's answer. If they were in modern Japan and this had been a traffic accident, he might have demanded compensation for medical treatment or even distress. But here, Calsedonia had already provided free healing magic, and considering that they were paying his living expenses, what more could he ask for?

In a more “adult” scenario, one might jokingly demand, “Hehe, then let me have your granddaughter’s hand in exchange,” but Tatsumi was pretty sure that Giuseppe and Calsedonia would happily agree to such a request—and he wasn’t quite ready for that.

“Are you... really not going to ask for anything, after all you’ve been through?”

“No. You and Calsedonia have taken good care of me... I can’t ask for any more than you’ve already given me.”

He had a man on the level of a king bowing before him. What more could he ask for? Still, his answer seemed so unexpected to Giuseppe, which told him the norms of this land were quite different from what he was used to.

“Son-in-law, you are... Hohoho, well, I’m quite astonished.”

Giuseppe’s usual gentle smile was back, but it now carried a hint of delight, as if he had discovered something amusing.

“Master, Grandfather, I’ve brought Morganaik,” Calsedonia’s voice announced from behind the door of the guest room. After a knock, Giuseppe asked the two outside to enter when he saw Tatsumi’s nod of approval.

Calsedonia entered first, followed by Morganaik, who gave a slight bow. Today, he wasn’t wearing the usual armor of a priest-warrior, nor the traditional priestly robes, but rather civilian clothes that anyone might be seen wearing in the city. To Tatsumi, this felt strangely refreshing, even if a bit out of place.

“Lord Tatsumi...” Morganaik’s face was all business as he stepped into the room. The Free Knight approached the side of Tatsumi’s bed and knelt down.

“I sincerely apologize for the damage I caused you due to my inadequate handling of the recent incident.”

Tatsumi, who had been staring at Morganaik in silence, suddenly seemed to realize something and opened his mouth to speak.

“Could it be... Morganaik, are you planning to leave the temple? And not just as a pilgrim priest like Baldio, but to leave the priesthood altogether?”

“Why do you think that?” Morganaik asked, raising his head, his expression still serious.

“You’re not wearing armor or robes, just ordinary clothes. Doesn’t that mean that you’ve decided to leave the priesthood?” Tatsumi asked sharply.

“You are quite observant. It seems that my eyes were indeed clouded,” Morganaik admitted with a dark smile.

Frankly, Morganaik had underestimated Tatsumi before. As someone who had fought countless magical beasts and demons, he had seen nothing remarkable in Tatsumi, either as a warrior or a magician. However, it seemed that he had been wrong.

The ‘ordinary’ Tatsumi had defeated Morganaik, even as he was under the influence of the demon, *and* had successfully exorcised said demon. Even though Tatsumi’s fighting style was amateurish and clumsy, he had defeated—no, he had saved—Morganaik.

Morganaik knew that the truth about the incident would be kept from the public, a decision he understood politically, but couldn’t accept personally. He had been overtaken by a demon, and the young man before him had saved him.

Morganaik knew that Tatsumi must have been informed about the decision of the temple and the kingdom. Nevertheless, Tatsumi was speaking to him normally, without reproach or condemnation, even though Morganaik was profiting from the situation. Yes, Tatsumi talked to him like any other person.

It seemed to Morganaik that every woman inevitably found her tastes in men shifting as she grew up, and he found it endearing. He had hoped that when Calsedonia shifted her gaze from the ‘boy of her dreams’ to a real man, he himself would be reflected in her ruby-red eyes. With that in mind, he’d continued to watch over her. But the “boy of her dreams” had turned out to be real, summoned from another world by Calsedonia.

Morganaik was aware that Summoning Magic was considered a legendary type of Great Magic. He was also aware of Calsedonia’s abilities as a magician. It was indeed possible for her to successfully perform a summoning ritual, and she had done so. Her deep feelings for the ‘boy of her dreams’ had brought him to her world.

Morganaik knew that there was no place for him in Calsedonia's new life. He also believed Tatsumi would bring no harm to the woman. Otherwise, he wouldn't have risked his life to protect her. His long-held feelings for the woman were another reason he'd decided to leave the temple.

"So be it. If that's your decision, Morganaik, I have nothing to say against it."

Tatsumi extended his right hand to Morganaik.

"From today on, I'll strive to become a mage and an exorcist," he said. "It will take a while to reach your level, but I *will* become an exorcist capable of protecting and fighting alongside Calsedonia."

"I may no longer be a priest, but I plan to become a monster hunter in the city, helping those who suffer from magical beasts and demons," said Morganaik. "Maybe... one day we could fight together."

"Yes, I look forward to that day."

Morganaik gripped Tatsumi's hand tightly, then turned to Giuseppe and bowed. "I apologize, Your Highness. The kingdom and the temple have shielded me, but I can't be at peace with that."

"I thought you would decide that," Giuseppe said, his voice tinged with resignation. He stroked his long white beard. "Both you and Baldio are too honest for your own good. Very well. I'll take care of the temple, the kingdom, and the people. You can do as you wish."

"Thank you. I'm truly grateful for all your support and guidance to this day." Morganaik raised his head, then turned to the Saintess. "Calsedonia, I've wronged you terribly. I don't expect forgiveness, but I have to apologize anyway. I am truly sorry."

"It's all right. I can't forgive you for hurting Master, but if he's decided not to say anything, then neither will I."

"I appreciate that." Morganaik smiled wryly at Calsedonia's consideration for Tatsumi, then bowed to her once more. Finally, he bowed to the three people in the room and quietly left, the Free Knight walking away in silence.

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A few days later, in a house some distance away from the Savaiv Temple, several people were busy coming and going.

“Tatsumi, where do you want me to take this? And what is it, anyway? I mean, it looks like an instrument...”

“It’s a guitar... a musical instrument from my country, Barse.”

“Wow, Tatsumi, you can play an instrument?”

“Well, just a little.” After their light conversation, Barse carried the guitar plus a handful of other items into the room Tatsumi had indicated, then quickly stepped outside to get more.

“Hey, Tatsumi! The furniture guys brought the stuff you ordered. Where should they put it?”

“Wait a minute, Bogard! Chiko, can you help Bogard outside?”

“Will do,” Calsedonia replied with a smile. She had been cleaning up in the kitchen, but now she hurried outside. Immediately, a chorus of surprised voices rang out.

“It’s the Saintess!!”

“Wow... I’ve never seen the Saintess this close before...!”

“I want to move to this neighborhood...”

It seemed that the realization that the Saintess herself had stepped out of the house had startled the movers. Calsedonia greeted them with a smile and quickly instructed them to move the furniture inside.

Tatsumi chuckled at the scene before slowly gazing around the house, which was slowly taking shape as their new home. “It really starts today...” he murmured softly. Today marked the beginning of his life with the woman he cherished.

Almost ten days had passed since Tatsumi had been summoned to this world by Calsedonia, but it felt as if his true life in this new world was just beginning.

“Master? Is something wrong?” Calsedonia asked with a puzzled look. She had just noticed that Tatsumi was standing still, staring intently around the

house.

As she tilted her head, the quirky lock of hair on her head swayed slightly.

“It’s nothing. Just thinking... about living in this house from now on, it’s a lot to take in,” Tatsumi said with a shy smile.

Calsedonia slowly approached him. “I’m looking forward to it, too. Living here with you, Master...”

Standing directly in front of Tatsumi, she offered a gentle smile. “I have so many things I’d like to do in this house, but for now, my immediate goal is...” — with a slight upward glance, Calsedonia brought her delicate lips close to Tatsumi’s ear— “to become a real family with you as soon as possible, Master. I’ll work hard for it.”

The words made Tatsumi’s eyes widen and Calsedonia blush. They looked at each other, both red-faced but radiating happiness. Indeed, as Calsedonia had said, it wouldn’t be long before the two of them became a real family.

A decorative rectangular border with intricate scrollwork and floral patterns, framing the central text.

# Extra Side Story: Two Calsedonias

## Extra Side Story: Two Calsedonias

**G**iuseppe Chrysopraxe, the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple in the Kingdom of Largofiery, was recognized as the pinnacle of the Savaiv clergy. His reputation as a collector of magical sealing tools—commonly known as magical items—was well-known among those of significant status. Today, a new item was delivered to the High Priest’s office in the Savaiv Temple.

The item was flat, wrapped in a soft, luxurious-looking cloth, and about as tall as a man. Looking at the item, Giuseppe nodded repeatedly in satisfaction.

“Ah, yes. I’ve finally acquired this piece,” he said contentedly.

“Is this the new magical sealing tool you’ve acquired, Grandpa? It’s quite large,” Calsedonia observed, looking over Giuseppe’s shoulder at the item.

“The previous owner was reluctant to part with it, despite my negotiations. But suddenly they agreed to hand it over, and now it’s finally here,” Giuseppe explained, his face beaming like that of a child with a new toy as he repeatedly stroked his long white beard.

“But Grandpa, why did you just ask for me to come? Didn’t you say you wanted to show Master Tatsumi the new magic sealing tools as well?” Calsedonia inquired.

Collectors, no matter where they were in the world, often liked to brag about their collections and took pleasure in the interest and admiration of others. In the past, Calsedonia would always light up at the sight of new magic seal tools, but lately, her reactions had become more subdued. Tatsumi, on the other hand, was different. Coming as he did from a world without magic, these wondrous items held an endless fascination for him.

So Tatsumi would have made much more sense to show off his collection to. However, today he had summoned only Calsedonia, leaving Tatsumi out, which made her wonder.

“No, it’s just that I thought I’d surprise my son-in-law a little,” Giuseppe explained.

“Grandpa, a little mischief is fine, but if it’s something that would bother Master... even if it’s you, I won’t forgive it.”

“Oh dear. You’re always so intense when it comes to your master.” Giuseppe chuckled, noticing the fierce glint in Calsedonia’s bright red eyes. “Relax. I have no intention of harming him. On the contrary, it’s mischief I’m sure he’ll enjoy.”

“Mischief my master will enjoy...?” Calsedonia was puzzled, unable to immediately think of what Giuseppe might mean. Observing his granddaughter’s perplexed look, Giuseppe smiled inwardly, enjoying this puzzling exchange.

“Why don’t you see for yourself instead of me explaining? Come stand over here, Calsedonia.” Giuseppe gestured to the magical sealing tool, and as Calsedonia took her position, he quickly removed the cloth covering it.

“Is this... a mirror?”

Indeed, it was a body-length mirror. At first glance, the material was difficult to discern, but the intricate plant motifs indicated that it was a valuable item even without its magical sealing properties. The mirror now showed Calsedonia’s full reflection—a perfect reflection, with absolutely no distortion.

“That is a really incredible mirror...” Calsedonia sighed in admiration as she gazed at her double.

A distortion-free mirror was valuable in itself, but the fact that this one was a magical sealing tool made it even more so. Calsedonia wondered how much her grandfather had paid for the item, but she wasn’t sure she wanted to know.

Unaware of his granddaughter’s thoughts, Giuseppe, with a look of great satisfaction, uttered the magic words to activate the mirror’s power. In response to his incantation, the mirror emitted a sharp flash of light.

Startled, Calsedonia instinctively closed her eyes and shielded them with her arms. When the light faded, she lowered her arms and opened her eyes.

“Oh?” Aside from the fleeting brightness, there seemed to be no change in the mirror. Could it be that all this magical sealing tool could do was emit a flash of light? If so, what about this was supposed to please Master Tatsumi?

As she tilted her head to take another look at the mirror, Giuseppe’s satisfied voice came from behind.

“Ah, yes. It seems to have worked.”

Turning toward the sound, Calsedonia saw Giuseppe smiling broadly. Upon closer inspection, however, she noticed that his gaze was not on her but something else. Curious, Calsedonia followed his gaze.

It was on the opposite side of the mirror, right where she was standing. And when Calsedonia saw what was there, she couldn’t help but look surprised. For there, on the other side, was another version of herself.

With an awkward, creaky movement, Calsedonia turned back to Giuseppe. “Could it be... *this* is the mirror’s ability?”

“Indeed. This mirror is known as the ‘Mirror of Imitation’. As you can see, it can create a copy of anyone who’s reflected in it.”

“Mirror of Imitation... a copy?” Calsedonia looked at her reflection.

Calsedonia’s mirror image had skin as flawless as the first snow, eyes as red as rubies, long platinum hair flowing straight down, and the same wayward strand of hair protruding from the top of her head. Every detail was a perfect reflection of herself. Then her reflection smiled at her.

“Nice to meet you, me.” The voice coming from the reflection was also unmistakably Calsedonia’s.

After looking around the room, the reflection of Calsedonia spoke again, “Where is Master? Where is he?”

“Huh? My son-in-law?” Giuseppe answered. “Well, Calsedonia, where is he now?”

“Master’s duties at the temple were only for this morning, so he should be home by now.”

As a junior deacon, Tatsumi had days off from work. Especially at this temple in the capital, where there were enough priests to rotate shifts. Some days off were for the whole day, while others were just for the morning or afternoon. Today, Tatsumi had the morning off.

“I see. Master is home then.” The reflection of Calsedonia smiled brightly and left Giuseppe’s office like a breeze.

“Ah, wait! You can’t just leave the real me behind and go see Master!” The real Calsedonia rushed after her reflection.

Left alone in his office, Giuseppe sighed deeply and shook his head. “Well, well. Even if it’s a reflection, Calsedonia is Calsedonia. Always putting her master first, no matter what.”

He hurried to the office door.

“Well, with two Calsedonias suddenly appearing, my son-in-law will be surprised for sure. Oh, I’d better hurry; I need to see the look on his face.”

Apparently, this was Giuseppe’s idea of a playful prank. He called a nearby priest and ordered a carriage to be prepared.

The streets of Levantis were busy in the afternoon. Women were shopping, workers were hurrying about, merchants were busy at their stalls, and customers were examining the goods on display. Some hunters, perhaps on their way to a hunt, carried weapons and armor. There were also very well-dressed individuals in the crowd, probably nobility.

Through this diverse crowd, a woman in a white priestly robe, the sacred emblem of Savaiv bouncing on her ample chest, rushed past. Her long platinum hair shimmered in the sunlight as she ran, and her beautiful face radiated joy.

Passersby turned their heads, captivated by the sight of the beautiful, fast-moving woman. “Wasn’t that the Saintess of the Savaiv Temple just now?” one man asked his friend.

“Yeah, no doubt about it. That was Saintess Calsedonia. I wonder what’s got her in such a hurry?”

“Did something happen?”

“No idea. But she seemed happy, so it must not be anything serious.”

Then another figure in priestly robes ran between them. “Excuse me! I’m in a hurry, please let me through!” the woman called.

“Did you see that... Wasn’t that...”

“That looked like Lady Calsedonia to me too... or was it just my imagination?”

“I thought so too... but it must have been our imagination, right?” The two exchanged puzzled glances and shook their heads.

After finishing his morning duties at the temple, Tatsumi returned home and started cleaning. “I left most of the housework to Chiko...” he muttered. “I should do what I can.”

Tatsumi was no good at cooking, and Calsedonia did the laundry every morning. That meant his contributions to the household were limited to cleaning and fetching water from the well. He swept the floors with a broom-like tool, picking up dust and debris to sweep outside. After thoroughly sweeping each room, he used a tool that his world would have called a mop to wipe the floors.

Just as he finished with a sigh of relief, he heard the front door open. “Huh? Chiko said she’d be at Giuseppe’s a little longer today...”

Wondering if Giuseppe’s business had been less important than expected, Tatsumi went to the entrance. The front door of their house had been magically locked by Calsedonia. It wouldn’t open without a preset password that only the two of them knew. So it had to be Calsedonia at the door.

Tatsumi looked from the living room to the entrance, and there she was. “Welcome back, Chiko!” he greeted her. “Didn’t think you’d be back this early. Did you finish Giuseppe’s business?”

“Master! Master...!” Seeing Tatsumi, Calsedonia’s face lit up, and she rushed over to him and hugged him immediately.

“What’s wrong, suddenly like this...?”

Tatsumi hadn’t expected to be hugged tightly like that, but when she nuzzled her head into his neck, much like she used to do when she had been a cockatiel,

Tatsumi remembered and smiled, stroking her head gently.

“What’s wrong, Chiko? Did something happen?”

“No, nothing special... Is it wrong to be like this?” she asked, looking up at him.

“No, it’s not that it’s wrong...” Confused but very pleased, Tatsumi was about to hug her when the door opened again.

“Eh...?” Tatsumi turned to the entrance, and his eyes widened in shock.

“Ch-Chiko...? Wha...? There are two Chikos...?”

One Calsedonia stood at the entrance, looking at him sternly, and another still clung to him, eyes closed in bliss. Alternating his gaze between the two of them, Tatsumi was completely bewildered.

“Leave Master at once!” the Calsedonia at the door demanded.

“No. If you were told to leave Master, would you just obey?” the other one replied.

“Of course not!” the first Calsedonia snapped back.

“Exactly. I’m you, after all. There’s no point in telling me that,” the second Calsedonia replied confidently.

Hugging Tatsumi tightly, the mirror image of Calsedonia turned her head to answer the real Calsedonia standing behind her. A clear smile of triumph was etched on her face. Of course, the real Calsedonia didn’t like this and tried to pull the mirror image away from Tatsumi.

“Let him go!” she demanded.

“I said *no*!” the reflection retorted.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow!” Tatsumi shouted as the two Calsedonias struggled, one trying to pull the reflection away, the other clinging desperately to Tatsumi. In the end, it was Tatsumi who suffered the most damage.

“Ouch, Chiko...”

“Ah, I’m sorry!” Both Calsedonias apologized at the same time, and the reflection finally let go of Tatsumi.

Tatsumi was completely perplexed as he looked back and forth between the two Calsedonias bowing to him. Both were undeniably the Calsedonia he knew, but it was impossible for there to be two of them. This led him to a realization.



The image of a certain senior priest, grinning mischievously, flashed in Tatsumi's mind. *Giuseppe definitely had something to do with this*, he thought. It must have been the effect of one of Giuseppe's magic-sealing artifacts that had duplicated Calsedonia.

"So, which one of you is the real Chiko?" Tatsumi asked.

"Of course it's me!" one Calsedonia asserted.

"No, *I'm* the real Calsedonia!" the other one asserted.

"Don't lie! *You're* the mirror image!"

"What are you saying? You're the reflection, the real one is me!"

"Master can tell, right? I'm the real Chiko!"

"No, I'm your real Chiko!"

While Tatsumi frowned in confusion, the sound of carriage wheels rattled down the street. The carriage was adorned with the sacred emblem of Savaiv, clearly marking it as belonging to the Savaiv Temple. Leaving the busy main street, the carriage entered a quieter residential area and stopped in front of a certain house. The coachman opened the door with impeccable manners, and an elderly man dressed in elaborate priestly robes stepped out.

The old man walked from the carriage to the house with an air of familiarity. Although it was his first visit here, this place was no stranger to him.

"Son-in-law, are you there? It's me. Would you open the door please?" he called casually, as if this was a house he visited often. In this country, there were few who could refuse a visit from this elderly man.

The door opened a moment later, revealing a young man with black hair. Standing in the doorway, the young man frowned when he saw the old man. "So you really came all the way to my house..." he muttered.

"Hohoho, it seems you're in a bit of trouble." Giuseppe chuckled to see the young man's annoyed expression.

Tatsumi stepped aside to let him in, then led the way to the living room, where two Calsedonias were sitting side by side behind the coffee table.

Tatsumi and Giuseppe sat down in front of them.

“Well, son-in-law? Aren’t you happy to have two of your beloved girls with you?” Giuseppe teased.

“Is that really something to be said by the High Priest of Savaiv, the guardian deity of marriage?” Tatsumi replied, perplexed.

“True, the God of Savaiv forbids infidelity, but this wouldn’t count. After all, they’re both Calsedonia, your lover,” Giuseppe argued.

Tatsumi wasn’t sure whether to agree with that statement or not, but if the highest priest of the Savaiv Temple said so, then perhaps having two Calsedonias wouldn’t violate the teachings of Savaiv, since they were the same person. Still, such an arrangement couldn’t possibly be without its problems.

*The biggest problem right now is... I can’t tell which one is the real one and which one is the reflection...* Tatsumi pondered.

The Calsedonias themselves had explained why there were two of them. However, both of them insisted that they were the real one, and claimed that the other one was the mirror image. To Tatsumi, both looked equally real.

Their appearance, their voices, and even their memories seemed to be perfectly copied. Moreover, even subtle gestures and habits were indistinguishable between the two Calsedonias.

“How long does Calsedonia’s reflection last?” Tatsumi asked Giuseppe.

“Well, that’s a good question. The previous owner of the mirror didn’t seem willing to divulge such details,” Giuseppe replied.

“You shouldn’t have bought such an ambiguous magic item,” Tatsumi said worriedly. “What if something dangerous happens?”

Giuseppe was a key figure in the Kingdom of Largofiery, even if he wasn’t directly involved in national politics. It would be unwise for someone of his stature to handle magical items whose effects weren’t fully understood. Tatsumi felt sure that any of Giuseppe’s close associates would have shared his concern, had they known about this incident.

“Don’t worry about it. The person I got it from is an old acquaintance and completely trustworthy. If the magical item were truly dangerous, they would never have given it to anyone else,” Giuseppe assured him.

Despite Giuseppe’s words, Tatsumi couldn’t help but feel uneasy. “Anyway, we need to find out which one is the real Calsedonia and which one is the mirror image.”

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“Before that, my boy, I’m a bit dehydrated. I know it’s presumptuous of me as a guest, but could you make me some tea?” Giuseppe asked.

“Ah, I’m sorry. How could I forget to offer tea to a guest?” Tatsumi said, and quickly got up to go to the kitchen.

However, both Calsedonias stood up at the same time and each grabbed one of Tatsumi’s arms. “I’ll make the tea,” they both insisted, gently pushing him back into his chair. “Just stay seated, Master.”

“Hmm? Did you notice something?” Giuseppe asked, raising an eyebrow as he noticed Tatsumi’s expression.

“Ah, yes. It’s just a hunch, but...” Tatsumi thought it was worth a try.

In front of Tatsumi, the two Calsedonias were working efficiently in the kitchen. They shared the tasks without any arguments, perhaps because they were originally the same person. Tatsumi watched them intently, planning his next move.

Eventually, the Calsedonias returned with tea and snacks for everyone. “Here you go, Master,” they said at the same time as they placed cups of tea in front of him. Normally, Tatsumi would have reminded them to serve Giuseppe first, but this time, he just watched the two Calsedonias in silence.

Sensing something unusual in Tatsumi’s demeanor, both Calsedonias tilted their heads in curiosity.

“Yes, I can tell which one is the real one and which one is the mirror image,” Tatsumi declared confidently.

“Oh, you found out?” Giuseppe asked.

“Yes, I have,” Tatsumi replied with a smile and stood up to face the Calsedonias. “Calsedonia, stand next to me,” he instructed.

The Calsedonias, still confused about his intentions, complied and stood beside him, one on each side. Of course, they positioned themselves without any prior agreement or dispute, each on one side of Tatsumi. Satisfied with this arrangement, Tatsumi asked, “You’re the real Calsedonia, right?” As he did, he smiled at the Calsedonia standing to his right.

“How did you find out that I was the mirror image?” the one on his left asked.

“It’s quite simple,” Tatsumi explained with a smile. “You’re a mirror image. Just the fact that you’re standing there gives it away.” He pointed to the feet of the mirror-image Calsedonia. “Calsedonia always stands to my right. When you both grabbed my arms earlier, you naturally took positions to my left and right without arguing. That’s when I realized it.”

Indeed, as Tatsumi pointed out, Calsedonia habitually stood on his right, probably an unconscious preference. The mirror-image Calsedonia had reversed that habit. Come to think of it, Tatsumi remembered that even when Calsedonia had been a cockatiel in her past life, she would often sit on his right shoulder. Today, even the hand her double had used to hand him his cup of tea had been the opposite.

While both Calsedonias displayed identical gestures and quirks, a closer look revealed their left-right reversal. It had taken Tatsumi a while to recognize the left-right reversal, but once he had, the difference was obvious.

“I see. You’re very observant, Master,” the mirror-image Calsedonia remarked, stepping back a few steps from Tatsumi with a warm smile. “I’m glad you pay so much attention to me.”

She then turned to Giuseppe. “Grandfather, the mirror that created me... it can only hold the reflection for about a quarter hour. So, I don’t think it will be useful for what you have in mind.”

By a “quarter hour,” she meant the time between the ringing of the bells at the temple. Tatsumi had previously checked with his watch and found that a

quarter hour was exactly two hours.

“Hmm... It’s that short?” Giuseppe frowned and stroked his long, white beard. “Then you’re right, it can’t be used for what I had in mind.”

Giuseppe seemed to realize that the former owner of the Mirror of Imitation might have anticipated his intentions. However, knowing that the mirror could not be used for its intended purpose, he had sold it to Giuseppe for a remarkable price.

“I was delighted to finally get my hands on that mirror, but I had no idea there was such a catch...” Giuseppe mused.

“Didn’t you suspect something when they suddenly agreed to sell it after being so reluctant?” Tatsumi asked.

“Well, considering the relationship I have with this person... To be honest, I’ve done similar things to them in the past. There’s a bit of give and take between us.” Apparently, such exchanges were not uncommon in their relationship, and eventually became fodder for shared laughter, indicating a deep mutual trust.

“Looks like it’s about time,” Calsedonia’s reflection said as she again stepped closer to Tatsumi. She pressed her lips gently against his cheek. “Sorry, real me. I’ll disappear soon and forget that I ever existed... So, that should be okay, right?”

“I guess it can’t be helped,” the real Calsedonia replied with a sigh. “You are me, after all. But let’s make this the only time we indulge ourself like this.”

The two Calsedonias shared a smile, understanding each other perfectly.

With a graceful curtsy, the mirror image of Calsedonia lifted the hem of her priestly robe and bowed toward Tatsumi. Then, as if melting into the air, she vanished without a trace.

“Now, what exactly were you planning to do with the Mirror of Imitation, Giuseppe?” Tatsumi asked as they resettled in the living room.

“You know I’m the High Priest of the Savaiv Temple, right?” Giuseppe began. “That means I’m extremely busy every day. Of course, I take pride in my role

and find it fulfilling, but sometimes, just sometimes, I wish I could take a day off to relax.”

Although lower-ranked priests managed to rotate their days off to take a day off, it was extremely difficult for the only High Priest in the temple to take a day. Still, Giuseppe was only human, and he needed breaks, but his busy schedule often left him yearning for a day of rest.

“So, you hoped to use the Mirror of Imitation to make a mirror image to handle your work...” Tatsumi lamented, appreciating Giuseppe’s intentions but also feeling a bit exasperated.

“But Grandfather, can’t you just make another mirror image as soon as the first one disappears?” Calsedonia inquired.

“It seems that’s not possible. The previous owner mentioned that once a mirror image is created, it takes about three days for the mirror to accumulate enough magical power to create another one,” Giuseppe explained.

*I guess it takes quite a bit of magical energy to create a human replica,* thought Tatsumi.

“Well, I’ll have a word or two with that Balraide fellow later,” Giuseppe mused aloud.

“Wait, Balraide? Do you mean...?”

Even though Tatsumi’s time in the Largofiery Kingdom had been short, he’d been learning all he could about this world and its people from Giuseppe and Calsedonia. The name Balraide definitely rang a bell.

And then it hit him.

“The king...?” Tatsumi asked in disbelief.

“That’s the one. I’ve known Balraide since we were kids. We used to get into all sorts of mischief together,” Giuseppe recalled with a nostalgic twinkle in his eye. Tatsumi was reminded just how extraordinary the seemingly accessible Giuseppe was in the eyes of ordinary citizens.

As for the fate of the Mirror of Imitation, it had unexpectedly ended up in Tatsumi’s home. When Giuseppe had realized that it couldn’t serve its original

purpose, he'd given it to Tatsumi.

“Even though the mirror image only appears for a short time, it could be useful depending on how you use it. For example, being with two Calsedonias at the same time, you know? Don't worry, it's not cheating since it's the same person,” Giuseppe suggested with a mischievous grin, his thumb raised in a knowing gesture.

“I would never do that! One Calsedonia is more than enough for me!” Tatsumi protested vehemently, his face flushed with embarrassment.

And so, the Mirror of Imitation found its way to a corner of Tatsumi's attic, where it would remain unused for the foreseeable future... probably.

## Afterword

Hello everyone,

First of all, allow me to say, nice to meet you. Well, I'm sure I've exchanged words with some of you on the web, but I'd like to formally introduce myself. My name is Muku Buncho.

I am truly grateful that you have picked up the book version of *My Pet Is a Saintess*. As I mentioned in the introduction, this work was originally just an amateur novel that I posted on the novel submission site "Become a Novelist," born out of personal satisfaction. Through a series of fortunate connections and opportunities, it has now been published as a book and seen the light of day once again. I am deeply grateful to everyone who supported the web version, and to TO Books, who generously offered to publish it.

It's been over a year and a half since I began writing *My Pet Is a Saintess* (hereafter *Pet Saintess*). It's only through my interactions with various people on the Internet and the opinions and ideas I've received from them that *Pet Saintess* has been able to come this far. I am grateful to everyone who's commented on new posts, pointed out typos and mispronunciations, and tossed out fragments of ideas during casual banter. Truly, *Pet Saintess* stands on the support I've received from all of you. I would like to take this moment to express my sincere gratitude. Thank you very much.

Now, let's put the formalities aside.

In this newly transformed book version of *Pet Saintess*, publishing a book was, of course, a first-time experience for me. It has always been a dream of mine to have my written works displayed on the shelves of a bookstore.

Now that dream has finally come true. But what excited me even more was giving a visual aspect to the characters I created. My request was granted, and Akira Kasukabe graciously agreed to illustrate *Pet Saintess*. You're probably

familiar with Kasukabe's stunning artwork. The way Kasukabe brought characters like Tatsumi and Calsedonia to life is nothing short of amazing.

I've always been excited to see my characters drawn or portrayed by someone else. In the past, before I started writing novels, I drew manga and felt immense joy when others illustrated my characters in our group's self-published works. This time, it feels like the ultimate version of that joy—I was almost ready to dance with happiness!

With the release of the first volume of *Pet Saintess*, the second volume will be released soon. It's scheduled for early next year, and preparations for its release have already begun.

The second volume will feature *that person*, who was very popular in the web version. I'm looking forward to seeing what kind of visuals will be given to *that person's* parents, especially his mother.

However, I'm a little concerned about whether *that person* and his family will get illustrations. As an author, I'm very excited and enjoying the process of turning *Pet Saintess* into a book series. I hope to continue this joyful journey for as long as possible. I would be delighted if you would continue to accompany us on the *Pet Saintess* journey in both its book and web versions.

*Muku Buncho.*



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