

I SAVED
TOO MANY GIRLS AND CAUSED THE
APocalypse

9

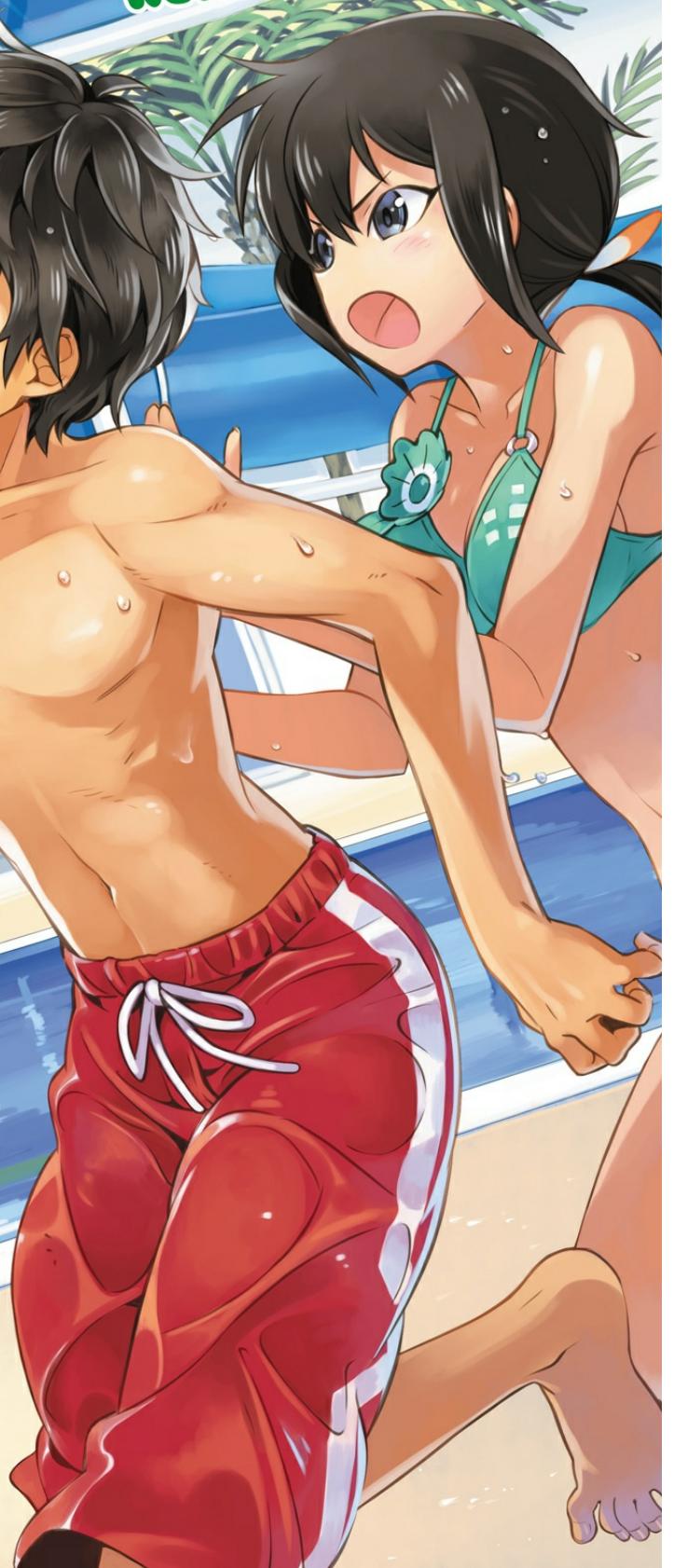


Author: NAMEKOJIRUSHI

Illustration: NAO WATANUKI

“Let's
check it
out.”

“Hurry up,
Rekka.”







“Why
are you
here, L?”

“Shut
up! It's
none of
your
busi-
ness!”

MYSTERIOUS
ASSASSIN
L

*The red light
was deflected
by R's shield.*

The slypheed sisters and Harissa were totally enthralled by the goldfish-scooping game.

“You can do it, Harissa! Go, sis!”

“Ah!”



REKKA NAMIDARE

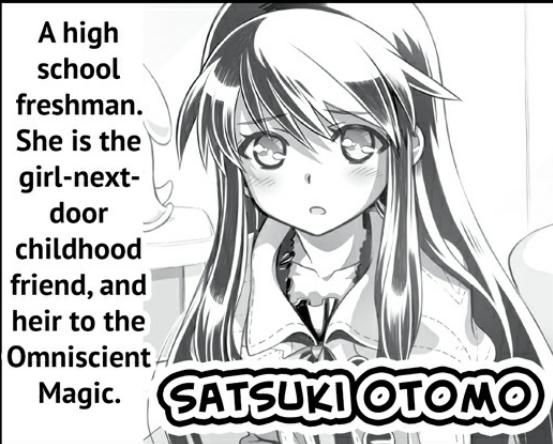


A high school freshman. Thanks to the Namidare bloodline, he keeps getting involved with girls that are in trouble.



**[IRIS FINERITAS
CYPHERCALL]**

A high school freshman. A space princess who's presently studying to be a bride on Earth.



SATSUKI OTOMO

A high school freshman. She is the girl-next-door childhood friend, and heir to the Omniscient Magic.



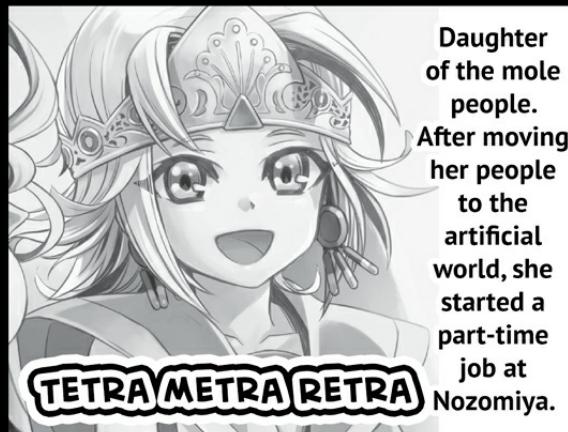
A demi-material being sent from the future in order to get Rekka together with a girl.

R



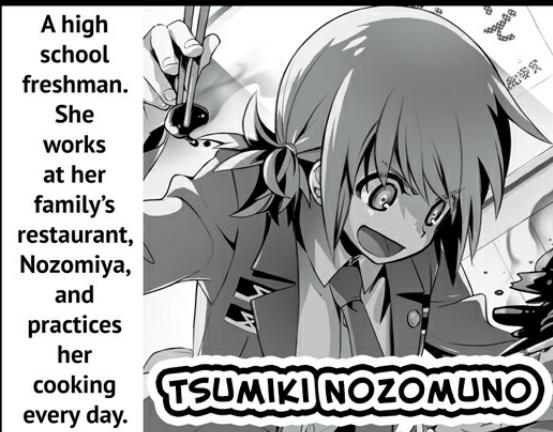
HARISSA HOPE

A sorcerer from another world. She lives at Rekka's place and helps out with the house-



[TETRA METRA RETRA]

Daughter of the mole people. After moving her people to the artificial world, she started a part-time job at Nozomiya.



TSUMIKI NOZOMUNO

A high school freshman. She works at her family's restaurant, Nozomiya, and practices her cooking every day.

V
B
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H
A
R
I
V
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S

A second-year high schooler. A relative of Rekka's who carries the Banjo bloodline.

HIBIKI BANJO

Leviathan, the Strongest Beast. After losing most of her power, she's now living in human society.

LEA

ROSALIND C. BATHORY

A high school freshman. Also a centuries-old vampire. She has strong opinions about maids.

CHELSEA MARGARET

A research scientist. Sent to Earth with Fam and Rain to keep an eye on them.

SHIRLEY MADAGASCARWEL BLOOD

A former homunculus. Now a normal girl working as a maid for Rosalind.

SUZURAN

RAIN WATERCHILD

A second-year middle schooler. Princess of the merfolk who's come to Earth to broaden her horizons.

A first-year middle schooler. Also a gremlin and a former space pirate. She's come to Earth to learn about education systems.

FAM

S
E
T
H

A second-year high schooler. The student council president. Her family runs a shrine, and she uses her powers to fight evil spirits.



A second-year high schooler. President of the light literature club and an aspiring author.

C
A
H
A
C

ELLICIA OTTO

A psychic. Part of the newly reformed organization working to protect psychics.

A greater wind spirit. Working with her little sister to help promote the alliance between spirits and sorcerers.



A former hero and Demon King of another world. She left her domain to a regent and is currently staying at Rosalind's mansion.

U
O
B
A



A mysterious assassin. She suddenly appeared before Rekka and is trying to kill him with all kinds of techniques and weapons.



A nekomata. Actually the kitten Rekka and Satsuki used to take care of as kids who's taken the form of a yokai. Currently worried about the other nekomatas.

AI

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R's Special Mission: Preface

“It’s sooo hot...”

The stifling heat had melted Rekka into a puddle of goo.

“You okay there, Rekka? Has your brain melted, too?”

“Yeah... it might have. R, bring me some barley tea...”

Rekka called out for me lazily. R—that was my identifier.

“I am incapable of making physical contact with anything other than you.”

“So useless...”

“How rude.”

Two years have passed since my creation. My outer appearance is approximately that of a ten-year-old girl. Despite my pretty and compact body, I’m an extremely capable individual. Granted, I rarely have the opportunity to demonstrate that to Rekka.

“You know, you could just ask Harissa. She’s in the kitchen anyway.”

“Can’t be bothered to yell...”

He was seriously the spitting image of a hopeless cause.

“Transmission received.”

Just as I was about to tell off the bump on a log named Rekka, a semi-transparent display screen appeared before my eyes. Rekka, of course, didn’t notice a thing. It was only visible to me.

Oh? It was a transmission from the future. Who could it be? Hmm... It seemed to be from one of my superiors.

“Dispatching special mission to Singularity Branch Point Observer R.”

I silently read the message from the future that was displayed on the screen.

“What kind of mission is it?”

I sent a response back to the future. The text I wanted to send was displayed on the screen just by thinking it, so it was a much more convenient method of communication than the computers and phones of this era. It removed the need for typing on a keyboard, so Rekka wouldn't suspect anything, either.

"Your previously submitted Heroine Report was found to be informationally insufficient."

"With all due respect, this unit is incapable of venturing more than five meters away from the observation target. There is a limit to what intelligence can be gathered, so please wait for further behavioral reports for additional information."

"Request denied. Headquarters seeks more precise information in a timely manner."

"Please explain."

Even if they asked for more precise information, I couldn't give them any more than I was already reporting.

"In three seconds' time, a Mind-Melding Device will be forwarded to you."

Exactly three seconds later, a palm-sized reader with a red jewel embedded into it arrived.

"This is... a Scarlet Doppel Stone. I'd heard the ore for it was mined, but were you successful in refining it?"

This Scarlet Doppel Stone was the same as the Margaret family treasure, and it had the ability to store special powers. The raw ore to make it was exceedingly rare, but could occasionally be found in space. A small amount had been excavated in the future I came from, but it needed extremely precise refinement to be able to replicate psychic powers properly. Many experts had deemed it a hopeless cause.

"Documents on the refinement process of Scarlet Doppel Stones were obtained through negotiations with the Margaret clan. The refinement process has not been perfected. Consider this a low-quality prototype of the Scarlet Doppel Stone."

“Huh.”

“...”

Oops, I accidentally responded like my usual self. I could feel the cold silence coming from the other side of the screen. It seemed moods could transcend time and space.

“Ahem. So, what kind of psychic power does it hold?”

I could make a pretty good guess based on the name of the device, though.

“Telepathy.”

Figures. Just as I expected.

“However, as previously mentioned, the Scarlet Doppel Stone used in this Mind-Melding Device is still a prototype. Thus, the telepathic ability stored in it is extremely limited. It is only capable of reading the thoughts of each target once.”

“Understood.”

That certainly felt like a knockoff compared to the psychic powers of Yang Danshey, the leader of the organization Rekka fought against. Granted, in his case, he was born with telepathy and had sharpened his skills with it through extensive training.

“Observer R. Your five-meter movement restriction around Rekka Namidare will now be removed.”

“...”

“You will take the Mind-Melding Device to each heroine and produce a more detailed report. This is the special mission assigned to you.”

“And the time limit?”

“August 31st.”

Hmm, so a little under three weeks. That would be the end of summer vacation. It seemed reasonable considering the number of heroines Rekka had been involved with at this point, but it was surprisingly lax for an order from the higher-ups.

“Understood.”

“Good luck.”

With that, the display screen abruptly closed.

Well... A mission, huh?

“Aaah... I can’t take it anymore. Harissa! Can I turn on the air conditioner?”

“Sure!”

Just as I finished my transmission with the future, Rekka gave in to the heat and picked up the remote for the air conditioner. As soon as Harissa called back to him from the kitchen giving him permission, he switched it on. Cool air came flowing out of the unit.

While it was a pathetic sight to see, he’d done his best to withstand the 31-degree room just for Harissa, who didn’t like the air conditioner. So I guess he wasn’t *completely* without merit.

Anyway, Rekka probably wouldn’t leave the house for a while now that he’d turned on the air conditioner. This was my chance to make a move. I casually distanced myself from Rekka and went through the ceiling. While we normally couldn’t be separated by more than five meters, that didn’t mean we were always in the same room. We often ended up in different rooms or even on different floors. He probably wouldn’t notice if I wandered off like this.

Now, shall we get going? To peep on all the unladylike heroines... I mean, to complete my important mission.

R's Special Mission 1

I found myself in the swimsuit section of the department store. No, not for my own pleasure... It was just that there happened to be several heroines gathered here. Despite the fact that I never really have a chance to demonstrate it in front of Rekka, I'm incredibly capable. Tracking down the heroines was a piece of cake.

But who cares about my functional abilities? What was more important right now? Swimsuits, of course.

For the record, the six heroines present were Iris, Tsumiki, Lea, Hibiki, Chelsea, and Corona. Quite the crowd, right? On top of that, they'd each made their way here individually, rather than as a group. Coincidences sure are amazing.

Just kidding. There's no such thing as coincidence. They were all going to the pool with Rekka this weekend. Originally, they were supposed to go to an amusement park, but there'd been a change of plans yesterday thanks to the heat wave.

The heroines had probably all gathered here to buy new swimsuits to show off in front of Rekka. Although, Lea and Corona didn't own any to begin with, so it was more accurate to say that they were buying their first swimsuits. Tsumiki had come along to help them. Now... let's see what the three of them are up to first.

"Hmm. So humans swim in these undergarments?"

"Um... yeah, basically."

Tsumiki gave something of an awkward reply as Lea stared at a skimpy piece of material. Having the minimal coverage of swimsuits pointed out so bluntly was probably embarrassing for a girl her age. Standing next to Lea, Corona held up a similar bikini as she looked at it.

"Come to think of it, Pastel would wrap a cloth around her chest and waist on

hot days to bathe in the water.”

“Huh... So that’s what they do in worlds without swimsuits.”

“Everyone in the demon world just goes naked, but when I tried to do that, she beat me up.”

“Yeah... Please don’t do that at the pool, okay?”

I, for one, would personally welcome the sight, but I guess that was too much to ask for. What a shame. At any rate, it seemed like Tsumiki was playing advisor to the two heroines who knew nothing about swimsuits. It was nice to see them bonding like that.

“W-Well, anyway, if you find a swimsuit that catches your eye, you can try it on. There’s a fitting room over there,” Tsumiki said, showing the other two girls to the fitting room.

“Then I guess I’ll try this on first.”

“I’ll do the same.”

Lea and Corona nodded and went into changing stalls. Corona forgot to close the curtain behind her, so Tsumiki hurried to pull it shut for her.

“Hmm... I don’t know how to put this on,” said Corona from the other side of the curtain.

“I’ll help!”

Tsumiki followed in behind her and let out a strange groan. Just what did she see in there?

To clarify, I was currently waiting outside the fitting room for them to finish changing. I could have peeped inside easily, but I chose to wait instead. Since we were dealing with the two heroines with the best figures, who wouldn’t want to savor the moment of the reveal?

Well, I doubt Rekka would agree with me, but anyway...

After Tsumiki helped Corona change into her swimsuit, Lea needed help, too. There was a second groan as she entered the next changing stall. I was sorely tempted to poke my head through the curtain this time. The fact that I could

only be seen and touched by Rekka would come in particularly handy right now. But even so, I waited.

Eventually, Tsumiki stumbled out of the fitting room, exhausted from helping the two of them. And at last, the curtains finally opened.

“Ooh...”

My mouth fell open. It was a sight beyond words.

“Hmm. This is kind of comfortable,” said Lea.

“Tsumiki, are you sure my outfit isn’t strange?” asked Corona.

Both of them were wearing simple bikinis. But as they say, simple is best—and simplicity was undoubtedly the best way to emphasize the impact here.

“...”

As I was worshiping the double sight for sore eyes before me, Tsumiki had a rather conflicted expression on her face. She’d heard Corona’s question, but hadn’t answered her yet. I had to wonder what she was thinking...

Oh, this was a good chance. I took out the Mind-Melding Device delivered to me from the future.

“Take this!”

With an unnecessary shout, I pointed the Mind-Melding Device at Tsumiki and activated it. The Scarlet Doppel Stone embedded in the reader started to glow, causing Tsumiki’s thoughts to flow into me.

I already knew it, but the two of them really do have great figures... The bikinis really suit them.

Well, it seemed like the device was functioning properly. And I completely agreed with her thoughts.

They’d totally catch his eye...

Tsumiki pursed her lips for a moment. She was probably thinking of Rekka.

B-But it’s not like whatever goes on between him and them has anything to do with me!

I staggered in mid-air. Jeez, she was playing hard to get even with herself.

But, like... He may be an idiot sometimes, but he's not a pervert... He wouldn't choose someone for their appearance, Tsumiki muttered in her heart.

I would often catch Rekka's eyes wandering towards the heroines' chests, so in a way, her fears weren't completely unfounded—but it was true that, in the end, when it came to choosing someone, he wouldn't pick based on appearances.

“...Yup! The two of you look perfect.”

After much careful consideration, Tsumiki gave Corona and Lea her honest opinion. Though what she said was partially because she had faith in Rekka, it was mostly because she wanted to be honest with her friends. She was too much of the helper-type to be plotting anything, after all.

I then took the opportunity to use the Mind-Melding Device on Lea and Corona, too.

Will Rekka compliment me?

What will the young man think?

But they were thinking the same thing. Both of them were wondering what Rekka's reaction would be to their swimsuits.

That told me what I needed to know about the three of them, so it was time to move on. Next up were Hibiki and Chelsea. The swimsuit section of the store was huge, so they hadn't even noticed Tsumiki and the others yet. It was a coincidence they were all here, after all. Iris wasn't even that far away.

“Look, Hibiki. What about this one?”

“Th-That...? Isn't it a little flashy for me?”

Hmm... It seemed like Chelsea was the one helping Hibiki pick out a swimsuit in this group.

“You have a great figure, so you need to go on the offensive more!”

“O-Offensive? What do you mean? I just grew out of my old bathing suit, so I wanted to get a new one...”

“Your chest got bigger, right?”

My, my...

“Don’t say it so loudly!”

Hibiki moved to cover Chelsea’s mouth in a panic, but I heard everything clearly. So, Hibiki’s breasts were growing... This was something to look forward to. The swimsuit Chelsea had picked out for her had a nice design, too.

“Anyway, this isn’t my style! I’m going to pick something else.”

No, don’t give up!

“Aww, but it suits you! Just try it on.”

Chelsea seemed to agree with me. She snatched the swimsuit away from Hibiki, who was trying to put it back on the rack. I was rather seriously rooting for Chelsea. Come on, girl!

Come to think of it, Tsumiki was rather conflicted in a similar situation, but what was Chelsea thinking right now? This was a good time to check. There was no need for me to hold back, after all. I activated the Mind-Melding Device with another shout.

Hmm... There are a lot of girls around Rekka, so Hibiki needs to try a little harder. Not to mention that some of them can be pretty aggressive, like Iris.

Chelsea watched as Hibiki took the swimsuit back and returned it to its hanger. Chelsea then put her hand on her hip and sighed.

She’s a nice girl, but she’d have a better chance if she showed off her own charms more.

Hmm... She sounded more like an older sister helping out a little sister who was having boy troubles. Chelsea picked up another cute swimsuit, slightly less sexy than the one before.

“Here. Wouldn’t Rekka like something like this?”

“...”

Reacting to hearing Rekka’s name, Hibiki took the swimsuit from her. As she was carefully examining it, Chelsea picked up another swimsuit. It was the

strapless type, held up only by elastic and a hook in the back. It was the kind of suit where there was always the fear of something slipping... How exciting. I felt it was a wonderful choice. But then...

This is definitely too risky... But what would Rekka think? Would this be a knockout?

I could hear her thoughts coming through loud and clear. That must be it. Chelsea was doing for Hibiki what Tsumiki had done for Lea. They'd saved each other in their respective stories, and were now trying to return that favor by helping them out, even though they were still interested in Rekka themselves. I had suspected that Chelsea might pull away from Rekka, but it seemed that was a needless worry now. I wished her the best. I also wished she would wear that strapless swimsuit.

I was silently cheering Chelsea on when their paths finally crossed.

“Oh.”

Iris, Hibiki, and Chelsea all looked at each other in surprise. It seemed like Iris had wandered over while the other two were still considering their swimsuit options. It would have been more interesting if Tsumiki and the other heroines were there too, but they had already made their choices, checked out, and moved on to another section of the department store. Well, I guess this would be interesting enough.

Each heroine silently glanced at the swimsuits the others were holding. I would have loved to read the thoughts of all three of them at once, but the Mind-Melding Device could only handle one person at a time. So I started with Chelsea, since I was already reading her thoughts.

Iris sure is holding a lot of swimsuits. They all look so expensive... and it's hard to believe she's younger than me with that figure. Are hers bigger than mine?

It was true. Iris's did seem larger than Chelsea's by a slim margin.

...Guess I should go with this swimsuit after all.

Oho? Her rivalry with Iris had given her that last little push of incentive to buy that dangerous swimsuit. Bravo! Next was Hibiki.

That Iris sure grabbed some amazing swimsuits. They're all so cute... and much more daring than what I saw on Berano...

Hibiki compared the swimsuit in her hand with the ones Iris was holding over and over.

I need to try my best, too. Let's splurge a bit this time.

She'd found the resolve to put up a fight. It seemed Iris's arrival had done them both some good. Now, what was Iris herself thinking?

Why are Hibiki and Chelsea here?! Just when I was thinking about buying a new swimsuit to charm Rekka! Now my plan is ruined! How do you even wear that swimsuit Chelsea's holding? Ah! And Hibiki's swimsuit is so cute! I want that one, too... Wait! No, no! I can't pick the same one she did! I have to show Rekka the best of myself! I have to try on more before deciding!

Wow, how delicious. No matter whether she was with him or not, Iris's head was full of thoughts of Rekka.

“Ah... So, you came shopping, too, Iris?”

“Th-That's right. You guys did, too? What a coincidence...”

“This place has the biggest selection around, after all.”

They were now belatedly greeting each other. Not one of them gave of a hint of what they were thinking not three seconds ago. Well done. As expected of romantic rivals.

Well, that was enough for one day. I put the swimsuit section behind me and left the department store. I knew where the other heroines were, but thought it best to save them for another time. If I was away from Rekka for long enough, he'd realize I was gone. Plus, I was a little worried about leaving him alone for too long. Who knew what trouble he could get up to?

“It'd be quite troublesome if he got caught up in something weird while I wasn't around.”

And so I went home for the day. I had all of summer vacation to finish this special mission, so I could take my time. Oh, and I would have to pretend to be seeing the heroines' swimsuits for the first time while we were at the pool so

that Rekka wouldn't suspect anything. But I had only actually seen Lea and Corona wear theirs, so it shouldn't be too hard. I wonder which swimsuit Hibiki and Iris chose in the end... Come to think of it, I haven't seen over half the heroines in swimsuits yet. I was really looking forward to going to the pool.

Episode 1: River Ride of the Mermaid Princess

With half of summer vacation already gone, we made the decision to venture out to an amusement park near where Hibiki lived. Our goal was to enjoy the pool together. Originally, we'd planned on going to the main park and riding all the rides, but with how stifling hot the past few days had been, we all agreed at the last minute that the pool in the water park section would be much more in our interest.

It was past lunchtime now, so the sun was already high overhead, glaring down at us mercilessly. I really wished it would take a break.

“So, this is what a water park is like...”

Rain covered her mouth with her hand politely as she stared agape at the huge dome building.

“Yeah, they close the dome roof on rainy days, but it’s sunny today, so they’ve got it opened.”

“I can’t believe they fill this entire building with water.”

“No, the water doesn’t go up to the roof... Well, you’ll see for yourself soon.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” Rain replied with a contented grin.

If she was that happy about coming, then it was worth bringing her here.

“Rain and Fam finished two days’ worth of summer homework yesterday just for this.”

“Ugh... My head hurts...”

Shirley giggled as she watched Fam clutch her head and groan. Garnet stood next to her, carrying her belongings.

Summer homework, huh? I still had to do mine, too. I’d gotten caught between an organization of psychics and a family of mages, plus a world of spirits and a world of demons, right at the start of vacation. And after that, I went to Mio’s concert with Tsumiki and accompanied Harissa back to her

hometown. I'd barely had any time for homework. I figured I'd just get Satsuki to help me out with it later like I did every year.

But even though I was behind on my homework, I'd managed to save a few stories over the summer, so at least some good had come from it. Like Chelsea and Hibiki being able to chat happily.

"Come to think of it, I've never been somewhere like this before. What about you, Hibiki?"

"This is actually my first time coming to a pool outside of school."

"Huh... I bet you always have all the boys staring at you with a set like yours."

"Wah! S-Stop, don't poke them! Anyway, Chelsea, if we're comparing chests, then yours is..."

They... sure seemed to be having fun. It was kind of embarrassing watching them.

I hadn't seen Chelsea for a while after her story was resolved, but she'd just moved to Hibiki's neighborhood recently. She was my point of contact with the Margaret family. I would deliver information about Aburaamu to her, and she would pass it on to them—that was the role assigned to her by Nartessia, the head of her family. In order to fulfill that role, she'd relocated her treasure hunting enterprise to Japan. And thanks to that, we were now able to invite her out like this whenever she was free.

"Whew, I'm really looking forward to Chelsea's swimsuit..."

"You never change, do you?"

I sighed at R, who was doing somersaults in the air. For some reason, the girl from the future was already changed into a swimsuit. How enthusiastic.

"But Rekka, Chelsea wasn't with us when we went to Berano. She still hasn't shown off her swimsuit yet, unlike the other heroines."

Hmm... It was true that we hadn't been able to invite Chelsea to the beaches on Rain's home planet. She was overseas at the time.

"You must be curious, too, no? Wondering how much those breasts being jostled around by Hibiki right now could be enhanced by a swimsuit..."

“I-I’m not curious!”

No, really, I wasn’t. I wasn’t staring at those bouncing lumps under her tank top. Not at all.

“Speaking of swimsuits we haven’t seen yet, those two will also be an interesting sample.”

With a wicked grin, R pointed her finger in a different direction.

“Ooh...”

“Aah...”

Lea and Corona were standing there with their arms linked, both of them staring up at the dome in awe. My conversation with R led my eyes downwards towards their chests. No, really. There was no other meaning behind it. It’s just that they jiggled every time the girls nodded excitedly, attracting my gaze unwillingly...

“Oh, Rekka...”

Suddenly, I heard several girls talking behind me. It was Satsuki, Iris, and Tsumiki, all three of which were glaring my way.

“And what might you be so fascinated by?” Satsuki asked.

“Rekka! I’ll have you know that mine won’t lose to those two!” Iris proclaimed.

“...You’re the worst,” Tsumiki sneered.

I felt extremely attacked right now. Except by Iris, really. But that was barely anything compared to the gloom hanging over the group standing next to us...

“If only mine were a little bigger...”

“At least yours show promise, Harissa. Mine are...”

“I hate this cutting-board figure...”

Harissa, Mio, and Tetra were like a fountain of negativity.

“Apologize, you! Tell Mio you’re sorry right now!” Tsumiki barked.

“Huh? O-Oh, sorry.”

I apologized on reflex, but... it seemed to make the mood even darker. Mio was our age, but she was also the top idol MIO. She had to shuffle her busy schedule around in order to be able to come today. I didn't want to make her feel bad like this...

"Hmph! Breasts are just sacks of fat, anyway."

"Mistress, use this to wipe your tears."

"I'm not crying!"

Rosalind huffed and crossed her arms as her maid, Suzuran, tried to console her for some reason. The situation was getting rather complicated, and we hadn't even made it to the pool yet...

"Rekka...!"

"Uwah!"

And in the middle of things, someone hugged me from behind. Something soft was pressing up against my back...

"T-Tokiwa! Please don't jump on me like that!"

"It's so hot here... Let's go in..."

Tokiwa whined, panting in my ear rather deliberately. Her weak constitution made her more susceptible to the heat, so it was probably tough for her to be outside in this weather.

"Listen to Midori, problem child."

The One-Eyed Student Council President—President Momone, who wore an eyepatch over her right eye—appeared next to Tokiwa and placed a straw sun hat on top of her head. It must have fallen off when she jumped me.

"Having twenty-odd people loitering at the entrance will cause trouble for the other visitors. If we're all here, let's go inside."

"Yeah, you're right."

I obediently followed her suggestion and directed everyone to start moving towards the entrance.



Inside the huge dome was a wide variety of water play areas. There was a river ride, a wave pool, a shallow pool for children with a waterslide, and a diving pool. The tallest diving board was nearly as high as our school building... Who would jump from that?

“It’s not that crowded.”

“Yeah, but it’s not as spacious as the beaches on Berano, though.”

At least we wouldn’t all be squished into a small public pool with barely any room to swim. We planned on meeting outside the changing area by the pool entrance after everyone got into their swimsuits, but we’d be splitting up into groups after that.

“The only problem would be... Lea and Corona, perhaps? They probably don’t know anything about places like this.”

On the one hand was the Strongest Beast, who’d been sealed away for millennia, and on the other hand was the Demon King, who had been sealed away in another world. There was no way either of them knew how to play in a pool. There were also aliens and mole people and vampires in our midst, but fortunately, we also had plenty of sensible people in the group who could look after them as long as we split up tactfully.

“Brother Rekka!”

As I was wondering how all this was going to go, an energetic girl came bounding out from the changing rooms. It was Fam.

“Huh? That headband...”

“Oh, this? I normally hide my horn with my bangs, but that’s a lot more difficult to do with wet hair, so Shirley told me to wear this for today,” she explained, tugging on the headband she used to wear from her days as a space pirate. As a gremlin, she had a horn that she needed to hide around others.

“Fam, don’t run around the pool.”

Shirley and Rain appeared next after the lively girl, followed by Garnet, who was carrying a waterproof purse.

“Aww, why not?”

"It's dangerous to run around, both for you and the people around you. If you can't understand that much, then you'll always be a child."

"Hmph..."

Unable to talk back to Shirley, Fam puffed her cheeks up and sulked.

"I was just in a hurry to show Brother Rekka my swimsuit!" Fam protested indignantly, then turned away.

For the record, both Fam and Rain were wearing one-piece swimsuits. They'd bought the same one in different colors to match each other. Fam's was light green while Rain's was pastel pink, complementing their respective hair colors.

"Rekka, what do you think?" Rain asked.

She was standing next to Fam, fidgeting with her hands behind her back as she looked up at me. She was obviously asking for an opinion on their swimsuits.

"Oh, you both look very nice," I answered honestly.

Rain and Fam both smiled joyfully.

"Oh, my, I want to hear Rekka's opinion of mine, as well. How is it?"

Shirley inserted herself into our conversation with a smooth pose. She didn't seem too interested in swimming, as she was still wearing her glasses. Her pareo-style swimsuit was neither too fancy nor too simple, and it emphasized her charms tastefully.

"I think it's really nice. It's new, isn't it?"

"We all bought ours through an intergalactic delivery service. They have water-repellent technology unavailable here on Earth... Wait, how did you know it was new?"

"Um, the tag's still on your skirt."

"Huh?"



Shirley looked down in a fluster. When she spotted the tag, she blushed and called Garnet over to cut it off. Her three companions didn't have tags on their swimsuits, so it seemed Shirley was the only one who'd forgotten... Either that, or she cut the tags off for the other three and missed her own. Either way, Shirley was kind of cute when she was blushing furiously as Garnet took care of the tag for her.

"Come to think of it, we met Rain and the others on the ocean planet of Berano, but we never saw them wearing swimsuits. Rain and Fam went for a cute look appropriate for their age. Shirley normally doesn't stand out, but looking at her now, you can really tell she has a slender and beautiful figure. Garnet has a functional and conservative style typical of an android..."

For some reason, R had started to give live commentary on everyone's swimsuits, so I decided to ignore her. Just in time, too. I spotted some of the other girls coming out of the changing rooms.

"Hey, Satsuki! Over here!"

"..."

Huh? My childhood friend seemed to be in a bad mood. Her swimsuit was the same white two-piece bikini I saw her in at the beach last time. I couldn't see anything wrong, so I had no idea why she was upset...

Huh? Harissa and Tetra also looked dismayed, though not nearly as much as Satsuki. Rosalind was even chewing on her nails in frustration. Suzuran stood next to her master with her eyes closed. It seemed like everything was normal apart from their sour moods... Had something happened in the changing rooms?

"Rekka! Thanks for waiting!"

"Hm?"

That was when Iris came running over with a beaming smile that rivaled Fam's. And boy, did her chest bounce magnificently with every bounding step... It was too tempting to look at any more than that, so I turned my gaze away. But she walked right up to me so I could see her anyway, still grinning.

“Rekka, what do you think of this swimsuit?”

As always, Iris looked amazing in a bathing suit. I was about to say that when I came to my senses and stopped myself. Then, upon taking a second look at her, I noticed something.

“Is that a different swimsuit than the one you wore before on Berano?”

“Bingo!”

Iris must have been watching Earth quiz shows on TV. She made a chiming buzzer noise to confirm my guess. The swimsuit I’d seen her in the first time looked amazing on her, but this one was a knockout, too. Not to mention... the design was a little more daring this time...

“Yeah... I think it’s the perfect swimsuit for you.”

“Heehee! I’m happy to hear you think so!”

Iris seemed satisfied at the compliment. It seemed her good mood was attributable to her new swimsuit, but why were Satsuki and the others so upset? I still couldn’t figure it out.

“I forgot Iris was supposed to be a princess...” muttered Satsuki.

“Rekka just bought me new clothes the other day, so I couldn’t ask for more...” said Harissa.

“I’ve been sending most of my wages back home to the village...” mumbled Tetra.

“I can’t believe this little girl gained the upper hand over me...” said Rosalind.

The aforementioned quartet of girls had gathered to grumble together. Suzuran joined them silently, making for a rather strange lineup.

“Whoa, what happened here?” Hibiki asked as soon as she walked over and saw them.

“Um... It’s probably best to ignore them,” I said.

“Really?”

With a doubtful look on her face, Hibiki zipped up the front of her hoodie. But Chelsea snuck up behind her, yanked the zipper back down, and flung open her

hoodie all in one go.

“Hey!”

“There’s no point if you hide it, you know? Especially with a figure as great as yours.”

“Ch-Chelsea!”

Hibiki’s hoodie was caught on her arms, so she struggled to get it zipped back up. As Chelsea held it in place like that, she shot me a wink over Hibiki’s shoulder.

“What do you think, Rekka? Of Hibiki’s swimsuit figure, I mean.”

“Well, I... Oh, did you get a new swimsuit, too, Hibiki?”

“H-Huh?” Hibiki’s jaw dropped at my observation.

“Hmph...” Iris’s proud expression suddenly disappeared.

The design of Hibiki’s swimsuit was definitely different from the one she’d worn on Berano. Decorative flowers were stitched on the right side of her chest, making it seem like a more fashion-oriented style of suit than before.

“Um, the swimsuit I wore on Berano was rather old and didn’t fit well anymore, so I got a new one when I went out shopping with Chelsea so she could get a swimsuit,” Hibiki stammered.

“The chest was too tight, right?”

“Chelsea! Why would you say that out loud?!”

“Hahaha!” Chelsea laughed happily as she teased a blushing Hibiki.

In comparison, the design of Chelsea’s swimsuit was a little more simple, but it was strapless. It was all probably being held together in the back... Wouldn’t it come off while she was swimming? Since Chelsea had a great figure, it made me feel all the more anxious... Or excited.

“Mine don’t lose to that, either!” Iris interrupted just as I was starting to get distracted.

“Wow, those three are quite the sight when they’re lined up... Perhaps I should say six rather than three.”

R crossed her arms and nodded in deep appreciation of the two lumps of delight attached to every female. True, a federation formed from these six would be like a mountain range... Wait, the girl from the future was leading me astray again. I shook my head to purge those thoughts from my head, when—once again—two huge, pillowy marshmallows pressed up against my back.

“T-T-Tokiwa! Please don’t hug me when you’re in a swimsuit!”

“So crowded... tired...”

Tokiwa, clad in a bikini and a sarong, muttered listlessly into my ear as she leaned on my back, pressing herself into me even more. The crowds of people seemed to have tired her out. The park wasn’t particularly busy today, but it was a lot to handle for her when her energy reserves were so low in the first place. But no rest for the weary. Everyone’s gazes on me were starting to feel more and more murderous, so I carefully peeled Tokiwa off of me and handed her to President Momone, who was wearing a sporty swimsuit with a line across her chest.

“Hey, Midori—pull yourself together.”

“Mm...”

“...!”

Tokiwa’s wriggling in President Momone’s arms pressed their chests together like two pieces of squishy mochi. I caught myself before I started staring and averted my eyes. After that, President Momone turned to everyone else.

“Wow, I’m pretty popular myself, but I’ve never hung out with this many people at once.”

“Yeah... I invited everyone I knew, and it kinda snowballed,” I said.

“The ratio of males to females is strange, too. It’s not a group date, so there’s no need for exact numbers, but I’d at least put a little more thought into that kind of thing if it were me.”

President Momone shook her head in exasperation. But she wasn’t wrong... I couldn’t deny that I was the only boy present.

“Could it be that the problem child has no male friends?”

“Huh?! N-No, it’s not that!”

Actually, now that I thought about it, I’d been dragged this way and that by these girls since the school year started, so I’d barely spoken to any of the guys in my class... W-Wait...

“Momone... you just touched on the one taboo for the main character in a harem.” R gulped with a solemn nod.

Really, this was serious.

“Well, whatever. Midori and Momone complement each other nicely. One is the soft indoor type, while the other is the well-toned sporty type. Though Midori’s chest easily wins over Momone’s, it’s hard to say who looks better in a swimsuit.”

Readily dismissing my dire situation, R resumed her commentary on the swimsuits. I could only sigh at her quick change of attitude, but it was also infuriating that her commentary was so pointlessly on point.

“Rekka...”

“Hm?”

A voice called out to me from below, so I looked down. Mio stared back up at me through her sun visor. Her swimsuit was a beautiful balance of purity and cuteness... and looked rather expensive, to put it bluntly. The embroidery was extremely detailed.

“Ah... This is something I wore for work once. They let me keep it afterward.”

“It’s really cute.”

“C-Cute?!”

“Yeah, but wouldn’t you be more comfortable without that hat?”

“This is to disguise myself...”

“Oh...”

Mio was a pop star, after all. Even though she wasn’t in her wig and outfit, she still had to be careful. I could understand that.

“Hey, you! Don’t you dare make Mio cry again!”

“I’m not.”

Though she was late to the scene, the first words out of Tsumiki’s mouth were an accusation hurled at me. Which I denied indifferently. She had mistaken the sight of Mio pulling her sun visor down over her eyes as a sign of me picking on her.

“You sure took your time changing, Tsumiki.”

For the record, Tsumiki’s swimsuit was the same orange one as before.

“I had to help Lea and Corona change. It was a lot more trouble than I expected.”

“I see.”

It was the first time they’d ever worn bathing suits, after all. But if Tsumiki was here now, it had to mean they weren’t far behind.

“Time for the last boss,” R muttered in an exaggeratedly dramatic voice.

But the last boss, huh? Considering their species, it seemed appropriate enough. And it wasn’t long after that that the last boss—as R described them—appeared.

“Eep...” someone squeaked. It was probably an indication of surprise.

“Hmm? What’s wrong?”

“Is something wrong?”

Lea and Corona both looked down at themselves. They were wearing red and purple bikinis respectively, both of which were simple and without any extraneous decorations... I’d thought something similar when I saw Iris earlier, but swimsuits really could become lethal weapons depending on who was wearing them.

“Just what I expected from the top two heroines, I’d say. Those would probably float in the water.”

“Pfft!”

The image of Lea in the water flashed through my mind, and I had to hold back my laughter. Whew, that was close...

“Rekka? What’s wrong?”

“Young man, is there something weird about how I look?”

“Oof!”

The aura they had just by standing next to each other was overwhelming. Really and truly like a final boss...

“Don’t start causing trouble outside of school too, problem child,” President Momone leaned in and warned me.



As for what she meant...

"Hey, what's with that unbelievable group over there...?"

"They've got everything... Busty and flat, little girls and older ladies..."

"They have nothing in common. What are they gathering for?"

"What's with the guy?"

"Don't tell me that guy is... But with that many girls, he has to be..."

"An escort?"

"No way, not at that age."

"A harem god, then?"

"I want in on that religion."

Yeah, wow, we were really gathering a lot of attention.

"O-Okay, everyone's here now, so let's get a move on."

I urged everyone to change locations as I broke out in a nervous sweat.



Several of us had brought along water-resistant phones, so we agreed to contact each other if anything came up before splitting into groups. No matter how large the water park was, it wasn't like 20 some odd people could all hang out together. If we all got in the river ride at the same time, we'd stop the flow of water completely. So since we couldn't do anything like that, we decided to split into groups to go do whatever we wanted. But for some reason, I was given two conditions: that I could never be alone *and* that I couldn't go along with the same group twice in a row.

Of course, it was my intention to play with everyone as much as possible since we all came together, but I didn't know why there had to be rules about it... I couldn't understand what the girls were thinking. Oh, well.

"So, Rekka, who do you want to go with first?" R asked me.

"Let's see..."

I leaned against a fence at the corner of one pool and considered my options

carefully. Since everyone was splitting up anyway, they could have just assigned me to one of the groups from the start. I'd suggested it, but was immediately shot down because "the whole day would be wasted bickering about it." Whatever that meant.

So there I was, standing alone by the corner of the pool. The girls had told me to wait here for five minutes after they left. However, as stipulated, I wasn't allowed to be alone. I was strictly ordered to go find one of the groups as soon as I left.

"Well, considering how many of us there are, surely it can't be that hard to bump into some of them."

Even split into smaller groups, there were enough of us that there would probably be someone at nearly every attraction at any given time. Basically, I could go wherever I wanted and I would probably find someone. So my first destination? The wave pool.

One end of the pool was shallow while the other end was deep. There were fences lined along the very back, behind which were the wave machines pumping the water at a fixed rhythm. They called them waves, but they were more like swells. They were only about 20 centimeters in height. It was basically just a specialized pool for people to get the experience of bobbing up and down in open water.

"Hey! Brother Rekka!"

"Rekka!"

"Oh, Rekka!"

Playing right in the middle of the waves was Fam. In front of her, Rain and Tetra were enjoying the knee-deep water. The three of them all waved my way when they saw me. Shirley and Garnet were nearby too, apparently supervising the three younger girls.

"Oh my, did you come to us first?" Shirley asked.

"Hm? Yeah, I guess I did."

"I'm glad to hear that. Everyone else will be so vexed."

“Huh...?”

Puzzled by her comment, I tilted my head to the side. But Shirley just giggled.

“Aren’t you going to get in, Shirley?” I asked.

“It’s just nice to be out in the sun once in a while. I’ve been doing so much research these days.”

Shirley and the others lived in the house across the street from me. Apparently, she’d modified the basement into her own laboratory. She locked herself in there whenever Rain and Fam were out and about.

“Make sure you’re looking after yourself, okay?”

“There’s no such thing as a healthy scientist.” Shirley scoffed and looked up at the sunlight streaming in through the open roof of the dome. “But... it’s nice being able to hang out with you and my friends like this.”

“Yeah?”

I was glad she was having fun, but... Huh?

“Why did you single me out from your friends just now...?”

Before she could answer, Fam came over waving her arms around.

“Hey, Brother Rekka! Don’t just stand there! Let’s go to the deep end already!”

“All right, all right.”

As soon as I agreed, Fam began tugging on my arm as she dragged me away. She turned to ask Rain and Tetra, too.

“Hey, do you guys wanna come, too?”

“Yes!”

Tetra answered immediately, but...

“Huh? Rain? Aren’t you coming?”

“Um...” Rain’s eyes darted about as she hesitated to answer. “I-I’m sorry. I’ll pass.”

“Really?”

Well, if that's what she wanted. No one was going to force her to come.

"All right, let's go."

"Yeah!"

Tetra, Fam, and I linked hands as we waded towards the deep end of the pool.



We played in the waves for quite a while. When I realized how long it had been, we returned to Rain and Shirley on shore to rest a bit before I moved on.

"Where are you going to go next?"

"Hmm... Well, wherever I feel like, I guess."

I let my feet lead the way and wandered around aimlessly for a bit, glancing at the attractions as I passed. And then...

"Rekka! Over here!"

I heard someone call my name. When I looked over, I saw Hibiki and Chelsea.

"Hey, what are you two up to?"

"I was going to have a race with Chelsea," Hibiki said and pointed to the proper swimming pool next to her.

The six-lane pool was well maintained, but rather deserted in comparison to the wave pool and river ride.

"We went to the wave pool first, but there were so many people that we couldn't swim freely," Hibiki continued with a slight grimace.

"Actually, Hibiki was embarrassed about being seen and ran over here."

"Ch-Chelsea!"

"Heh, you two sure get along."

I laughed along with Chelsea as Hibiki let out a dejected sigh.

"Anyway, Rekka, do you want race with us?" she asked.

"Hm? Yeah, sure."

I did some light stretches before lining up next to Hibiki and Chelsea at the starting blocks. I'd never done competitive swimming before, but I figured I could at least manage to dive in by mimicking what they did.

"Rekka, Rekka."

"What?" I whispered back to R.

"Please turn to the side."

"Huh?"

All I could see was Hibiki and Chelsea.

"You don't want to miss the moment the two of them dive in, do you? There's a chance something might slip out."

"Bwuh!"

True, Hibiki was in a bikini, and Chelsea was in a strapless suit. There was definitely the possibility of an accident. And thanks to what R said, I couldn't get my mind off of it. My focus was completely shot. I was practically swooning and couldn't turn away.

"Hmm... Since it's a race, should we have a prize on the line?" Chelsea suggested.

"A bet?" Hibiki asked.

"How about, like, the winner gets to pick something from that stall over there?"

"Fine by me... What do you think, Rekka?"

"Huh? Oh, s-sure." I responded in a fluster and agreed without thinking.

"All right! Then, on your marks... Get set... Go!"



Of course, I came last. Hibiki and Chelsea were both way faster than me, even though you'd think their... excess baggage... would be a handicap in terms of water resistance. But after the race, we headed to the square with shops and stalls to buy the two of them something to eat.

“Hmm, what would be good?”

“Have you had shaved ice before, Chelsea?” I asked.

“You mean Italian ice?” she replied.

“Italian ice?”

“They’re both pretty similar,” said Hibiki.

The three of us continued chatting as we inspected the various storefronts. Eventually, we came to one that seemed particularly crowded.

“What’s that over there?”

“Dunno. Judging from the smell, it’s a grilled corn stand.”

“Let’s check it out.”

“S-Sure!”

I was more than willing to go, so there was no need for Chelsea to pull me along. When she grabbed my arm like that, her chest...!

“Hmph... Hurry up, Rekka.”

“Don’t you push me from behind either, Hibiki!”

She could have just used her hands! There was no need for her to press up against me like that! Her chest, too...!

“Nothing like a bit of friendly rivalry!” R cheered.

My current situation was probably a real laugh from where she was sitting. But nevertheless, the thick crowd of people turned out to be all men, who happily stepped aside when Chelsea and her drop-dead gorgeous figure arrived on the scene. And what we saw on the other side of the crowd was...

“Lea?!”

“Hom nom... Oh, Rekka.”

Lea, who was munching on some grilled corn, turned when she heard my voice. A huge pile of corn cobs lay at her feet, which were surrounded by pale men on their knees, moaning in horror. This scene... It was my first time witnessing it in person, but I had heard of it before.

“Lea... Did you get all these people to buy food for you?”

“Y-Yes, I did. They said they’d pay, so I just...”

She seemed to have picked up on the serious tone of my voice and hesitated to answer. Which meant... she’d eaten the men hitting on her out of their wallets again.

“I told you to use your own money when there was something you wanted, didn’t I? That’s why you started your part-time job, after all.”

“But my next paycheck is still a ways off... and the money I had left, I spent buying this the other day,” Lea said, snapping the straps of her bikini.

The crowd around us stirred as her supersized chest bounced up and down. I had to stop her!

“J-Just quit it for now, okay? Come on, this way!”

“O-Okay...”

I grabbed Lea’s hand and slipped out of the crowd of people. Hibiki and Chelsea followed us.

“What? Wasn’t she going to hang out with whoever paid for her until she was satisfied?!”

“Is that supposed to be her boyfriend? They don’t suit each other at all...”

“Wait, are all those girls with him?!”

“Has that brat mastered hypnosis or something?!”

I was starting to get used to the death glares directed my way. And no! I hadn’t hypnotized anyone!

At any rate, I let go of Lea’s hand once we got far enough away from the grilled corn stand.

“Jeez! You need to be more careful. For some reason, they thought you were going to hang out with them for the whole day once you had your fill, you know?”

“Huh? I never said anything like that.”

“That’s what I figured, but...”

It was probably a crazy idea that had been started by the men who’d gathered, but it could have turned out rather badly.

“Well, she probably would have been fine anyway. I bet she still would have been hungry after emptying all of their wallets.”

Hibiki had a point. She definitely had a point, but...

“Just don’t do anything that would make me worried.”

“...All right.”

Lea threw away the last corn cob and nodded earnestly.

“Oh, I almost forgot about buying something for the two of you. Sorry.”

“If we go back there now, we’d just run into those men again. You can just get us something on the way home,” offered Hibiki.

“I’m fine with that, too,” agreed Chelsea.

After we made it a promise, the two of them went their own way, leaving me with Lea.

“Well, was there anywhere you wanted to go?” I asked.

“Hmm... that’s a tough choice.”

Just as Lea crossed her arms and began contemplating her options, I spied two familiar-looking girls on the other side of her: one with silver hair and one with purple hair.

“Found you, Rekka!”

“There you are, young man.”

Iris and Corona made their way over with smiles on their faces.

“Just in time. Iris, Corona, was there anywhere you wanted to go?”

I figured I’d take this chance to hang out with them, so we might as well do something they wanted to do.

“Let’s see... That!”

“Urk...”

I looked up and let out a small groan. She was pointing to a ridiculously high diving board...

▽

“So, do I take off from here?” asked Corona.

“No, you’re not supposed to fly,” explained Lea.

“You just jump off and aim for the pool below!” said Iris as she turned to me.
“Right? Rekka.”

“Yeah...”

I’d jumped off plenty of things before, right? Like Bahamut’s back or the roof of a tall building... I’d even fallen out of the sky with a demon. This should have been nothing compared to all that, so why was it still so scary...?

“Hey! Only one person at a time allowed on the diving board!”

Oh, one of the lifeguards was angry. Iris had pushed me the whole way up, so I’d completely missed all the posted signs with the rules. My bad.

“What?” Corona asked, unfamiliar with the common sense of this world.

“Does he want us to jump down quickly?” Lea asked, just as confused.

“I see. In that case...”

Corona didn’t hesitate to jump off the diving board.

“Wait, Corona!”

I inched closer to the edge, worried about her well-being. But my fears were unfounded. I could see her taking a deep breath as she resurfaced after her graceful dive. Her physical abilities were typical of a Demon King. Her courage, too.

“Me next.”

“Lea?!”

Lea jumped and did one somersault in the air before landing in the water too. The other guests were clapping at her dive.

“Then it’s our turn next!”

“You can go first, Iris...”

“Aw, but I want to go together!”

Iris forcefully grabbed my arm before I could stop her. Me, on the other hand... My cowardly self was flailing.

“No, no, no! Two people at once is actually dangero—”

“Wheeeee!”

My panicked shouting and Iris’s screams of delight overlapped as we fell. After a surprisingly long time in the air, we made a grand splash into the pool.



Once the lifeguard was done thoroughly lecturing us, Corona lent me her shoulder as I staggered away from the pool.

“Are you all right, Rekka?” she asked worriedly.

“Yeah... I will be,” I managed to answer.

It was just the two of us now. Iris and Lea had really gotten into diving, so they were still going at it.

“Do you want to rest somewhere?”

“Yeah... Take me to where the umbrellas are over there.”

“Leave it to me.”

Corona moved closer to me to help bear more of my weight as she shouldered me.

“...”

It was an act of goodwill on her part. I shouldn’t be having any dirty thoughts. And I must not lower my gaze at any cost...

“Rekka, now’s your chance. If you pretend to fall here, a special event will happen.”

Shut up, swimsuit-obsessed girl from the future.

I triumphed over my carnal desires and safely made it to the resting place with tables, chairs, and umbrellas. It was surprisingly crowded, so I was looking around for a place for us to sit when I spotted a familiar face.

“What’s the matter, problem child? Did you drown?”

“Something like that, President Momone.”

“I see.”

President Momone smiled in a rather unconcerned way and gestured to one of the chairs at her table. I gratefully took a seat. President Momone, Tokiwa, Rosalind, and Suzuran were already seated at the table for six, so Corona and I made a full house.

“Are you taking a break too, Tokiwa?”

“I’m looking after her. Midori has a weak constitution, after all,” President Momone answered for her.

“Mm...”

All Tokiwa could manage was a sound. She sat there, motionless and practically draped over the table.

“Oh, look, her chest is squished against the table, so—ow!”

R was running her mouth again, so I secretly flicked her on the forehead.

“What about you, Rosalind? Suzuran?”

“I don’t like flowing bodies of water,” Rosalind replied flatly.

Come to think of it, that was one of her quirks as a vampire. Just as I was thinking that, President Momone offered her own two cents...

“Hahaha! You sound just like a vampire saying stuff like that,” she laughed, assuming it was a joke.

My two upperclassmen were unaware of the superhuman and supernatural origins of some of the other girls. If only they had any idea...

“...!”



Tokiwa suddenly straightened up a little and shimmied over Rosalind... then suddenly clung to her.

“Gyah! Wh-What is it?”

“...”

Tokiwa was saying something to Rosalind, but her voice was too soft for me to hear.

“What? You mean to ask me if I am truly a vampire?”

Ah, of course. Tokiwa loved those kinds of stories.

“Bah! You’re tickling my ear! If you insist on knowing, I am a—!”

“Rosalind!”

I rushed to stop Rosalind from revealing her true nature by shooting a desperate, pleading look.

“...Human! A girl your age should know there’s no such thing as creatures of the night. Now let go of me already!”

“Oh...”

Rosalind pulled Tokiwa off of her and watched indignantly as Tokiwa dragged herself back to her seat.

“Wait, Tokiwa! Your swimsuit!”

I noticed something “wrong” with Tokiwa’s swimsuit and immediately covered my eyes with my hands.

“...?”

“Watch it, Midori. Shuffling like that pulled your swimsuit down.”

I heard President Momone exasperatedly explain the situation to her. I then waited patiently.

“You’re good now, problem child.”

“Thanks...”

Phew, that was close...

“Goodness, there’s no helping this girl,” Rosalind sighed in a tired voice.

“Mistress, would you like something to drink?” Suzuran asked her afterward.

But once more, President Momone interrupted.

“Using ‘mistress’ makes you sound like a maid.”

“...!”

Tokiwa’s eyes lit up once more at the mention of maids. Her body might be weak, but her curiosity couldn’t be beaten. After that, Corona’s identity as a Demon King was also nearly revealed too, but we continued spending some time together anyway.



Before I knew it, it was three o’clock. The amusement park itself closed at 8:00 PM, but some of our group had curfews, so we decided we’d leave at around 6:30. Considering the time it took to get changed, that meant we had to head to the changing rooms at 6:00. But that was still three hours away. There was no point in rushing, so I leisurely headed towards my next destination.

“Where are you going now?” R asked.

“I haven’t been to the water slide or the river ride yet... I guess I’ll check out the slide first.”

I chose at random, and I turned left at the forked path accordingly. The water slide was one of the more popular attractions at the water park. Depending on how crowded it was, there might be a line. It wouldn’t be the best place to hang out with any of the girls, but I figured I should try it at least once before we left. And as I was standing in front of the elevator up to the water slide...

“Oh, Rekka.”

“Mio?”

I bumped into Mio, who was waiting in line, too. She seemed to be by herself.

“Is it just you, Mio?”

“Nope. I came with Tsumiki and the others, but we got separated.”

The water slide elevator only took three people up at a time. Only once those

three had gone down the slide could the next three go up. Letting too many people go down the slide at once was dangerous, so limiting the number of riders was a safety precaution, but it had unfortunately meant that Mio had been separated from her friends.

“But I’m glad you’re here now, Rekka,” she said, smiling bashfully.

I was glad I arrived just in time to go up with her. We chatted about this and that until the elevator came back down and opened its doors with a ding.

“Next guests, please!”

“Let’s go.”

“Okay.”

We went through the door held open by an attendant and rose up to the top of the water slide. It was actually pretty high up. A little higher than the high dive from earlier, even. The slide itself had many twists and turns, and it was the longest in the prefecture according to the attendant. That wasn’t a particularly impressive distinction considering how rural our prefecture was, but it certainly seemed to be worth giving a try.

“Do you want to slide first, Mio?”

“Ah, um...”

When I asked Mio that, she fearfully peered down...

“What’s wrong?”

“I-It’s higher than I imagined...”

Then she looked up at me with puppy-like eyes.

“If it’s all right with you... could we go down together?”

“Huh? Is that allowed?”

I asked the attendant, who nodded in response.

“It’s perfectly fine for younger children and their guardians. You’re siblings, right?”

“Um... Yes.”

It was a pretty blatant lie, but I didn't want to have to leave the frightened Mio alone because the attendant changed their mind. So we prepared to go down together, with me holding on to her from behind.

"You have to hold on tighter, or we'll get separated on the way down. It would be dangerous for the person in front, so make sure your arms are nice and snug around me."

"Okay... You sure, Mio?"

"Y-Yeah," she answered in a trembling voice.

Hmm... She didn't sound so sure. Was this really okay? Flustered, I wrapped my arms around her waist and held on tight. She fit perfectly in my arms with her back pressed up against me, and her thighs had an awful lot of skin contact with mine...

"All right, I'm going to send you two down now," said the attendant.

And then we started our descent.

"...Yah!"

Mio tensed up at each turn when the centrifugal force tossed us around. She was pressing herself against me reflexively, so I had to hold on tightly to make sure I didn't let her go. But I had to make sure we had some fun, too!

"Mio! I'm gonna lean us back!"

"Huh? Huh?!"

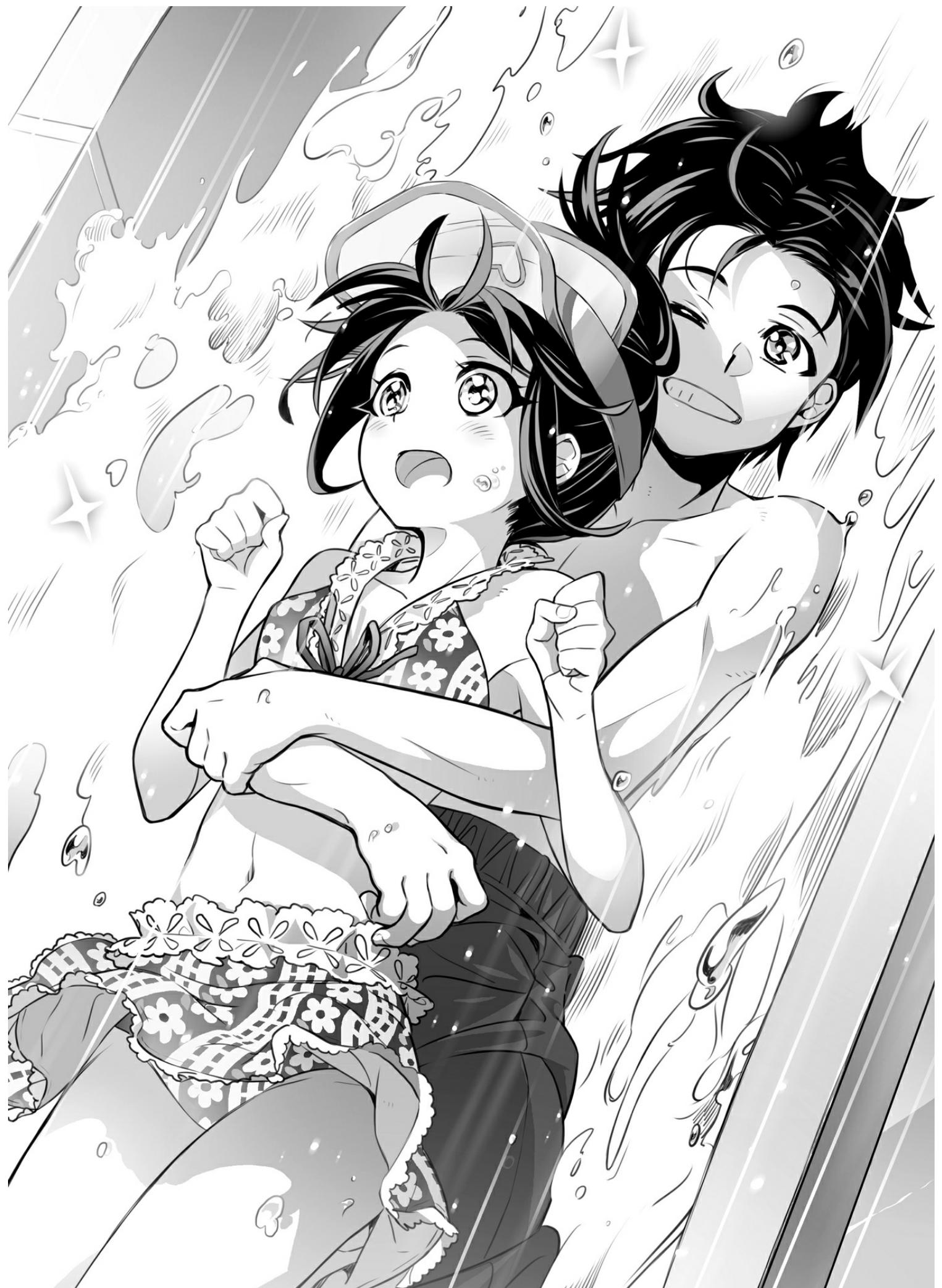
"Here we go!"

"Kyah!"

I leaned back, pulling Mio back on top of me.

"Well? What do you think of the view?"

"Wah!"



The water slide had no top to it, so the blue sky was clearly visible. And now that we were lying down instead of sitting up, there wouldn't be as much bouncing around since we didn't have as much resistance. She could look up now instead of down, too, so it should be less scary this way.

"This is amazing, Rekka! We're moving so fast!"

"Right?"

I supported Mio's body to make sure she didn't slip away from me in her excitement, and before long, the sensation of the slide against my back suddenly disappeared out from under me. We'd reached the small splash pool at the end of the slide. With all our momentum from the ride down, we went immediately underwater, but the pool was shallow enough to easily stand up in.

I took a deep breath, but Mio was coughing for air next to me.

"You okay?"

"I swallowed a little water... but I'm fine."

"Here."

I offered her my hand and helped her stand up. There wasn't anyone lined up after us, but it wasn't a good idea to hang around at the bottom of the slide. There was no telling when someone might come out. So I hurried out of the pool with Mio.

"Did you have fun?"

"Yeah. I..." Mio blushed. "I felt a little nervous being o-on top of you, though."

"Yeah, sorry I pulled on you out of the blue like that."

Doing something like that would make anyone's heart jump. Just as I was thinking that...

"Rekka!"

"Sir Rekka!"

"Y-You...!"

Satsuki, Harissa, and Tsumiki appeared from a nearby crowd and closed in on me. They'd probably been waiting for Mio to come down.

"Why do you two get to slide together?!"

"That's unfair! That shouldn't be allowed!"

"You had your grubby hands on Mio, didn't you?! D-Doing that to an idol is unforgivable!"

"Uh, sorry?"

Why were the three of them so mad? I stood there in confusion as a bright red Satsuki furiously avoided eye contact with me.

"Next... Next is my turn!" she stammered.

Seriously, what was she so worked up over?

"Sorry, I think they only let you do that with smaller kids," I said, recalling the attendant's words.

"Then it should be fine for me! Now, Sir Rekka, let us go!"

"Hey! That's sneaky of you, Harissa!"

"Yeah, real sneaky!"

This was starting to get out of hand. After that, I checked with the attendant to be sure, and it seemed you could still go down the slide two by two with adults if you asked. Apparently they got requests like that a lot. That being the case, I figured I'd suppress my embarrassment and go down the slide with Satsuki and Tsumiki, then with Iris and Rosalind who appeared after that... But why did it feel like the attendant was getting more and more annoyed?



When all was said and done, I ended up going down the water slide with everyone more than once. It felt like the skin on my butt had rubbed off through my swimsuit... But at least I got to do something with each of the girls. I was relieved I had at least met my playtime quota.

We all split up after having our fun at the water slide, so once again, I found myself wandering around alone. That is, until I ran into Shirley.

“Oh, Rekka. Have you seen Rain?”

“Huh? Oh, no, not recently. Is she missing?”

“I haven’t seen her since we all split up at the water slide. She’s probably with someone, but I don’t know where she is, so please let me know if you see her.”

“All right.”

“Thanks,” Shirley said, and quickly disappeared into the crowd to keep looking on her own.

“Did she get lost?” R asked.

“Hmm... Well, she’s probably fine if she’s with someone.”

We had over 20 people in our group, after all. It was hard to think she’d gotten separated from *everyone*. She was probably off doing something with someone else.

“Shirley’s like a guardian to Rain and Fam, worrying and looking for her just in case like that...”

“Sure is. Well, where to next, Rekka?”

“I haven’t been to the river ride yet, so there, I guess.”

“I see. So you’re going to wait for a new heroine to come floating down the river à la the legend of Momotaro.”

“Hey, don’t jinx me. What if one really appears like that?”

The fact that I couldn’t completely write off the possibility was terrifying. Anyway... I eventually made it over to the river ride.

“I wonder if anyone’s around?”

The river ride had lots of bends, but it was basically just one giant elliptical loop. Because of that, it took up the most area in the dome. It’d be tough trying to find anyone in it.

“Eh, I’ll run into someone eventually if I float along long enough.”

“But if everyone flows down the river at the same speed, you’ll stay the same distance apart.”

Thank you, voice of reason... I guess that meant it'd be best to stand by the edge and wait for someone to float past.

Deciding to do just that, I found myself a spot where I could look left—upstream, where both the water and people were coming from. Just as I was wondering if anyone would float past, I spotted something eye-catching. Within the mass of people and swim rings approaching was an extremely familiar head of pink hair. It was Rain. And she was drowning!

“Rain!”

It was rude to dive into the river ride, but I didn’t have the time to worry about anything like that.

“I’m coming!”

I quickly swam over to the drowning mermaid princess and grabbed her with both hands, trying to calm her down.

“Listen! Hold on to me and you’ll be fine, okay?”

“O-Okay...”

I carefully swam back to the poolside with her, making sure her head stayed above the water. Then I lifted her up to the edge. Fortunately, she hadn’t swallowed much water and was fine after a bit of coughing.

“I’m sorry for the trouble...”

“Don’t worry about it. But... how did that happen? For a mermaid like you to drown...” I asked, whispering the last part so no one around us could hear.

“Um... It’s embarrassing to admit.”

“Yeah?”

“I... can’t swim.”

“...Huh?”

Apparently, this was how it went. On Rain’s home planet—the ocean planet of Berano—she used her mermaid tail to swim. She could take on a human form, but she always swam with her tail... meaning she’d never tried to swim with her legs before. But even then, she was still a mermaid. She hadn’t wanted

to tell anyone that—despite the fact she was a water-dwelling creature—she couldn't swim. That's why she'd snuck away from Shirley to practice on her own. She'd come to the river ride because it was relatively shallow and she thought the artificial current might help her move naturally in the water.

"I think it'd be better to practice in a normal pool first," I suggested.

"Y-You think so...?"

With her secret attempt to practice swimming gone completely awry, Rain hung her head in defeat. She was fidgeting quite a lot, so she must have been embarrassed that I saw it all happen.

"Hmm... Hey, I know. I'll help you practice swimming."

"Huh?"

I smiled at the apparently shocked Rain.

"Well, I'm not much of a teacher, but I can at least hold your hands while you learn to kick."

"Oh... Okay!"



"Here, you can stand in water this deep."

Rain and I were in the shallowest lane of the regular swimming pool where I'd raced Hibiki and Chelsea earlier, but it seemed they'd moved on. There weren't many people around at all. Just a middle-aged man quietly swimming laps in the far lane, probably trying to get some exercise in.

"So, how far have you gone with your human legs? Can you put your head underwater?"

"Um, I'm not particularly scared of diving in the water."

"I figured you weren't really scared of the water since you're a mermaid and all... which means all you need to learn is how to swim."

"That's right. And how to breathe, too. I can breathe in the water as a mermaid, but my powers are halved in this human form, so I need to adjust to that."

“All right. Then let’s start with kicking.”

“Right!”

I took Rain’s hands in mine. She squeezed my hands in return and slowly sank into the water, trying to lift her feet up behind her.

“Uh...”

But it didn’t seem to be going well. Despite her efforts to float, her midsection kept sinking, so her legs refused to come up.

“Straighten your body out a little more.”

“L-Like this?”

When she tried it, her legs slowly came floating up behind her until her heels were sticking out of the water.

“Just like that. Keep your knees straight, too.”

It seemed she was just having trouble getting a feel for how to control her legs in the water. Once she overcame that, the rest would be easy.

“Now relax. You just need to hold on to my hands. Like you’re giving me your weight.”

“O-Okay!”

For some reason, Rain blushed as she squeezed my hands tighter. For now, it seemed she’d gotten the hang of floating, so the next step was kicking.

Splish, splash, splash...

“Good, good. Well done.”

I matched Rain’s speed as I walked backwards with her in the water, still holding her hands and encouraging her at the same time. And just like that, we completed one lap of the pool, then two... By the time we got to five laps, she could keep an even keel and her form was looking good. She was a natural, but of course she was. She was a mermaid, after all. She was used to the water and swimming, so once she had her... sea legs... she’d have no trouble mastering freestyle and the other strokes. Though I bet she’d have the easiest time with the butterfly stroke. She certainly wouldn’t need my help with it...

Roughly half an hour had passed since we started practicing. Rain seemed to be getting the hang of it, so we decided to take a break. She stood up in the pool and took a deep breath.

“Well? Have you gotten used to your legs yet?”

“Yes... is what I want to say, but I’m still a little scared,” she said with a shy smile.

“You’ll be just fine with a little more practice.”

“...I wouldn’t mind practicing forever.”

“?”

“U-Um, Rekka...”

Rain balled her hands into fists and started to say something, when...

“Reeeeekkaaaaa!”

Wham!

A pillar of water rose into the air with a grand splashing sound, sending a powerful wave out from around it. I caught part of it directly to the face.

“Wuhbuh!”

I wiped my face off with one hand and tried to make sense of the situation in a panic. The spray of water droplets still hanging in the air reflected the sunlight like a shining fog. Rain was standing safely behind me, while the old man in the far lane had been washed up onto the poolside by the wave. As for the perpetrator behind the commotion...

“Rekka!”

Iris burst out of the water where the pillar had been and waded towards me at a ridiculous speed.

“Wh-What?”

“Why are you flirting with Rain?! That’s unfair!”

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

I informed Iris that I was helping Rain learn to swim.

“Then teach me how to swim, too!”

“You’re perfectly capable of swimming already.”

And much faster than me, for that matter.

“Ugh! That’s not the point!”

For some reason, Iris got mad at that. She slapped the water angrily. Lured in by that sound—or perhaps by the sight of the water pillar earlier—everyone from our group started to gather at the swimming pool.

“What are you doing, Rekka?” asked Satsuki.

“What was that water pillar just now?” asked President Momone.

More and more of the girls showed up until everyone was present.

“There you are, Rain...”

Of course, that included Shirley. She let out a sigh of relief when she finally saw Rain.

“I told you to tell me when you found her, Rekka.”

“Oh, sorry. I kinda forgot.”

“Jeez... So what were you two up to?”

“Um...”

I told Shirley what I’d just told Iris.

“Huh... So can you swim now, Rain?”

“No, not yet...” she said, shaking her head.

“I see. It might not be possible to master in a day, but like Rekka said, if you practice, you’ll get the hang of it in no time at all. If you’d like, I could help you out tomorrow...”

“U-Um...!” Rain shouted, cutting her off abruptly. “No! I-I want Rekka to be the one to teach me!”

Then she entwined her fingers with mine as though to make sure I couldn’t get away, and moved closer to me. Shirley looked shocked for a moment, but relaxed her shoulders soon after.

“And you’re all right with that, Rekka?”

“Huh? Well, yeah.”

Even though Shirley would probably make a better teacher. She probably knew some super scientific training method...

“Teehee...”

But Rain seemed rather pleased, so I decided against saying that out loud. If she was that happy to have me as her teacher, then I was happy to help.

“Jeez! I told you to teach me how to swim, too!”

“But you can already swim, Iris...”

“Sir Rekka! A-Actually, I’m not good at swimming, either...”

“You too, Harissa?”

Sploosh!

After that, it seemed that everyone had gotten their fill of the other attractions, so we all played in the swimming pool together. The old man from before had left, and the lap pool wasn’t popular to begin with, so we stayed there until it was time to leave. The wave pool and water slide were fun, but in the end, we had the most fun being together with each other. The more the merrier, after all.

Ah, this was the life...

That’s how I spent one day of my first summer vacation as a high schooler. No drama, no nothing. Just enjoying the sun and some good company.

—*Fin*—



R's Special Mission 2

Once I snuck out from under Rekka's nose and out of the house again, it was time to continue working on my mission. I hadn't decided on anyone in particular to visit, but... Let's see, maybe I'll drop by the heroines Rekka met more recently. Corona's investigation was already done, which left five people: Midori, Momone, Mio, Ellicia, and Lyun.

"Hmm..."

The five girls in question were all in different locations. One was even in a different world. But there was no helping that considering Rekka's adventures... Might as well get down to it.



And so I made my way to the spirit world. How I got there is confidential. A trade secret, if you will. Merely one of the many functions this unit comes equipped with. But setting aside how useful I am... My target, Lyun, was sitting on a soft-looking grass-green rug with her sister, Sophie.

"Go on, Sophie. Give it a go."

"Hrrrngh..."

Spurred on by Lyun's encouragement, Sophie was turning bright red as she squeezed a pendant in her hand. It was an adorable sight to behold, trying her best like that... Though I had no idea what they were doing.

"...Pwah! W-Well, Sis?"

"Let's see... Hmm... Yeah, there's a little more magic in it than before!"

"Just a little, huh?"

Sophie threw out her limbs and fell over backwards, sprawled out on the rug. Spirits usually wore light skirts, so it was a rather nail-biting scene to witness. It was a shame Rekka wasn't here. I would've liked to have seen his reaction.

At any rate, I deduced what the pendant was from their conversation. It was

most likely one of the mana storage units that had been created from Aburaamian technology. The spirit world had suffered quite a bit in the previous story, and it seemed they'd learned something from it. They'd decided to stock up on mana to be prepared for future emergencies. This mana storage unit was probably one of the results of that.

"How much have you been able to store, Sis?"

"Hm? Well, watch this—hnnngh!"

At Sophie's inquiry, Lyun mustered all her strength. She probably wanted to show off a little as an older sister. Mana flowed into the pendant several times faster than before... Wait, were mana storage and grip strength meant to be proportionate to each other? Eventually, Lyun gasped for air and gave up.

"How'd you do?" asked Sophie.

"Let's see... Look! This is how much I stored up!" Lyun said, proudly sticking out her chest.

"Wow!"

Sophie clapped her hands, delighted as though she'd done it herself. These sisters sure were close.

Lyun clipped the pendant around Sophie's neck.

"If you wear the pendant around and charge it with mana regularly, you'll be fine in case anything ever happens."

"Right! Those human sorcerers sure can make some amazing stuff." Suddenly, Sophie gazed up at the sky. "I wonder if Nammy and Rissy are doing okay..."

I didn't recognize her nicknames for Rekka and Harissa there for a second. Apparently, it wasn't customary for spirit names to be longer than two syllables.

"Nammy, huh...?"

Lyun mumbled Rekka's nickname as she looked up at the sky too. Perfect timing. For me to use the Mind-Melding Device, that is. Gotcha!

I didn't get the chance to see Nammy again in Aburaamu...

Come to think of it, by the time they returned to the castle from Harissa's

village, Lyun had already gone back to the spirit world.

I miss him...

Lyun's honest feelings bubbled up in her heart, manifesting as a sad sigh on her lips. Ooh, and what a rare sight it was. The side of a heroine that Rekka usually didn't get to see... Absence must really make the heart grow fonder.

I really want to see him, just to talk about anything... No, really just seeing him would be enough. I want to see Nammy's face again...

Lyun's feelings grew stronger as I continued to read her thoughts while the Mind-Melding Device was active, and then...

"Okay, Sophie! We're going out!"

"Huh? Where to?"

"The Spirit King's palace! We're going to ask him to let us use that magic to cross into other worlds!"

This "magic to cross into other worlds" was presumably referring to Harissa's connection magic. When Rekka and others visited Aburaamu and the spirit world last, she'd informed both worlds about her discovery with the catalyst from Red Thread. She accordingly had also prepared items with strong connections to three locations—that is, Earth (Rekka's house), Aburaamu (the castle), and the spirit world (the palace). Of course, items connected to Aburaamu and the spirit world were also kept at Rekka's house, along with one linked to the demon world for Corona's sake. They also had a large stock of catalysts prepared.

They'd even developed a message spell to inform others of when they were crossing worlds. It was essentially a derivative of the connection magic, but it had an extremely short range.

Anyway, it seemed like Lyun and Sophie were heading to Earth to see Rekka. But there was quite some distance between Windsong Valley and the capital where the palace was, so they probably wouldn't arrive until the end of summer vacation.



Next, I returned to Earth and headed towards Ellicia's location. She appeared to be in the organization's headquarters. There were several psychic barriers surrounding the place, but I slipped right through them. Don't mind me; I'm just letting myself in!

Wow, this place was unexpectedly nice. The furniture all looked good and sturdy, reflective of their leader, Yang's, personality. I floated down the hallway towards Ellicia's room. Ah, yes, here we are. It seemed not only Ellicia, but Yang and Lucy the teleporter were inside her room.

"So the negotiations with the Margaret clan are over?" Ellicia was asking Yang.

"Yes, we've finished discussing most of the aftermath countermeasures regarding this case," Yang answered with a small sigh.

That discussion must have been tiring.

"We were the ones who stole the Margaret clan's treasure. I feared we'd suffer greater consequences for it, but the head of the family, Nartessia, was surprisingly cooperative... No, if anything, it was like she was no longer interested in us."

"Thanks to the other-world information that Rekka brought her, perhaps?"

"Probably." Yang nodded grimly. "We owe him one for that. We'll have to pay him back someday."

Ellicia smiled at that.

"To think our Yang would say that about an ordinary human..."

"I don't think it's right to call that boy with that kind of destiny ordinary... But I get what you're trying to say."

"Your brow isn't quite as wrinkled as it used to be, either," Lucy added from the side.

The air in the room relaxed a little.

"Well, I just hope all of us are as grateful to Rekka as I am. Who knows where we would be without him..." sighed Ellicia.

“Of course,” replied Yang. “There’s that debt I mentioned before... but he also has valuable connections. Especially that space scientist who’s knowledgeable about psychic powers. If the organization continues to rescue and host psychics, we’ll need their help.”

“When you put it that way, it sounds like you’re using Rekka.”

“That’s because we’re the ones relying on him one-sidedly right now. But we’ll have to bear that shame. It would be foolish not to borrow his help... though it pains me to admit it.” Yang closed his eyes and chewed at his lip. “His destiny will cause him to be constantly involved in some kind of commotion or another. As long as we keep up our relationship, we’ll be able to repay our debt to him one day.”

“And that’s what the Japanese division is for.”

Oh? Japanese division? I leaned my ear towards their conversation.

As a result, I discovered that the organization was opening several branches within Japan. The organization was going to proceed forward in their mission to help psychics all over the world, so they had to branch out in order to be able to find and help as many newly-born psychics as possible.

“I’m leaving the management of the Japanese division to you, Ellicia. Are you prepared?”

“I still have lots left to do. I’ll be traveling back and forth from Japan for a while. Next time I go, I’ll be doing some preliminary inspections.”

“Oh? But that isn’t your real goal, is it?” Lucy gave her a knowing smile. “It’s been quite a while now... Aren’t you going to Japan to see Rekka?”

“Wha...?!”

Caught off guard, Ellicia blushed. And it was there that I turned on my Mind-Melding Device.

“What are you saying, Lucy?!”

It’s true that I was going to see him, but...

“Who’d have thought Ellicia liked younger guys...”

“That’s not true!”

It isn’t because he’s younger...

“But he’s on your mind, isn’t he?”

“That’s...”

That doesn’t mean you have to bring it up here and now!

Even as she argued against everything Lucy pointed out, she agreed to it in her heart. It was surprisingly cute.

“Yang! Stop Lucy!”

Ellicia then turned to Yang for help, who had been silently observing all this.

“Hmm... He was 16 years old, right?”

“Huh? What about it?” a puzzled Ellicia asked.

“I hear the marriageable age in Japan is 16.”

“Not you too!”

Ellicia’s wails echoed throughout the room. I was hoping for more drama than that, but that was enough fun... Ahem, I mean, that was enough investigating for me. Time to move on.



After visiting other worlds and foreign countries today, I was finally back in Japan. But not the town where Rekka lived. I was in a large room at a luxury apartment in Tokyo.

“...”

The owner of the room, Mio, was hugging a teddy bear as she vacantly stared into space. There was no telling when she would do something, so I used the Mind-Melding Device on her.

Click.

Today’s dance lesson was awful...

Hmm... Her worries were fitting for an idol, it seemed.

“...Oops.”

I need to drink some water.

Mio put the stuffed bear down on the floor and got up to go to the kitchen. She took out a bottle of mineral water from the fridge and poured some into a small cup. I guess she wasn’t the type to drink tap water. But still, water was water. And Mio didn’t look too satisfied.

I want to have juice... but my next outfit shows my tummy. If I eat like I did at the pool, I’ll...

Mio placed a hand over her stomach, but from what I could see, she had nothing to worry about. My sensors were capable of scanning down to the milliunit, so there was no mistaking it.

But I had so much fun at the pool... It’s been so long since I played with others like that.

She didn’t get to do that often, huh? She must really be busy with her idol work. It seemed like she lived alone in this apartment, too. She must have moved away from her parents to pursue her career.

But the water slide I went down with Rekka... made my heart race a little.

Oh? Rekka’s name finally came up.

I’ve never been so close to a boy like that...

Idols sure had it tough in that regard. They showed it in those Monday night dramas.

Was my swimsuit weird? Rekka said it was nice, though. But I look so childish...

Mio looked down at her body. At her chest, to be precise.

...There are so many girls with big boobs around Rekka.

Mio sadly groped at her own flat bust.

Hmm, I still hadn’t identified whether Rekka leaned towards the flat or the busty types. Every time I asked, he’d stubbornly declare, “Neither!” I wondered which it really was... The most well-endowed heroine for her height was Lyun.

But even then, hers weren't particularly big. They were just a little smaller than Shirley's. And it wasn't like Rekka's reaction to her had been any different than the other heroines, so I honestly didn't know what to make of his preferences. Perhaps this was the real cause of the War of All.

Maybe I'll get someone from my company to teach me chest exercises...

With that tearful conclusion, Mio returned the mineral water to the fridge and went back to her stuffed bear. I wasn't meant to show any favoritism in regards to the heroines, but I hoped her efforts would bear fruit.

When will I see Rekka again...?

Mio was busy being an idol, so it wasn't easy for her to find time to see him.

"...That's right!"

Mio suddenly brightened up like she'd had some kind of epiphany.

I'll send a ticket to my next concert.

Ah, so that was her plan. Rekka had gone with Tsumiki to see her in concert last time, and he was pretty dependable about things like that. So if she sent him a ticket, he'd definitely come. It was a good idea.

Last time, he even came backstage... Maybe he will again.

Mio opened the calendar on her phone excitedly as she checked her concert dates.

Now then, it was time for me to reluctantly make my way back to Rekka's town.



I was back in town, but I still had to visit Momone and Midori. Fortunately, they were both at Midori's house. I could kill two birds with one stone.

And so, I intruded into Midori's bedroom... Wow, that's a lot of books. The curtains were closed, so the room was shrouded in darkness, but the walls were lined with bookshelves that were filled to the brim. Their owner, Midori, sat curled up in a ball in the middle of the room. In front of her was a low coffee table with a laptop on it. Perhaps she had turned the air conditioning down too

low; she was sitting there in a plush robe despite it being the middle of summer. Maybe that was just her preferred way to get into the writing mood, but there was someone who wasn't too happy about it...

"It's freezing in here!" Momone, who was apparently called to the room, exclaimed upon first opening the door.

She frowned and immediately went to turn off the air conditioner, then threw open the curtains and windows.

"..."

"No complaints! Stale air creates bad ki. You're already weak to begin with, so you need to pay more attention to your environment."

Momone responded when Midori opened her mouth, but what she said certainly wouldn't be audible to normal human ears. Perhaps Momone knew what she was saying because they were childhood friends? Oh, well. I guess I'll have to temporarily enhance my hearing.

"Ugh... Momo, you tyrant."

All right. Now I could hear her properly.

"Don't call me by that cutesy nickname."

"But Momo is your name, Momo."

"Jeez, you're hopeless..." Momone sighed. "So? What did you call me here for today?"

"Oh... um..."

Midori fidgeted with the sleeves of her coat, covering her mouth with one hand and blinking up at Momone innocently.

"I... want to hold a study camp..."

"A study camp?"

Momone made a dubious face at her request. She meant for her light literature club, right?

"You mean you want to use the school's camp area? Why do you need to do it at school when you can just type from your computer here? There are only fans

over there, you know?"

"Yeah."

If I recalled correctly, Rekka was part of the light literature club. This was getting interesting. I had to investigate this further. Three, two, one... Click!

"I-I'm writing about school life right now."

The story about the girl who wields a drill.

"You mean you just feel like writing your school life story in a school setting?"

"Yeah."

"I'll say it once more, but there's no air conditioner."

"That's fine. As long as there's a refrigerator."

That way, I can have ice cream.

"Too much ice cream is bad for your stomach."

"I'll use an ice pack, then."

And take baths or something.

"Well, I suppose you could wash off the sweat with a bath..."

Hmm, I was hoping they'd talk about Rekka more, but it didn't seem like that was the direction this conversation was headed in. It also seemed Momone had completely mastered reading between the lines with Midori. It was almost like telepathy. Momone crossed her arms and pondered her friend's request for a while, but she eventually shook her head.

"I can't say I'd recommend it. What if you collapsed or—" Suddenly, Momone seemed to realize something. "Wait a second. Come to think of it, that problem child's in the club, too."

"...!"

Rekka...

Aha!

"There would be fewer problems if you weren't alone, but... that would come with problems of its own."

“Like what?”

“You’re a girl, and he’s a boy.”

Midori tried to feign ignorance, but Momone pointed it out quite bluntly.

“I’d support you if it were true love, but what do you really think about Rekka Namidare? Would you mind if something like that happened?”

Ooh! Nice, Momone! Very nice! Who would’ve expected such a fast ball to come flying right at them like that? This was extremely useful for me. Now, as for Midori’s reaction...

Hmm, how I feel about Rekka? He’s funny...

Go on, go on...

His popularity is funny...

I guess she wasn’t the type to get jealous about that.

His reactions are funny...

Well, you couldn’t really call him cool and composed.

The people around him are funny...

...

He’s just funny...

Was that all he was to her? Well, Midori and Momone weren’t exactly traditional heroines. They hadn’t had particularly dramatic first meetings with Rekka or gone through thick and thin with him, so maybe their romantic feelings would take a little longer to develop? It hadn’t been long since they met Rekka anyway, so perhaps they just weren’t aware of their affections yet. Too bad... Midori was the big-breasted, quiet, defenseless type, so this was a little disappointing.

Well, I guess I wouldn’t mind if Rekka did anything to me.

“Say what?!”

Oops, I accidentally responded out loud. Good thing no one could hear me. But wow... Even someone from the future would be surprised at that. Though

you could say it was typical of Midori, in a way.

“It’ll be fine if it’s Rekka.”

“If that’s okay with you, then fine.”

Momone slumped her shoulders in defeat. Childhood friends couldn’t really read each other’s hearts. What Midori had said could mean one of two things. Either: “It’ll be fine if it’s Rekka (since he won’t do anything).” Or: “It’ll be fine if it’s Rekka (no matter what he does).” It could be interpreted both ways. Hmm... I wonder how Momone had taken it. Time to use the Mind-Melding Device on her.

Jeez, Midori’s ideas always lead to trouble.

She meant both the study camp idea and the idea to write a school life novel, I suppose. It did seem like she acted based on her own whims.

“Just so you know, you’re supposed to put in a study camp application *before* summer vacation starts. Make sure you follow the rules next year.”

“Sure.”

“And I’ve already accepted other club applications for the space, so the only days that are available are the three days of the Obon festival. You don’t mind if the light literature has to do its camp then?”

“I’m fine with that.”

“What about the problem child?”

“I’ll ask him later.”

“You’re assuming he’s fine with it, huh?”

Momone sighed again.

I’m already used to it, but that problem child must have it tough being dragged around by Midori.

I’m pretty sure he’s very used to being dragged around by heroines in general now.

Well, it makes sense that Midori would be interested in him. That problem child was the second person to react so calmly to seeing my right eye. But he’s a

pretty funny guy, even putting that aside, Momone mumbled in her heart.

She was probably talking about that ghost and afro incident from before.

Hmm. I know what I said to Midori before, but really thinking about it, I'm also rather interested in Rekka Namidare. Love has never crossed my mind before, but even I've reached the age for that kind of thing. It might be worth expressing my interest in that kind of way once.

Oh, my... What's this? It wasn't quite clear enough to call love yet, but she definitely was fulfilling the "interest" part. Well, I had no experience to go off myself, but I supposed it was normal for love to start from that small spark. This was just as good a start as any.

I'll get in on this study camp, too. I'd be too worried if I left Midori and that problem child alone, anyway.

My, my, my... What started as a whimsical idea of Midori's is turning out to be quite a terrific event, Rekka. Just you wait.

Episode 2: Youth Camp

Tokiwa had called me out to the school. The rest of the country was celebrating the Obon festival, but I didn't have any family gatherings to go to and my parents were overseas, so it wasn't like I had any real reason to refuse her invitation. I told her I'd be there in about 20 minutes or so.

After letting Harissa know I was stepping out, I hopped on my bike and headed to school. I normally walked with Satsuki to school, but sometimes biking was more convenient. The wind felt great in the summer heat.

Anyway, once I got to school, I headed around back to the old school building and made my way up to the third floor where the light literature club room was.

"Good morn—bwah!"

"Morning."

The instant I opened the door, Tokiwa flung herself at me like usual, pressing her chest up against me and cutting off my greeting. I was just wearing regular old street clothes, but she was in her school uniform. Granted, she wasn't wearing her tie. And her shirt was as wrinkled as ever, not to mention she had the top two buttons undone. I could even smell the deodorant she was wearing when she was this close.

"Um... remember how we discussed using the computer to communicate through writing while we're in the club room?"

"Oh, right."

Tokiwa let go of me and walked over to the desk where her computer was, pulling up a seat and waving me over. I took a step into the room and felt the humid air hit me in the face. The sunlight was bright on the third floor, too hot for opening the windows to have any effect. I looked at the computer screen and saw she had her word processor open.

Welcome to my abode, Rekka!

“...Why are you talking so weirdly?”

When I pointed that out, Tokiwa started clacking away at the keyboard again.

I’m in character. That’s how one of the characters talks in the story I’m writing now.

“I see...”

Let’s try that again. Thanks for coming, Rekka.

“Well, I didn’t have anything better to do... But what’s up?”

That’s a very good question.

After a dramatic pause—during which she pressed the enter key a few times to start a new section—she continued.

The light literature club’s study camp is about to start.

I had to read that line a few times.

“...Camp?” I asked in confusion.

Did she mean one of those overnight stays at school that sports teams usually did for training?

Momo said the other clubs are on break during the three days of the Obon festival, so we can use the camp area.

“Ah, okay.”

President Momone and Tokiwa were childhood friends. It sounded like they’d worked something out to accommodate everyone. But that wasn’t the problem here.

“...What do you do at a light literature study camp?”

That was the biggest mystery. It wasn’t exactly like I could write a story on demand, you know?

Well, I’m writing a story about school life right now.

“Okay...”

So I wanted to try some things at school that we normally don’t.

“So basically, you want reference material for your story? Is that it?”

That’s right.

That didn’t seem too difficult.

“Yeah, sure. I can probably help you out with that,” I said with a nod.

Suddenly, Tokiwa sprung up from her seat and pressed her chest against me again.

“Thank you, Rekka.”

“N-No, y-you’re w-welcome...! And I told you not to hug me when there’s a computer...!”

Ugh, this was seriously bad for my heart! But anyway... That’s how the light literature club’s summer study camp started.



However, I was a little vague on what “doing things at school that we normally don’t” entailed.

“Did you have something in mind?” I asked.

“The pool,” Tokiwa answered.

And so I followed her to the school pool.

We were barefoot and walked along the poolside rather awkwardly. Surely we weren’t actually getting in... It wasn’t like either of us had changed or rinsed off.

“Um, I didn’t bring a swimsuit.”

Actually, I hadn’t brought anything. Should I go back and get my things to stay overnight at school? Wait, was Tokiwa going to stay overnight, too? Just the two of us? I mean, surely the school camp area had different rooms for boys and girls, but...

My imagination started to run wild, when—

“.....i.”

Tokiwa placed her butterfly hair clip on the starting block, and then jumped

right into the pool with her uniform on.

“Whaaat?!”

I was panicking in surprise as Tokiwa’s head resurfaced in the pool. Unfazed by my astonishment, she turned to me and beckoned.

“Um...” I hesitated.

“I think she wants you to get in too,” R supplied helpfully.

So... was this what she was talking about when she said she wanted to do stuff at school we normally didn’t? Jumping into the pool in your uniform... I’d never considered doing it before, but opportunities like this didn’t present themselves often. Although, to be fair, I wasn’t wearing my uniform. Hmm... Well, whatever. Tokiwa was calling for me, and it *did* look pretty refreshing...

“Hup!”

I jumped into the pool with a shout. It reminded me of the water park I’d gone to with everyone the other day, but this time I was wearing my clothes. The water felt different against my skin. I relaxed my body and let myself float to the surface.

“Ah...”

Once I surfaced, I wiped my face with my hands and opened my eyes. The blazing sun was blindingly bright, but I was nice and cool in the water.

“It feels so good...”

This was a pretty nice break from the summer heat. Now that I’d completely cooled off, I could really appreciate the lapping of the water on my skin as I floated along. The other clubs were on break, so no one else was around. All we could hear were the cries of the cicadas. I looked over and saw Tokiwa floating on the water comfortably too. If she hadn’t invited me here, I never would have known how good this felt.

“...”

Suddenly, Tokiwa stood up with a splash. Following her lead, I placed my feet against the pool floor. I could feel my wet clothes weighing me down as I righted myself. Since the sun was so bright today, I wondered if they’d dry out if

I left them at the poolside for a while.

“Hey, Tokiwa—?!”

I was about to offer my thoughts on what to do with our clothes when I realized something mid-sentence. Tokiwa’s white blouse was soaked through, making her bra underneath completely visible.

“U-Um, Tokiwa... your shirt...”

I could feel my freshly cooled cheeks heating right back up as I tried to say it.

“...?”

Tokiwa looked down, oblivious as ever, at the pink peeking out from underneath her white shirt... then splashed the water in a shrug.

No, you might not care, but please cover yourself.

Evidently, my pleading was all in vain. Tokiwa simply brushed her wet bangs out of her face and started to play with the water, scooping it up in her hands. She seemed to be making the most of her chance to wear her uniform in the pool. I, on the other hand, was at a total loss. Just as I was wondering what I should do...

“Hey, you two!” a voice suddenly shouted in our direction.

I was about to freak out, thinking we’d been caught by a teacher. But when I turned around, I was met with the sight of a familiar face.

“President Momone.”

It was our school’s student council president. Unlike Tokiwa, she was wearing her uniform properly... and holding a bamboo sword for some reason. Her one eye unhidden by the eyepatch looked like it was filled with anger. She probably couldn’t overlook us doing something like jumping into the pool in our clothes because of her position as the student council president. Maybe that was why she was mad? I tried to come up with an explanation for this situation, but...

“Midori, you’ll catch a cold dressed like that in the pool. Hurry up and get out.”

President Momone pointed her sword at Tokiwa and spoke before I could.

“.....i.”

Tokiwa frowned in disappointment, then looked my way. It felt like she was suggesting we get out, so we did just that. Once we were out of the pool, Momone marched over and threw me a towel she'd gone to get.

“You dry yourself with that, problem child. Midori, you come here,” she said sternly.

President Momone then took out a second towel and forcefully started to dry Tokiwa off. While ignoring all her protests, mind you. It was like watching a kitten being cleaned against its will.

“Good grief. I came because I was worried and found exactly what I was afraid I would.”

Apparently, President Momone had come to check up on the light literature club's camp—or rather, on Tokiwa.

“...Oh.”

“Huh? I won't accept any excuses. Don't forget you have a weak constitution.”

“...”

Tokiwa pouted at being scolded. She was like a little sister sulking over her older sister telling her what to do. It was pretty cute. But as such pleasant thoughts were passing through my mind, a bamboo sword came down square on top of my head.

“And you should've stopped Midori. You know she's sickly.”

“...Yes, ma'am.”

Unable to offer any protest, I nodded obediently and rubbed my throbbing head with the towel.



After we got out of the pool, I decided to go back home to grab a change of clothes and a few other things. Harissa was out shopping, so I left a note for her before returning to school.

I had been worried at first about staying the night at school alone with a girl, but I was much less concerned now that President Momone was joining us. Nothing seemed like it could get past her, after all.

“Oh, my. Even I couldn’t have foreseen an affair between Rekka and his two upperclassmen at school this summer.”

“Have you ever foreseen anything before?”

I casually brushed off R’s typical nonsense and headed to the camp area where the girls had told me to meet them. Walking down the wooden hallway, I soon arrived at a room with its sliding door left wide open. It looked like the overnight rooms were Japanese-style.

“I’m back.”

“Good.”

President Momone replied to my greeting as Tokiwa waved from next to her.

The computer from the light literature club room had been hauled over and set up at the coffee table where Tokiwa was typing away furiously, occasionally reaching for her notepad to jot something down. Perhaps the trip to the pool had given her some inspiration. She was really focused on writing.

“The boys’ room is next door.”

“Okay.”

Taking a hint from President Momone, I went to put my things down in the next room. And when I came back...

“...”

“...”

Klak, klak, klak, klak, klak...

With nothing in particular to talk about, we sat in silence. Bored, I sat down on the tatami floor and stretched out my legs with a big sigh. I could feel my fatigue easing up, but it was like my body was getting heavier at the same time. I decided to lie down on my back.

Both the window and sliding door were open, letting a refreshing breeze blow

through the whole room. The room was also out of any direct sunlight, making it even more refreshing. Ah... It kinda made me feel like taking a nap...

As I started to doze, I felt something plunk down on the floor nearby. I blearily opened an eye to see that it was President Momone, who'd taken a cross-legged seat next to me.

"Hmph! What seemed like a careless position at first actually conceals everything between her legs and the hem of her skirt perfectly. As expected of the One-Eyed Dragon, you might say..."

R was eagerly trying to peek up the president's skirt.

"You seem idle, problem child."

"Yeah... we're basically just here for Tokiwa, after all..."

With Tokiwa concentrating on her writing right now, we couldn't do much more than chat among ourselves.

"What are you doing over your summer break, President Momone?"

"Hm? The usual. Studying, attending club activities, going out with friends... plus training under my grandfather and occasionally exterminating monsters."

"...Exterminating monsters is usual?"

"What about you?"

"Me?"

Studying? I still had a ton left to do. Club activities? I had none. Going out with friends? I'd gone to the pool once. Other than that... I'd been to another world with a Demon King and defeated a different Demon King, stopped the scheming of a psychic organization, met a pop star, made friends with some spirits... Yeah. I didn't have any room to talk.

"Just some stuff."

"Hmm..."

President Momone narrowed her lone eye, but didn't press the matter.

"Well, come to Kibi Shrine if you run into any ghosts again. I can at least listen to your problems."

“Yeah... Thanks.”

Her unexpectedly kind offer woke me up a little. In the end, she was a pretty considerate person... But I'd probably get hit with a bamboo sword again if I said that to her face. Just as I was thinking that, I heard a flurry of fast-paced footsteps echoing down the hallway outside.

“Rek—!”

“—ka!”

“Hey—!”

“Are you—?”

“You—!”

“—together!”

“—doing?”

“It’s—!”

“—brother!”

Multiple overlapping voices called out all at once, making it almost impossible to decipher any one sentence. But I did get the idea they were all shouting at me. The gaggle that then plowed into the camp area consisted of nine girls: Satsuki, Harissa, Iris, Lea, Rosalind, Suzuran, Rain, Corona, and Fam. I had absolutely no idea why they were all together.

“What’s wrong?”

But the most puzzling thing of all was why they'd showed up at school.

“It’s because Harissa said...!”

Satsuki, who had entered the room first, started to answer in a pained voice before the other girls plowed her over from behind. I looked at Harissa since her name had been brought up.

“I didn’t know the meaning of this ‘study camp’ mentioned in your letter, Sir Rekka, so I asked Satsuki, and she said that it meant you were staying overnight at school with your attractive upperclassmen! That’s why...!”

Harissa couldn't finish her explanation either before more of the others mowed her down.

"And I can't accept that!" Iris shouted, with several people nodding in agreement.

I guess this meant everyone heard I was staying overnight for a camp with Tokiwa and decided to drop in to make sure nothing bad happened? They... really didn't trust me, huh?

"We're here to all play with Brother Rekka, right?"

Well, except for Fam and a couple of the other girls. That was at least a little reassuring.

"It suddenly got a lot more lively..." President Momone sighed.

The room that had only been filled with the sound of Tokiwa's typing before was indeed suddenly a lot more boisterous. Actually, now that I thought about it... I didn't hear the clack of the keyboard anymore.

"Rekka."

Hearing that voice, I felt something heavy pressing up against me. Shocked, I looked away from the door and down at myself... only to realize that Tokiwa had slunk away from her computer and was now practically on top of me.

"AAAAAHH!"

The collective scream of the girls reverberated through the room. Tokiwa ignored it like it was just a birdsong on the breeze and leaned forward.

"Let's do something youthful next," she whispered.



Youthful. Summer.

From these two keywords, the conclusion my simple mind came to was "baseball." It was the summer for nationals, after all. We had the numbers for it and everything. I couldn't just ignore the girls who'd showed up. I thought it was a good idea to do something together. And the only thing we could do with this many people was sports... was what I figured.

And so, after a lot of whining and complaints, we headed towards the school field to play baseball. We ended up borrowing the school's gear to play. There were some obvious outsiders like Lea and Corona, but President Momone arranged it with the school on our behalf.

There were 12 of us in total once I counted in myself, Tokiwa, and President Momone, so we split into two teams of six. Since we didn't have enough people on each team to fill all the positions, we went without second base and had a triangle instead of a diamond. That meant the pitching team would just need to take care of a pitcher, catcher, first baseman, third baseman, left fielder, and right fielder. The batting team was banned from stealing bases and tag ups. We had no umpire, so we'd be making the calls ourselves. No one really knew the rules in detail anyway, so we were kind of just going with a general policy of "hit the ball, run to the bases, and get the points."

And as for how we chose teams... For some reason, we decided by lottery instead of dividing up into groups based on ability and skill level. If Iris, Lea, Corona, and Rosalind all ended up on the same team, it wouldn't even be a game anymore. Yet they adamantly insisted on a lottery. According to them, trying to decide who would be on which team would take all day. I felt like I'd heard something very similar recently...

Anyway, the lottery worked out as follows. Red team: me, Satsuki, Lea, Fam, President Momone, and Tokiwa. White team: Iris, Harissa, Rosalind, Suzuran, Rain, and Corona. The strongest players gathered on one team for the most part. We had Lea on our side, but it still didn't seem fair.

"Gah! Now that we're enemies... I won't hold back, Rekka!" Rosalind yelled angrily from the batter's box.

She'd shouted at the sky in frustration when she first drew the straw that put her on the white team, and she'd been howling ever since. It seemed like she was ready to channel all of that frustration through the bat now...

Meanwhile on the red team, we got to organizing ourselves: Lea as pitcher, me as catcher, Fam on first base, Tokiwa on third base, Satsuki in left field, and President Momone in right. Our plan was to use Lea's strength to keep the opposing team's power lineup in check. Honestly, the rest of them would

probably be a piece of cake. But we'd have to be careful of any balls that headed for left field. Satsuki was terrible at sports...

“Here I go, Rekka!”

Lea gave me an unhurried wave and assumed the pitching stance she'd learned moments ago. Well, we were just playing for fun, so her casual attitude was probably the right way to go about this. Tokiwa said she just wanted to do something youthful, not play serious baseball. And as I was thinking that...

“There!”

A supersonic ball smashed right into my mitt. The force of it was so strong that it sent me flying backwards. As my helmeted head made contact with the fence behind me, it finally dawned on me... I hadn't given a second thought as to how I was actually going to catch any of Lea's fearsome pitches.

“Are you okay, Rekka?!” she shouted.

We had to call a timeout on the first pitch. Luckily I wasn't hurt or anything, so I just asked Lea to dial back her pitches enough that I could catch them. We resumed the game from there, but...

“Take that!”

“Whee!”

“Hah!”

Rosalind, Iris, and Corona all made consecutive hits, putting us three points behind. Even Lea's weakened pitches were a force to be reckoned with, but all three girls got home runs. After that, Lea easily struck out Rain and Harissa. And while Suzuran nearly scored off of us, a fine play from President Momone put them at three outs.

“What's with this game of superpowered baseball?” President Momone asked —quite aptly, if I might say so—as we returned to the bench when we switched teams.

It was true: our heartwarming, youthful game had been kicked into overdrive, but more importantly, it was our turn to go on the offensive. A one-sided game would be boring, so we at least wanted to get a few points in.

“You can do it, Lea!”

I cheered for Lea when she stepped up to the plate. She happily waved back.

“Urgh... Why you...”

For some reason, the pitcher—Rosalind—was grinding her teeth at our friendly display.

“I’ll crush you without mercy, Lea!”

The gauge on her anger was clocking at 200 percent. Her tiny arm got a big windup, and she let the baseball fly.

“Rargh!”

The white ball blasted towards Corona’s waiting catcher’s mitt, the tailwind kicking up the dirt underneath it.

Whoosh! Strike one.

Rosalind snorted smugly. Since Corona was catching for the white team, Rosalind didn’t have to hold back on her pitches like Lea did. That meant we’d be at as much of a disadvantage even on the offensive.

“Tch!”

However, Lea’s second swing was a good one, and she made it onto a base... even if it was only first. Second up to bat was me.

“Hey, Rosalind?”

“What?”

“Will you go easy on me?”

“I refuse.”

Of course not. Well, there was no way I was hitting anything if she didn’t... In the end, even with Rosalind pitching two balls out of the strike zone, I struck out. Next up was President Momone. Rosalind pushed the ball count to a dangerous three, but President Momone struck out eventually.

“Do you think you could get that Rosalind girl to join the softball club somehow?” she asked when she came back from the plate.

Apparently our school's softball team captain was seeking new members to strengthen the team, but that vision probably wouldn't be fulfilled. I couldn't even imagine Rosalind blending in with normal students in a sports club.

Anyway, after that, our fourth batter—Satsuki—sadly struck out too. It was time to change innings. I imagined the rest of the game would be similarly one-sided, but...

"Jeez. I didn't have any intention of going all-out for a pick-up game, but it won't be very fun at this rate."

Much to my surprise, our One-Eyed Student Council President didn't seem fazed by the odds against us.

"Time for a pitcher change. That good with you?"

"Huh?"

President Momone was asking Lea, who just looked at me questioningly.

It seemed President Momone had something up her sleeve, so I decided to trust her. I nodded to Lea, who left the mound and took President Momone's place as our right fielder.

"Here we go, Rekka Namidare. Make sure you keep your eye on the ball."

"Huh?"

I only understood what President Momone meant once the ball was flying through the air.

"What?!"

Just before the ball met Rosalind's bat, it suddenly took a dive.

"Waaah?!" Rosalind exclaimed.

I nearly lost sight of it. It was one of those so-called forkballs.

"What was that?!" she demanded.

That demonic pitch crafted from the epitome of human intelligence easily struck out Rosalind. After that, there were curveballs and circle changeups... as well as a breaking ball with some crazy trajectory that I was unfamiliar with, but it led to President Momone finishing off Iris and Corona in three pitches each.

“Why don’t you just join the softball team, President Momone?”

“I’m busy with the student council and my training at home.”

President Momone easily brushed off my question and removed her mitt, throwing it at the bench. Now that our almighty student council president had fortified our defenses, all we had to do was score. We’d need four points to get ahead, or at least three for it to be a draw. First up to bat this time was Fam...

“Yah!”

But it was over in three swings. Oh, well. Next was Tokiwa’s turn.

“...”

Tokiwa held the bat in both hands, giving it two or three test swings with a dazed expression on her face. Each swing made her stagger unsteadily.

“A-Are you okay?” I asked.

“...”

I gasped a little when I realized what I’d done, and tried to avoid eye contact as I backed away... But it was too late. Tokiwa saw right through me and made an immediate leap. An extraordinary amount of sweat was pressed against my skin.

“I’m okay,” she said.

After multiple shouts and complaints from all over the field, Tokiwa let go and trotted back to the batter’s box. Watching her from behind from the bench like this made her look even more slender than usual. There was no chance she’d stand up against one of Rosalind’s super fastballs.

“Will Tokiwa be okay out there?” I asked. “She looked like she was going to topple over just from swinging the bat...”

“Well, I wouldn’t write off that possibility completely,” replied President Momone. “But she might surprise you.”

Crack!

The sound of the metal bat meeting the ball overlapped with President Momone’s last few words. Tokiwa had gotten a hit, but had sent the ball flying

directly into the fence behind her. Translation: a foul. Normally, that would count as one strike, but...

“She actually hit it...?”

That wasn’t the problem here. Her opponent was Rosalind. A vampire. While she didn’t have much control over her pitches, their sheer speed and power were literally superhuman. It should have been impossible for a normal person to hit one of those.

“Midori’s eyes have always been exceptional. But since she’s no good at sports, it’s a completely wasted talent.”

Now that she mentioned it, Tokiwa did have really good reflexes at times. As I stood there impressed, Tokiwa hit a few more foul balls in the strike zone and patiently waited out the balls, which put us at a tense full count: three balls and two strikes. The next pitch move would be decisive.

“Ugyah! ...Ack!”

In her panic, Rosalind misjudged her power and threw the last pitch completely off-course. And that put us at four balls. That gave Tokiwa a free walk to first base, but there was no way we could risk letting her run, so we substituted her for Fam, who was last in our lineup.

“All right!” she cheered, leaping enthusiastically onto the field when Tokiwa returned to the bench.

“You were amazing, Tokiwa.”

She grinned at my compliment.

With that, we returned to the top of the lineup, which meant Lea was up to bat.

“Hah!”

Just like her first turn, she got a great hit off of Rosalind and made it to first base. Since we were only playing with first and third, that meant the bases were now loaded. This could be the turning point. And the next batter was... me.

Would someone be willing to pinch-hit for me...?

“...”

Rosalind was so irritated at the loaded bases that she didn't say a word. It was scary. Then she went to town.

First pitch: strike.

Second pitch: ball.

Third pitch. ball.

Fourth pitch. strike.

I was instantly driven into a corner. Even when I swung the bat, I didn't get anywhere near the ball. Should I just close my eyes and pray that the next two pitches were balls? But I couldn't see through the strike zone like Tokiwa, so that wasn't an option.

Ugh...

Tokiwa had given us this opportunity... I had to make a miracle happen here!

Rosalind assumed her stance for the fifth pitch as I racked my brain.

Think. Think! How can I make the most of this chance...?

“Ah!”

I quickly moved my bat into a horizontal position, ready for a bunt. Of course, I had no experience with bunting. I just figured I had a higher chance of making contact doing this than by swinging.

Widening my eyes to the size of plates, I fixed my gaze on the ball, just waiting for the moment Rosalind let it sail. That was when the first miracle happened.

Clank!

The bat I stuck out practically on a whim made contact with the speeding ball. Really, it was more like the ball had hit me rather than I hit the ball. It was a sheer stroke of luck, too. But hopefully my luck would last. The white ball bounced off my bat and up into the air. Of course, I ran for my life. Lea on first base and Fam on second base were also running with all their might.

“Feh! Curse you!”

“Whoops! Uwah!”

That was when the second miracle happened. As the ball fell downwards according to the laws of gravity, both the pitcher and catcher ran to nab it out of the air... and crashed into each other head-first, sending them both backwards to the ground on their butts.

“Crap!” Rosalind yelled.

She was looking at Fam, who was currently heading for home base. Unfortunately for them, the catcher—Corona—had moved too far forward to stop her. Rosalind judged that there wasn’t enough time, and she threw the ball to third base instead. That was when the third miracle happened.

“Kyah!”

Harissa, who was covering third base, saw the cannonball flying towards her and instinctively ducked. Lea passed through third base in that time.

“What are you doing, Harissa?!” Rosalind roared.

“There’s no way I could catch that!” Harissa replied, half in tears.

And she was totally right. I was blown away by Lea’s full-strength pitch earlier, so I had a pretty decent idea. There was no way the frail, petite Harissa could catch Rosalind’s throw at full steam. Rosalind was used to throwing without holding back with Corona as her catcher, but that had now turned on them.

“Jeez! What are you guys doing?!” Iris yelled from the outfield.

She was covering the right field close to first base, but she was much faster on her feet than Rain, who was covering the left. She’d crossed the field in the blink of an eye and had caught up with the rolling ball. Lea had already made it home, but so had Corona. She wouldn’t have any issues catching a throw from Iris’s iron shoulders. In other words, all that was left was whether or not I could make it in time.

“...!”

I ran past third base. Running at full tilt, my arms were moving of their own accord, flailing behind me opposite of my legs as they darted forward. My body was moving faster than my mind could consciously process. I was putting

everything I had into pressing forward.

Lea and Fam were waving at me from home plate. Satsuki and President Momone were cheering from the bench. Tokiwa was there, too. She couldn't yell loudly, but I could see her mouth moving. I didn't have any doubt she was cheering me on too. Her big eyes followed my running shadow.

Several steps in front of me at home base, Corona readied her mitt. It would only take Iris's throw one or two seconds to reach her...! The edges of my vision were blurring white, but I prepared to dive head-first into the base.

My body slid along the ground with a skidding noise, and I felt my fingertips touch the plate. I could hear my own heartbeat pounding in my ears as I caught my breath, my head still dull from exerting myself like that... I wondered what the result was...

"...Safe!"

The first thing I heard was Fam's voice.

"Safe! He's safe! You did it, Brother Rekka!"

Fam yelled as she jumped on top of me, flailing about in happiness. She was like an overexcited puppy. Typically speaking, self-judging a sports game would lead to a lot of arguing between sides over calls like this.

"Yes, I suppose that would be considered safe," conceded Rosalind.

"I think so too," said Corona.

But that was where our trust and friendship came into play. Even the taciturn Rosalind sighed and gave in when she saw me covered in dirt. In the end, it was only a game. Fun was the top priority. That's how it worked.

"All right! Now that we're tied, let's get back to the game!"

I jumped up and brushed the dirt off my shirt, and everyone took that as a signal to return to their positions. Then we played until the sun set.





Everyone made curry together for dinner. We were joined by Tsumiki, who arrived after finishing her shift at Nozomiya.

“I’ll help, too...” she offered.

“I can’t afford to let you turn curry that everyone’s eating into a natural disaster.”

Thankfully Tetra, who arrived with her, was strict when it came to supervision in the kitchen and kept all catastrophe at bay. We reassigned Tsumiki to wrapping the rice balls with seaweed for our late-night snack. After that, Satsuki, Rain, and Fam went home because they had people waiting for them, but the rest of the girls decided to stay overnight at school. Everyone washed up, brushed their teeth, then said goodnight to me as I retreated alone to the boys’ room, ready to hit the hay. But about 20 minutes after I crawled into the futon...

“...Rekka.”

I heard a voice whisper in my ear, rousing me from a near asleep state.

“?”

I lifted my eyelids to see a shadow right in front of me. Was the only reason why I wasn’t surprised because I was still half asleep? Or perhaps because I was used to it by now?

“...Tokiwa?”

“Get up.”

Instead of clinging to me like usual, she was kneeling next to me as she gently shook me. The moment I met Tokiwa, I knew she was a unique person. That was probably the reason I didn’t feel particularly irritated at being woken up. I obediently sat up like she asked and rubbed my eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

“Come,” she whispered, still not clinging to me.

Then she stood up. That caught my attention. Wondering what it was, I put

my shoes on and followed her out of the camp area.



Tokiwa didn't lead me very far. Just up to the roof of the old school building.

"I'm surprised you had the key to get up here."

"I had Momo secretly bring me the master key."

Wasn't that kind of a big deal? I mean, in terms of groundskeeping and security? Of course, I wasn't a teacher or a security guard, so it's not like I really cared. I figured it'd be all right as long as we returned it by tomorrow morning and left it at that.

As for Tokiwa, she walked to the middle of the roof and sunk to the ground. She then lifted her head and waved me over. When I approached her, she shifted her hand and patted the spot next to her. She was probably inviting me to lie down too.

I sat down first, feeling the rough, scratchy surface of the concrete underneath my palms. I then leaned back slowly so I wouldn't hurt my head on it... and was met with the beautiful sight of the starry sky overhead.

"Wow."

It was breathtaking... is what I wanted to say, but it was actually pretty normal. The town I lived in was still somewhat rural, so you could see more here than you could in the city, but the view didn't hold a candle to what you could see in the mountains. Yet even so, it seemed special right now.

"Lying down makes the view a lot prettier than looking up normally."

Maybe the place was what made it special after all. In a rural area like this, there weren't any buildings taller than the school—the new school building was taller than the old one, but the view was still unobstructed. The sky just plain looked different when you could stare into it and forget the world around you.

"Stargazing from the school roof at night, check," Tokiwa muttered to herself.

She was lying right next to me, so I heard her quiet voice clearly.

"Oh, was this part of the study camp?"

“Yes.”

That meant our mission here was complete, but neither of us moved. It seemed we both wanted to stay and talk for a little while longer.

“Today was fun,” she said.

“Yeah. We jumped into the pool, played baseball, made curry...”

“Nope. Well, we did, but that’s not what I meant.”

I could feel her shake her head adamantly.

“You know... I’m weak, so I rarely play sports. I can’t even go swimming unless I’m in top form.”

“Huh? But what about the other day at the water park?”

“I barely got in the water. Momo stopped me.”

Now that she mentioned it, the only times I’d seen Tokiwa were at the resting area, at the water slide... and at the end of the day, when we all gathered at the swimming pool. She’d scarcely gotten her feet wet. No wonder President Momone got angry when Tokiwa jumped in the pool today. Anyone would be worried. The two of them were childhood friends, so President Momone had probably looked after Tokiwa ever since they were little.

“Anyway, so that’s why I can’t join any sports clubs and I didn’t end up going on the school trip, either... so today was really fun.”

Tokiwa turned her head my way. Her eyes peered at me from between the wisps of her bangs.

“It’s all thanks to you joining the light literature club.”

“I didn’t do anything...”

“You did. Everyone gathered to play baseball and make curry together because you were there, right? No one would’ve come if it was just me. So...”



The corners of Tokiwa's lips curved up into a captivating smile.

"Thank you, Rekka."

Wh-What was this embarrassing feeling crawling on my skin? Was it because I was up on the rooftop in the middle of the night with a beautiful upperclassman? Her smiling right at me was making my heart beat oddly fast...

"An affair. Indeed, I smell an affair. Is this what they call a summer fling?"

SHUT UP, R! Don't mock me in my other ear, jeez... I couldn't even yell at her if I didn't want to look crazy. It was so annoying that no one else could see R!

But if she hadn't distracted me, my head might have short-circuited. Tokiwa hadn't broken eye contact once, so I still felt embarrassed. And just as I was seriously starting to wonder what to do...

"AAAAAAAHHH!"

Stomp, stomp, stomp... SLAM!

"?!"

A collective, noisy scream rang out in the night. I turned to the door in a panic to see multiple people who should have been asleep all piling onto the roof, staring at me.

"Wh-What are you all up to?"

"We should be asking you that! What are YOU doing, Rekka?!"

Iris was the first to yell. She threw off the girls who had fallen on top of her, got up, and marched angrily my way.

"Th-Th-That's right, Tokiwa! Just what were you d-d-doing here alone with Rekka?!" demanded Tsumiki.

"I should say! You've been trying to seduce Rekka with that body of yours since the moment I met you!" declared Rosalind.

The two of them approached next, but the others all followed close behind. In no time at all, Tokiwa and I had been surrounded by noisily complaining girls. Most of it was directed at me, to be fair.

“Heehee.”

Tokiwa giggled contentedly as she watched the swarming girls chew me out.

—*Fin*—

R's Special Mission 3

There were about ten days left of summer vacation. It was time to get a move on. Rekka was rushing to finish his neglected homework, making this the perfect chance for me to sneak out and visit some heroines.

“Hmm...?”



Today's first stop was—drumroll, please!

“Behind door number one, we have... a crimson mansion!”

In other words, Rosalind's house. I was just trying to imitate a show I'd seen on TV the other day.

Anyway, let's hurry inside. Both the inside and the outside were luxuriously spacious. Rosalind seemed to be on the third floor, but what was that...?

“Come on, wipe the window faster.”

“I-I'm going as fast as I can!”

I had stumbled upon Corona supervising Ulaula, who was on window-cleaning duty. Ulaula wasn't a heroine, and I had already investigated Corona, so I was free to ignore them, but... I was drawn towards them for some reason. It was the outfits. They were dressed like maids. Both of them. Come to think of it, the master of this mansion *was* a big fan of maids, wasn't she?

“Um... Great Demon King? You can, uh, leave the window cleaning to me and go take a load off, you know? Please?”

Ulaula was being almost suspiciously polite. I remembered her being a lot nastier... Perhaps, as a former demon, she was afraid to disobey a Demon King—even one from a different world. Said Demon King, however, continued to stand there with her arms folded even after Ulaula told her she could go take a load off.

“You're telling me to rest, but... you slack off so much that your master has

ordered me to keep an eye on you.”

“So why don’t you slack off too? I’d never tell on you!”

“I’m a freeloader here. This is the least I can do in return, since I was unfortunately told I was ‘unsuitable’ for the kind of work you and Suzuran do.”

Well, she was a Demon King, after all. She probably didn’t know the first thing about housework. But damn if her in a maid outfit wasn’t a feast for the eyes...

Anyway, with that small, delicious detour out of the way, I headed up to Rosalind’s room. After I arrived on the third floor, I poked my head in to see if she was there first, then floated right through the closed door to enter. Rosalind was sitting back in a rocking recliner, looking at the ceiling. She had a rather serious look on her face, as though she was contemplating something.

“Hmph... that Rekka,” she muttered as she fiddled with the ends of her twin tails.

Was she thinking about Rekka? Let’s have a look inside.

Why is that boy always surrounded by other girls... Shouldn’t he be spending more time with me?

Hm? I’m pretty sure Rosalind was there for both the water park and the study camp. Or did that mean she wanted him to hang out with *just* her?

And he was the one who said he’d make me happy...

That wasn’t exactly what he’d said, but I suppose it was the spirit of it. Whether he knew that or not was a different story. Rosalind gripped the arms of the recliner, clearly irritated.

So why does he insist on flirting with other girls instead of me? Does he want to feel my wrath?!

Whoa, I never knew rocking chairs could rock that fast. Just as I was starting to worry she might hurl her tiny body straight out of the chair, she came to a sudden stop.

Or perhaps... Is it that I don’t have enough charm?

Rosalind shook her head furiously, as if vehemently denying it. But her

expression gradually clouded as her mind filled with doubt. She must've been wondering why Rekka hadn't put the moves on her... not that he'd put the moves on anyone yet.

Shortly after that came two swift knocks at the door.

"Mistress, I have brought you some tea."

"Oh... Suzuran, is that you? Do come in."

Suzuran entered the room wearing her maid uniform. She was pushing a cart carrying a tea set. She wheeled it over to the antique table next to the recliner and started to prepare black tea and snacks. Her every move was skillfully executed. It hadn't even been half a year since this former homunculus had become a maid, but it seemed that she'd already mastered the art. I guess being a maid really did suit her.

Rosalind watched her working with a neutral expression, but then eagerly looked up into her eyes.

"Say, Suzuran..."

"Yes? What is it, Mistress?"

"Well, you see... I know I needn't ask, since there's no way... But in order to get a second opinion, I should like to ask you something just in case. Something important. Though it is just in case..."

"Yes?"

"...Am I lacking in charm as a woman?"

"Would you prefer a blunt opinion or an unreserved one?"

"If I had to choose, then be direct... Wait, are those not the same?"

"Then my blunt opinion is as follows." Smoothly ignoring Rosalind's comment, Suzuran spoke her mind frankly. "If I absolutely had to identify an area where my mistress is lacking as a woman, then I would say, putting it bluntly, that you are too childish."

"What...? D-Despite my appearance, I'm over 500 years old!"

"I'm not talking about your age, Mistress, but your appearance. Compared to

the knowledge I have gained, your boobs are fatally lacking.”

“M-My boobs?!”

Wow, Suzuran, that really was blunt.

“Animals that walk on four legs show their sex appeal with their backsides. But as bipedal creatures, that’s harder to see on a human. Instead, boobs fulfill the role of displaying our sex appeal. I believe that is the area you should concentrate on developing first, Mistress.”

Rosalind’s astonishment was so loud on her face that it was nearly audible. The cold, hard truth Suzuran had indifferently dropped on her seemed to have taken its toll.

Why, I never...! To think that I, the great “Jewel of the Night” among vampires, would receive such harsh criticism from a mere servant! No, I knew humans were attracted to breasts, but they’re just lumps of fat in the end! I thought elegance and refinement would have the last word...

“Grrr...”

Rosalind growled in frustration, lamenting the disparity between human and vampire values. Well, in reality, human tastes varied quite widely, so a woman’s bust wasn’t necessarily a determiner in her sex appeal, but still... Having bigger boobs never hurt.

“Mistress, the tea will get cold. Mistress...?”

Suzuran tilted her head as she tried to get Rosalind’s attention, but Rosalind wasn’t listening.

Now that I think about it, the way Iris latches on to him has always been suspicious! Curses! What shall I do?! Vampires don’t grow anymore! My chest will stay this exact size forever! There must be a way...

Rosalind furiously pondered her dilemma.

“Mistress, please calm down. That was only my answer if I had to pick something.”

“Hm...?”

Suzuran shook Rosalind's shoulder to snap her out of it.

"My opinion just now was purely from the biological point of view. You have plenty of charm, Mistress."

"Then my lack of breasts is..."

"Having an advantageous weapon does not necessarily result in victory."

Seeing the sincere look in Suzuran's eyes, Rosalind finally managed to calm down.

"Indeed... You're quite right, Suzuran."

"I'm glad you understand, Mistress."

What a puzzling emotional moment. My mission was to use the Mind-Melding Device to plumb the depths of the heroines' hearts—in other words, investigate how they felt about Rekka and write a more detailed report than last time. Recording "Rosalind is worried about the size of her breasts" wasn't exactly what I was after... but it was amusing, so it was fine.

Besides, there had been something strange about this mission from the start. Though their feelings were each unique in their own way, the heroines all felt some kind of attraction towards Rekka. I would be sure to articulate that in my reports to the future. But my original mission in coming here, although it was to help match Rekka to a heroine and save the future... The goal was for Rekka to choose someone for himself. Which meant it should be more important to investigate which heroine Rekka liked the most, rather than which heroine liked Rekka the most. What was the agency thinking?

As I was wondering about such things, Rosalind sipped at the tea Suzuran poured for her. The clouds over her heart seemed to have dispersed completely.

"By the way, Mistress, I actually wanted to consult with you about something, too..." Suzuran suddenly said from where she stood next to Rosalind.

"Very well. What is it?" Rosalind answered as she enjoyed her tea.

"I want to try giving birth to a child. What do I have to do?"

"Fwuh?!"

Rosalind promptly spat out the tea she was drinking.

“Wh-Where on earth did that come from?!” she managed to ask between coughs.

“I didn’t have any reproductive functions as a homunculus, so I’ve always had an interest in the family communities that humans create.”

“I-I see...”

This conversation was getting interesting... Let’s have a look inside Suzuran this time.

“I have the basic knowledge of how to make a child, and I understand that the first step is to be intimate enough with a male to do such a thing.”

If I had to pick a candidate right now, it would be Namidare, but...

“However, apparently just being intimate is not enough. A certain line has to be crossed to go further. This is the step I do not understand.”

“R-Right...” Rosalind nodded, wiping away the sweat on her brow.

“What must I do to cross that line?”

...With Namidare.

Suzuran kept the real subject of her question secret, but thanks to my handy Mind-Melding Device, I knew who she was thinking about. Was she keeping it vague on purpose because she recognized Rosalind as a rival in love? Or because it was understood that she meant Rekka? Even Suzuran didn’t appear to know the answer, so reading her heart right now was pretty pointless.

But oh, well. She was making progress from the last report I’d sent on her, which read: “she’s spent so little time as a human that she doesn’t know what her feelings are.” Just figuring out that much made this worthwhile, and that satisfied my investigation here. Time to move on.



I was wondering which heroine to visit next when I noticed something interesting going on at Satsuki’s house. I decided to drop by for a little visit. As for what had caught my eye...

"How is it, Harissa? Not too tight?" asked Satsuki's mom.

"No, it's fine," Harissa replied.

It looked like Satsuki's mom was helping Harissa and Satsuki try on yukatas.

"Harissa, it looks like that light blue one and this pink flowery one are your size. Which would you prefer?"

It seemed like Harissa was going through Satsuki's hand-me-downs.

"Um... Oh, they're both so pretty, I just can't decide."

"That's okay. You can try both on."

"Okay!" Harissa happily exclaimed as she started to strip.

Oooh... She was completely bare under there! Continuing the traditions of Japan is a wonderful thing... Thanks to that, I got to see something good. But, hey, this is work. I didn't just come to get an eyeful, okay?

"Hmm..."

Meanwhile, Satsuki was looking at her own yukata in the mirror. She was comparing the obi she was wearing with the one in her hand.

"Mom, can you help me?" she asked.

"What is it, dear?"

"Which obi do you think suits this yukata more?"

For the record, Satsuki was wearing a beautiful white yukata with a lotus pattern. She was trying to decide between an orangey-yellow obi and a purple one. Both were pretty.

"I think they're both lovely, honey."

"Jeez, Mom, that's not a real answer!"

Satsuki's mom and I were on the same page about that, but Satsuki was none too pleased. She must have been really serious about this... so it seemed like as good a time as any to use the Mind-Melding Device on her. Gotcha!

Hmm... Yellow or purple... Which would Rekka like more? I fell behind Iris and Hibiki at the pool, so I'm going to redeem myself at the summer festival for sure!

Ah, I see. She was planning on using the yukata to make up for lost ground with the swimsuits, huh? Satsuki sure was diligent and devoted when it came to things like these. She was even meticulously choosing an obi with Rekka in mind. Having a childhood friend like her was already winning the lottery at life, but that Rekka... How clueless can you be?

“Whew...” I sighed without thinking.

There was no end to the list of complaints I had about him, so I had to cut myself off there. The briefing I went through before I took on this mission emphasized that part of Rekka’s personality more than enough.

For now, let’s get back to the work at hand. I decided it was time to investigate Harissa, who had just put on the pink yukata.

“Wow! This one’s really cute, too!”

Harissa happily thanked Satsuki’s mother, who’d helped her put it on. She then looked down at the yukata in delight.

I wonder if Sir Rekka’d be happy seein’ lil’ ole me in this...

Ah, so Harissa spoke in her hometown accent in her head. The sleeves of her yukata fluttered in the air as she twirled around.

Maybe he’ll plumb fall head over heels for me in this number. Maybe then he’d come to my room tonight and... and...

“Kyah!”

“H-Harissa?”

Harissa’s sudden high-pitched squeal surprised both Satsuki and her mother. She hurriedly came up with an excuse on the fly and got her mind out of the clouds.

Hmm... Ever since they came back from greeting Harissa’s village elder in August, she seemed a little different. Well, according to Aburaamian custom, taking someone to meet the village elder was the same as announcing an engagement, so that was understandable. If only they’d go ahead and seal the deal, my mission here would be over already. But no such luck, for me or Harissa. Yet, nevertheless, she waited in her room every night for him to come

knock on her door.

In short, nothing had changed about Rekka and Harissa's life at home on the surface... just the way Harissa thought and felt about it. From her point of view, she probably felt like she had a huge lead over the other heroines. Whether that would change the relationship between Harissa and Rekka for better or worse in the future was... Well, I'm sure we'll cross that bridge when we get there.

"Kyah!"

"H-Harissa...?"

For now, there was nothing more to do than admire how red Harissa could turn when her little fantasies got the better of her. I'll make sure to write in my report to the future that Harissa's love for Rekka had increased even more than before.

Episode 3: Catgirl Trouble Buster

“There are other mole people?”

I’d stopped by Nozomiya to grab some lunch with Satsuki and Iris today. And I was currently blankly staring at Tetra because of what she’d just said.

“You mean mole people from somewhere other than Jizu Village?”

“I’m not entirely certain, but...” Tetra clutched the tray in her hands to her chest as she knitted her brow in worry. “Some of my people have seen others with glowing eyes in the mountains. They called out, thinking they were other villagers, but whoever it was just ran away... Now they’re saying there might’ve been other mole people apart from us.”

“Hmm...”

Another group of mole people, huh? The path to Jizu Village where Tetra’s people lived was located in the mountains behind our school, Mitsuhashi High. If that was where they’d seen this other group of mole people, then they weren’t very far away at all.

“Are you sure it wasn’t a mistake? It doesn’t seem likely another group of mole people lives so close and we didn’t know about it.”

“I thought so, too, but people have definitely seen something.”

“Hmm...”

Tetra’s people weren’t ordinary mole people. They were the descendants of the people created to guard the seal on Bahamut, king of beasts. God himself had put them there. So... had God made other mole people, too? If so, what mission had he given them? Or did they have nothing to do with God at all? And where were they coming from all of a sudden...?

“Yeah, I don’t think that’s enough information to go off of.”

“You think so too?”

“Did they cause any harm or trouble?”

“No, nothing like that. Like I said before, they ran away immediately.”

“Well, let me know if you find anything else.”

“Okay.”

We ended the conversation there for now, and I returned to focusing on my food. Iris had long finished her meal, and Satsuki was almost done too.

“So, how come you guys are eating together here when it’s summer vacation? You’ve all got your school bags and everything.”

Just as I was about to start eating again, a bored-looking Tsumiki decided to interrupt. She was playing with a ladle in her hands.

“We’re going to study in the library after this.”

“Huh?! You’re going to study in the library?! With Satsuki and Iris?!”

Was it really that surprising I was going to be studying?

“I didn’t have a choice in the matter. I’ve hardly put a dent in my summer homework, so I asked the two of them to supervise my studying.”

“Wh-What...? Why wasn’t I invited?!”

“Huh? Aren’t you busy with work here at Nozomiya?”

Unless there was a holiday or a family outing or something, Tsumiki worked regular shifts at the restaurant during the summer. That’s why I’d assumed she wouldn’t be able to come and hadn’t bothered to invite her.

“That’s true... but...” Tsumiki replied in a faltering voice.

Did she really want to study that much? What a weirdo. Anyway, I finished up my lunch and left Nozomiya with Satsuki and Iris. Tsumiki looked like she wanted to say something the whole time I was eating, but never did.



Later that evening...

“Man, I’m beat...”

All that studying had me exhausted. Thankfully, I managed to get plenty of work done... but there was still plenty left to do.

“Why are they grilling us like this when we’re not even close to university entrance exams?” I grumbled as Satsuki, Iris, and I walked home together.

“You know, Rekka, you say they’re far away, but you’re a high school student now. It’s about time you take studying more seriously. Things will sneak up on you before you know it.”

“What a pain...”

“I think so, too!” Iris exclaimed.

Ha! With her on my side, it was two against one. We won by virtue of majority.

“Pain or not, you’ve only got two years before university entrance exams.”

Urk, it was a hollow victory... Realizing Satsuki was right, my shoulders slumped.

“Hahh... Can’t they just abolish the entrance exam system in two years’ time?”

I grumbled even more as I adjusted the strap of my shoulder bag filled with heavy textbooks. From there, I continued to lament the homework I still had to do as we walked along. We even discussed what we were going to do at the summer festival over the weekend, and we eventually arrived at the intersection where Iris would have to take a different way to get home.

“Come to think of it, Lyun and Ellicia said they’d be coming to visit this weekend... Oh, this is where we part ways, isn’t it, Iris?”

“If you call me, I’ll come flying to you in my spaceship anytime! Or I could just walk you home if you want!”

“Please don’t abduct people too often, or you might cause a big panic. Wait, you’re still living on your spaceship?”

“It’s easier that way. Japanese houses are so tiny.”

“You have a point there...”

Even though we were better off here than in the cramped city.

“Bye, Rekka! See you tomorrow.”

“Yeah... Oh, we’re studying more tomorrow, too?”

“You should try doing it at home too, Rekka. Otherwise, you might not make it to the summer festival, you know?”

“Ugh, okay...”

We all said our goodbyes to each other... And that’s when it happened.

“Hm?” Iris reacted to something.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I heard something. Someone’s voice, I think?”

With that, she fell quiet and tried to listen again. After a few moments of silence, she pointed to a streetlight a little further down the forked road.

“Rekka, over there!” she exclaimed.

She was pointing to a figure collapsed on the road. No one had to say anything after that. All three of us just looked at each other, nodded, and took off running. Based on the silhouette, it looked like a little girl. But she was wearing a hat, so I couldn’t make out her face very well.

“Are you all right?” Satsuki asked.

She gently tried to lift the girl up off the ground, but accidentally knocked her hat off in the process.

Pop!

“Huh...?”

“What on earth...?”

Seeing... those things... appear from under the hat made me and Satsuki both do a double take. Iris was the only one who had a slightly different reaction.

“Oh? Is this girl an alien, too?” she asked.

“What? An alien? But... huh?”

“It’s not all that uncommon to see them in the Greater Galactic Federation,” Iris explained, pointing to the things growing out of the girl’s head. “Aliens with cat ears, that is.”



Putting aside the matter of whether the cat-eared girl was an alien or not, we decided to carry her to my house because she was hurt. Once we got her lying on the sofa, Satsuki and Harissa used their healing magics on her. After a few minutes, she slowly woke up...

“...Meow?!”

And her first reaction was to run. She jumped over the sofa with catlike agility and made a beeline for the window. Judging from her speed, she fully intended to smash right through it by force.

“Hey, wait!”

I reflexively tried to grab her, but I only caught air. She was way too fast for me. For a brief moment, I thought she would get away, but...

“Jeez, where do you think you’re going?”

“L-Let go, meow!”

Iris grabbed the cat-eared girl by the collar. She struggled and flailed in her grip, but there was hardly any challenging the strength of a Fineritan. Iris’s arm didn’t even budge.

“What should we do with her, Rekka?” Iris asked. “She’s kind of throwing a hissy fit.”

“Uh, yeah, about that...”

First we’d need to let her know we meant her no harm, but it didn’t seem like she was going to be very receptive to listening. Or so I thought, but all of a sudden...

“...Rekka?”

The cat-eared girl muttered my name and suddenly froze. Her cat ears twitched and turned my way as she looked at me.

“Rekka?”

She muttered my name once again. It almost sounded like a question. Wait, why... was I suddenly overcome with a sense of *déjà vu*?

“Huh? What gives? She got quiet all of a sudden.”

Realizing there was no longer a need to restrain her, Iris let the cat-eared girl go. This time, she didn’t try to run. Instead, she approached... and started sniffing me.

“Wh-What...?”

“...”

Rather than answering, she just stared up at me silently. This should have been our first time meeting, and yet... there was something familiar about the way her eyes and ears twitched. Suddenly, she tore her eyes away from me and started to do the same thing to Satsuki.

“...Satsuki?”

“Huh?”

Satsuki looked shocked when she heard the girl say her name, too. Wait. How *did* she know Satsuki’s name? Was there a connection between me, Satsuki, and this cat-eared girl? I’d never met a cat-eared girl before, but there was one time...

“Oh...”

That had to be it. It was the only memory I had involving me, Satsuki, and a cat of some kind. It was a memory from long ago, when we were still kids.

“Is that you, Ai?” I asked.

That was the name of the kitten we used to look after under the veranda of the local shrine. And when I said it, the cat-eared girl’s expression instantly brightened.

“Meow! It really is you, Rekka! Long time no see, meow!”

Then she proceeded to jump at my chest, her ears twitching happily.



So, as it turned out, the catgirl we picked up was really the kitten Satsuki and I had taken care of when we were younger.

“Um... So you’re some kind of magical being? Like a yokai? Did I get that

right?" I asked, a bit hesitant.

Ai's cat ears covered in indigo fur twitched as she tilted her head.

"I wasn't before, meow, but I am now."

"What do you mean?"

"I was a normal cat in the beginning. But one day, I realized I'd become like this. Apparently I'm what they call a nekomata, meow."

"A nekomata, huh?"

"Nekomatas have two tails, meow. See?"

Ai stuck her bottom out my way and slid her shorts down a little, revealing two hidden tails.

"Meow?!"

"I-I got it, okay?! Just hurry up and pull up your shorts!"

"M-Meow?"

She tilted her head in confusion.

"No, really! Please!"

I could see half of her backside with her shorts down like that, and the other three girls were glaring daggers at me. The latter of which was definitely the more pressing issue, mind you.

"It's a little old-fashioned having an animal you once saved return as a pretty girl, but I'd expected nothing less from you, Rekka," said the peanut gallery—R—as she rubbed her chin in the usual fashion.

At my behest, Ai finally pulled up her shorts and turned around to face me again.

"But Rekka and Satsuki sure got a lot bigger, meow. I didn't recognize you guys at first."

"I didn't recognize you either, Ai."

I mean, come on...

"I can still return to my old form, meow. That's how we usually live. We only

turn to people when we come into town, meow.”

“Huh? How come?”

“Cats with two tails stand out, meow. But when we turn into people, we can wear clothes to hide our tails and hats to hide our ears.”

“I see.”

Wearing clothes would be a little suspicious on a cat, yeah. I nodded, impressed with how much thought they’d put into it.

“So, why were you hurt, Ai?”

“Oh... That’s...”

Ai hesitated there. Whatever it was seemed serious, so I tried to approach the topic carefully.

“Did something happen? If there’s anything I can do to help, just let me know.”

“Mmmeow... I don’t mind telling Rekka and Satsuki...”

Ai glanced over at Iris and Harissa. Was she worried about them overhearing?

“What? What’s wrong with us?” Iris asked.

“We don’t really like involving humans in our affairs, meow. If you make a fuss, we’re the ones who have to suffer the consequences.”

Ai probably trusted me and Satsuki because of our past. I suppose it was normal she’d be a bit reserved around other people. Harissa fidgeted nervously, but Iris puffed out her cheeks indignantly.

“What? You worried people are gonna see your ears and tails? Then feast your eyes on this!”

I wondered what Iris was up to, but she slid her normally-hidden tail out from under her skirt and showed it to Ai.

“I’ve got a tail, too,” she declared.

“M-M-Meow?! Are you a yokai too, meow?!”

“I’m an alien,” Iris announced proudly, her hands on her hips.

“Um... Iris? Your skirt is riding up like that, so please put your tail away...”

This time it was just Satsuki and Harissa glowering at me.

“S-So, yeah, Ai. That’s how it is. The truth is...” From there, I explained the Namidare bloodline to her. “...So you can trust my friends, too. They’re pretty much all used to supernatural things, so they won’t cause any trouble for you or your kind.”

“O-Okay, meow...”

Perhaps I’d overloaded her with too much information at once. It looked like her head was spinning. But after a few moments, she collected herself and began telling us her story.

“Erm... So it all started when I came down from the mountain with everyone, meow.”

“When you say everyone, do you mean other nekomata?”

“That’s right, meow. We nekomata all live together.”

“I thought cats liked to be alone? Is it different because you’re nekomata?”

“Having two tails makes life pretty difficult, meow... But anyway,” Ai said, her tails flicking from right to left behind her. “Recently, lots of people have started to visit the mountain we lived on, meow. It would have been terrible if they discovered us, so we decided to go down the mountain. But then we ran into another group of yokai and some trouble... All the other nekomata were captured, meow.”

“What did you say?!”

I raised my voice without thinking. But if all of her friends had been kidnapped, this was a real emergency.

“Meow... I was the only one who managed to get away. But I had nowhere to go, so I was just wandering around. And then I collapsed, meow.”

Which I guess brought us up to speed, considering that’s how we found her.

“All right. Let’s go and save your friends, Ai.”

“...Are you sure, meow?”

“What do you mean? Of course I’m sure.”

“But this is risky business, meow. And you guys don’t have nine lives.”

“It’ll be fine.”

I’d been through so many unbelievable situations at this point that there was no way I was going to turn my back on Ai now. Especially not if she needed my help.

“Th-Thank you, meow... B-But don’t push yourself too hard, meow.”

Ai emphasized her reminder for me to be careful again. She was right to do so. Though it might be on a smaller scale this time, trouble was still trouble. We had to hurry since we didn’t know what might happen to her captured friends, but we couldn’t just go charging in recklessly, either. Pondering how we should proceed, a certain someone came to mind.

“I know! At times like these, we should call an expert.”



I contacted the certain person I had in mind, and found out they just so happened to be eating at Nozomiya right now, so we put a hat on Ai and made our way to the restaurant. Sliding the door open with a rattle, Tetra greeted us.

“Welcome!”

“Huh? If it isn’t Rekka. You here for dinner this time?” Tsumiki called, leaning over the kitchen counter. “Wow, there’s even more of you. I wonder if we have a big enough table open...”

Satsuki, Iris, Harissa, and Ai came in after me, and Tsumiki’s eyes wandered over the rest of the store when she saw them. She was checking if there were any tables available that could seat five people.

“No, we’re here for—”

“Hey, problem child.”

Before I could explain, my reason for coming spoke up on its own. I turned to see a girl in an eyepatch seated at a table, leaning on her elbows over an empty plate.

“President Momone, please don’t call me that in my own neighborhood.”

The thought of my neighbors hearing the student council president call me a problem child made me shudder.

“My bad. So, what did you want from me?” President Momone brushed off my protest and got straight to the topic.

When it came to expertise in ghosts and yokai in this country, people always thought of priests and shrine maidens first. And with President Momone’s background as a shrine maiden, I thought she’d be the perfect person to ask. We all went and gathered at her table—Tetra brought more chairs over for us—and I explained the situation to her in a hushed voice.

“Hmm... a quarrel between nekomata and other yokai, huh?” With a toothpick in her mouth, President Momone glanced at Ai. “Well, it’s a good thing your friends were weak, at least.”

“...What do you mean by that, meow?”

“Don’t take offense. I genuinely mean it’s a good thing. If your little spat had turned into a long and violent battle that brought harm to any humans, experts would have come in to intervene and exterminate the lot of you.”

Ai gasped.

“P-President Momone!”

I tried to get her to put a lid on it, but she just brushed me off like she would a fly.

“That’s why I’m saying you were lucky. My grandfather is personally informed of every yokai-related incident that happens in this area. The fact that I didn’t know about this one means there wasn’t any major damage. Think of it like wild bears—as long as they don’t come into town and bother anyone, they don’t get shot. At least, most of the time.”

“Um... does that mean you’ll help out?” I asked, a little sheepish and worried.

“Good question. I feel like mediating fights between yokai is slightly out of my jurisdiction, but...” President Momone leaned on her elbows like she was thinking and chewed on her toothpick absentmindedly. “When you said you

came down from the mountain, which mountain were you talking about?"

"It's a nearby mountain behind a human school, meow."

"Hmm... That's gotta be our school."

In other words, Mitsuhashi High where we all went. For some reason, President Momone grinned when she heard that and tossed her toothpick into the ashtray.

"All right, let's go. Lead the way, nekomata."

There was no need to ask where. Based on our conversation just now, there was only one place she could mean: the place where her friends were captured. But there was one thing I didn't understand. Why was President Momone motivated all of a sudden? It was like something had piqued her interest. When I asked her about it, she gave me an answer I should have expected.

"I told you before. I'm the student council president, and that school is mine. Any issues concerning it will involve me—which includes the surrounding mountains, if need be," she said with a proud huff of laughter.

It was a rather roundabout way of saying it, but... I guess that meant she was going to help. Was she being so indirect because she was embarrassed? Or was that just her excuse for taking a job that was really outside of her purview? Well, it wasn't like she would answer me if I asked anyway, so I took the liberty of assuming the latter. And that meant President Momone had gone out of her way to make up an excuse to help us out.

"Wait a minute, Rekka! If you're going to use my place as a meetup location, you have to order something while you're here!" Tsumiki complained just as we tried to leave.

"Sorry, we don't have time to eat."

"Hmph..." Tsumiki narrowed her eyes at me suspiciously, but seemed to realize something when she spotted Ai behind me. "Then let's make a deal."

"A deal?"

"L-Let me join your study session tomorrow!" she demanded, angrily pointing the ladle in her hand at me.

Come to think of it, she'd seemed awfully hung up on the study session talk the other day, too...

"Don't you need to work?" I asked.

"Th-The occasional break is fine!"

"I see. You're more than welcome to join us if you can. The more the merrier, after all."

"D-Deal! But now you've promised. No take-backs, got it?"

I had no intention of taking it back, but Tsumiki was rather insistent on that point.

"Let's move, problem child."

"Ah, okay. See you tomorrow, Tsumiki."

"Yeah... see you." Tsumiki nodded once, then waved her ladle as she saw us off.

I caught up to President Momone, who was already out the door. She seemed kind of exasperated.

"You're a natural genius at making people around you jealous."

"Excuse me?"

"What? Don't you guys think so, too?" she asked, looking to the other girls.

"Wh-What are you saying, President?" Satsuki asked in return.

"I don't get it either!" Iris announced.

"U-Um..." Harissa stuttered.

I didn't understand a single one of their reactions.



As I've mentioned before, the town we lived in was fairly rural. The further you strayed from the station and highways, the more farms and open fields you could see. Rosalind's mansion was out in the countryside, too. Not too far from where she lived were a multitude of warehouses once used by a now-abandoned factory. Of course, with the factory closed down, the warehouses

were defunct too. Ai led us to the yard there and pointed to one of the warehouses.

“That one, meow. They’re inside there.”

“You friends are being held there?”

“That’s right, meow.”

President Momone tapped the wooden sword she’d retrieved from home against her shoulder.

“I forgot to ask earlier, but what kind of other yokai are we talking about here?”

“Hmm...” Ai thought carefully about it for a moment. “They had lots, meow!”

“You sure are birdbrained for a cat,” President Momone said with a heavy sigh.

“Meow? But... how can a cat be...”

“I expected as much,” President Momone said, looking at me. “Let’s go.”

“We’re going in already?”

“A warehouse this size can’t hold much, especially not with hostages. From what I can see with my spirit sight, they’re not very powerful yokai, either. There’s no point in dawdling, and I want to go home and take a bath soon.”

“Y-Yes, ma’am...”

With Ai’s friends in possible danger, it was probably better to rescue them quickly anyway.

“Harissa, you wait outside the warehouse and make sure no one sneaks up behind us.”

“Okay.”

And so the rest of us followed President Momone towards the warehouse door.

“Nekomata, you wait here,” she said as we got close.

“Wh-Why, meow?!”

“Be quiet! Listen, if you charge in there with us, the captured nekomata might be used as hostages. But if you’re not there, the yokai will think we’re there to exterminate everyone. That’s why you need to come in *after* we’ve taken out the other yokai.”

“...M-Meow?”

“It’ll be fine, Ai. Just leave it to us. You can come in once it’s safe,” I said, trying to reassure her.

“Okay, meow!” she replied, nodding enthusiastically.

President Momone didn’t seem too impressed by her change in attitude, though.

“By the way, problem child, you owe me one for this.”

“Huh?”

“I’ll have you repay me eventually, so prepare yourself.”

That was... kind of terrifying. But President Momone opened the warehouse door before I could even object.

“Ah, wait!”

The rest of us followed after her in a hurry... and immediately found ourselves face-to-face with the monsters in the warehouse.

“H-Humans?!”

“Why are they here, gyao?!”

“Blub blub blub blub blub!”

“Galumph, galumph, galumph...”

It was almost like a yokai exhibition. It was basically “The Night Parade of One Hundred Demons,” just on a much smaller scale. Inside the warehouse was a talking tanuki, a fish-headed person, a flying head, a ball of fire, a scoop endlessly flowing with water, a human body with limbs but no face, an umbrella with legs, a girl in a bucket, and so on... Nearly every kind of yokai imaginable. Including a bunch of nekomatas bound with rope on the floor behind the others.

“Man...”

I had been to another world full of Japanese monsters before with Hibiki, so while I was surprised, I was somehow able to reign in any discomposure. Iris had experience meeting all kinds of different species in space, so she was only mildly taken aback by their appearance. And President Momone, as our resident professional, didn’t even flinch. But...

“K-Kyaaaaah!”

“Wh-Whoa! S-Satsuki?!”

Even the assortment of yokai before us covered their ears—those with hands, at least—at Satsuki’s hysterical screaming. She leaped at me, wrapped her arms around my waist, and held on for all she was worth. Come to think of it, she’d reacted similarly when she mistook Tokiwa for a ghost that time in the old school building...

“S-Satsuki! Why did you follow us if you were afraid?!”

“It was a mistake! Ai wasn’t scary at all, so I completely let my guard down thinking other yokai would be the same way!” Satsuki opened her closed eyes a tiny bit and took another glance at the yokai. “Nooo! Kyah! Save me, Rekka!”

She squeezed her eyes shut and held on to me even tighter, refusing to budge an inch. I was starting to worry she might just break me in half...

“Urgh!”

“Hey, Satsuki! Get away from Rekka!” Iris shouted.

“Nooooooooo!”

“What did you lot even come here for?” President Momone asked in disbelief.

“I’m not sure what’s going on, but we can’t have you humans knowing that we live here! Everyone, attack!”

“Yeah!”

“Raaah!”

“Let’s get ‘em!”

At the leader tanuki’s command, all the other yokai charged at us. However...

“S-Satsuki! Let go of me!”

“Nooooo!”

“Rekka! Get away from Satsuki already!”

“Huh?! It’s my fault now?!”

With the exception of President Momone, we were completely unprepared. But she looked unconcerned. She simply took off her eyepatch and sighed once more.

“Problem child.”

“Y-Yes?”

“You owe me twice now.”

Before I could get in a word edgewise, the wooden sword in her hand was slashing through the air. In the blink of an eye, the front line of yokai rushing at us were mowed down.

“Amazing...”

President Momone was almost absurdly strong. The yokai dropped like flies every time she swung her sword. Upon closer inspection, the wooden sword in her hand was glowing faintly. Just like her right eye, it was constantly changing color.



“Gyao! W-We’re no match!”

“Wh-What do we do, Pon?!” The flying head asked the tanuki—Pon, apparently—who pointed at us still messing about.

“T-Take the weak-looking humans over there as hostages!”

The nekomata behind them would have worked just as well as hostages, but thanks to President Momone’s foresight, they had no idea. Instead, the yokai believed this was their only chance and attacked us with everything they had.

“Tch! They’re heading your way, problem child!”

The flying head slipped past President Momone and rushed at the rest of us.

“Nooooo! That’s the scariest one!” Satsuki screamed with tears in her eyes.

She was holding on to me so tightly that I couldn’t move. The head was just about to come down on us, but...

“Move it!”

“Bwuh?!”

Iris sent the head flying with a roundhouse kick.

“Hito!” several yokai voices called out to the head, which was rolling across the floor unconscious.

“Ooh, that was a nice kick.” President Momone praised Iris with a smile, then returned to teaching the yokai a lesson with her wooden sword.



Ten minutes later, after defeating all the hostile yokai in the room, President Momone tapped the end of her sword on the floor like a cane.

“So, you’re the representative of this group?” she asked, looking down at the tanuki.

Pon nodded silently.

The battered and bruised yokai huddled together behind him (I think it was a him?), trembling in fear. Somehow, I was getting the impression that we were the bad guys here...

For the record, we'd released the nekomata already, and Harissa and Ai had joined up with us in the warehouse. Some of the other nekomata were a little scratched up, but they were mostly unharmed.

"I came here at the request of the human boy over there to mediate your dispute," said President Momone. "I'm not here to exterminate you mercilessly, so there's no need to worry."

"...Really?" Pon asked.

President Momone nodded in response. "My grandfather's the one actually in charge of supernatural events in this area, and it's his policy not to hurt innocent yokai. As his granddaughter, I follow the same policy."

"So, you're the grandchild of Kibi Shrine's Demon Slayer? No wonder you're so strong..." Pon sighed in resignation.

But there was a hint of relief in there, too. It seemed he believed everything President Momone was saying.

"Hey, catgirl. Come over here."

"M-Meow!"

At President Momone's prompting, Ai left the other cats and came over.

"I'll hear your side of the story first. Why did you come down from the mountain?"

"That's because... so many humans have been coming and going from the mountains recently, we couldn't live there anymore. So we left in search of a new place to live, meow."

"I see." Next, President Momone looked at Pon. "There's plenty of free space around here, so why couldn't you accept these guys?"

"It's a harsh world for yokai to live in these days. Especially for us yokai that can't blend in with humans... We struggle to even find places to sleep. The number of places that are safe from human eyes both day and night is limited."

Pon turned around and looked at his group of friends. It was true that they were all yokai who had no chance of blending in with society.

“There’s also the issue of food. The areas with plentiful food have long been claimed by other yokai, so we’re restricted to a very limited amount of space. That’s why I look after this lot...”

Pon paused for a moment and placed a leaf on his head. Then, with an energetic shout, he transformed into a middle-aged man.

“...By turning into a person like this, then getting whatever’s necessary from town.”

Once he was done talking, he returned to his tanuki form. So, that’s why he was the leader of this group, despite not seeming particularly strong...

“But the amount of resources I can obtain on my own is limited. I can’t look after any more than this.”

“Then why don’t you get the nekomata to help you? It’s easy for them to blend in among people.”

President Momone had a good suggestion, but Pon shook his head.

“No. If we did that, we’d end up reliant on the nekomata. It might work at first, but they’d betray us eventually.”

“So you’re worried you’d end up as glorified slaves?”

“We wouldn’t do that, meow!” Ai chimed in.

“Who knows?” replied Pon. “Cats are known to be highly protective over their territory. And highly fickle.”

It didn’t seem like Pon was going to back down here, despite Ai’s pleading. And with that, we had ourselves a stalemate.

“Satsuki, what do you think?” I asked.

“It’s not that I doubt Ai, but I can understand why the tanuki is worried. Anyone would be uneasy if they had to rely on someone else like that.”

“But they’re doing the same thing right now, right? It’s just Pon gathering food for everyone, rather than the nekomata. So why shouldn’t they let Ai do it?”

“That’s where the difference in trust comes in. Having the nekomata gather

more resources for them is all well and good, but what if they stopped doing it? Things would get tough for the other yokai."

After living without a worry, it would be hard to go back to struggling to make ends meet. That would basically mean they were dependent on the nekomata to maintain their lifestyle, so they'd have to make sure they were nice to them all the time... I see, so that's what President Momone meant by "glorified slaves."

Ai continued to argue against that vehemently, but Pon still wasn't listening. It seemed like it'd be a huge hurdle to get them to accept the nekomata living here... Wait, come to think of it...

"Ai."

"Meow? What is it, meow?"

"How come people started to frequent your mountain more?" I looked over at President Momone. "President Momone, has anything changed in the mountains by the school recently?"

"Now that you mention it... I can't think of any reason people would be there more often. We haven't held any kind of event there, and there are no plans for development in the area, either."

"Right?"

I'd been to the mountains myself several times over the last few months, and I hadn't seen any signs of other people there.

"What's the meaning of this? I won't hold back if you've been lying, nekomata."

"I-I'm not lying, meow! There have been lots of people on the mountain! They come and go nearly every day, meow!" Ai frantically waved her hands in the air as she spoke.

"Every day... Which means they must have some kind of goal, right?" I asked.

"And if there's a lot of them, they all probably share the same goal. They must have something in common..." mused President Momone.

"Ai, did you notice anything similar about the people who've been in the

mountains recently?"

"Y-Yes, meow!" she exclaimed, her ears standing up straight. "All the humans who came into the mountain had glowing eyes!"

"Glowing eyes?"

Satsuki, Iris, Harissa, and I all exchanged looks. We were all thinking about a certain friend of ours we'd just seen at Nozomiya.

"What's wrong, Rekka Namidare?" President Momone asked suspiciously.

"Um... There's a slight chance I might know how to solve this one," I said with a nervous laugh.



Three days later.

I was finishing up the rest of my summer homework in my room, when...

Knock, knock!

Someone was suddenly rapping at my window. Wait a minute, my room's on the second floor! I looked outside the window dubiously to find Ai in a hat.

"What's wrong, Ai? This is the second floor, you know."

"I'm a cat, meow! Scaling a roof is nothing to me."

Evidently, Ai had climbed up to the roof of the first floor to reach my window.

"How did you know this was my room?"

"It was the only one with a light on."

So, a lucky guess, then. Well, Harissa was probably asleep right now, so it was for the best.

"Can I come in, meow?"

"Sure. Take off your shoes, though."

Ai obediently removed her shoes before diving in through the window.

"Ooh! It's a bed, meow! It's so soft! Can I sleep in it, meow?"

"Did you come here just to sleep?!"

“Cats can sleep anywhere, meow.”

Ai laughed happily as she rolled on my bed. But instead of closing her eyes, she looked at me.

“Rekka...”

“Hm?”

“Pet my head, meow.”

“Why?”

“Pet me like you used to, just like old times.”

“...”

Old times... back when Satsuki and I were looking after her at the shrine, huh? I guess I couldn't really say no to that. I walked over to the bed and sat down, reaching to pet Ai's cat ears as she laid down. Petting her ears was different than just patting her head, but as I did it, she gradually started to yawn. She tilted her head, leaning in like she was asking me to get the other side of her ears, too. I obliged.

And then... I heard something I wasn't expecting. Was she purring? I guess she still really was a cat. Would she turn back into one if I asked her to? As a certified cat fanatic, it'd be great to get in some good scritches or something. And all that fluff...

As I was seriously contemplating how to go about asking for that, Ai opened her eyes and looked at me.

“Rekka, thank you, meow.”

“Huh? A couple of pets is nothing.”

“That's not it, meow. Um... what did you call them again? Ah, the mole people. Thank you for talking to the people with glowing eyes for us.”

Ah, that. Several days ago, Ai and the other nekomata left their home in the mountains and had a quarrel with some local yokai when they got into town. But once we got involved and realized why the nekomata had left their home in the first place, we rushed back to Nozomiya just before it closed.

You see, this all had to do with the “other mole people” Tetra was telling me about. Nekomata and the mole people had a very distinct feature in common: glowing eyes. And once we brought Tetra—the representative of the mole people—and the nekomata together, they were able to talk things out.

As it turned out, what the villagers from Jizu were really seeing on the mountain were the nekomata. They’d just assumed they were mole people because of their eyes at night. The nekomata had mistaken the mole people for other nekomata the same way, but would always panic and run once they realized they didn’t have ears and tails. For the most part, the mole people looked completely human. And the entrance to Jizu Village was on the mountain, which was why the nekomata had seen an increase in traffic in the area lately. Many of the mole people were working part-time jobs like Tetra, and traveled to and from the mountain every day.

After the mole people and the nekomata got all that straightened out, they were easily able to come to an agreement to help each other protect their secrets from outsiders. It was mutually beneficial. For example, the mole people would help secure resources for the nekomata, while the nekomata would help guard the entrance to Jizu Village to make sure it wasn’t discovered by ordinary humans.

As for the yokai that got in a fight with the nekomata, President Momone was going to lend them a helping hand. She’d said she was going to work them to the bone in exchange, which worried me a bit. But other than that, everything was neatly wrapped up.

“You always come to save me, Rekka,” Ai said.

“It was just a coincidence this time.”

“I’ll have to give you a thank-you present, meow.”

“Present?”

“If there’s anything I can do, just let me know, okay?” she said, looking up at me with expectant eyes.

Anything she could do...? Did she really mean that? I glanced over her human body one more time, and after thinking it over carefully, decided to ask her for

what I really wanted.

“Ai...”

“Meow?”

“Can you turn into a cat for me, just once?”

Ai rolled off the bed with a loud crash.

R, who had been watching the whole thing, let out a heavy sigh.

“Good grief,” she muttered.

—*Fin*—

R's Special Mission 4

“Come on! You have to finish it now, or you won’t be going to the summer festival tomorrow!”

“Waaah!”

...And so there I was, visiting Shirley’s house, just as Fam was crying over her math homework.

“Jeez! I told you to do your research project and book report on your own! Why did you leave all it until today?!”

“Cause reading makes me sleepy!”

“That’s no excuse!”

“Hmph...”

Fam was sulking over being scolded. Shirley seemed to realize she had gone too far, and let out a weary sigh.

“You snuck out of morning study sessions so often, I bet you haven’t finished your English homework either, right? You really won’t be going to the summer festival at this rate.”

“B-But I want to go...”

“Then make sure you work hard.”

“I know!”

With the way Fam was glaring at the formulas on the page with tears in her eyes, it seemed progress would be slow.

“Do your best, Fam. I’ll help, too,” Rain offered, unable to sit by doing nothing.

“Thank you, Rain...”

“Rain, you can teach her if you want, but you can’t do it for her. Understand?”

“I know.”

“Then I’ll go search for materials for the science project. The types of projects you can do in a single day are limited, though...”

“Thank you too, Shirley.”

“Yes, yes. Now do your best to finish today so we can all go to the festival together tomorrow.”

“Yup! I’m going to watch the fireworks with Brother Rekka!”

“...!”

Fam’s offhanded remark caught the attention of both Rain and Shirley.

“Fam, when did you make such a promise with Rekka?” Rain asked.

“Huh? Um, the last time I went to his house, I think.”

“So, the time you skipped doing homework was all going to play at Rekka’s, right?” asked Shirley.

“Huh? Y-Yeah.”

“...”

Rain and Shirley suddenly had terrifying expressions on their faces.

“What shall we do, Rain? Do you want to watch TV together while eating ice cream? Are there any dramas you want to see?”

“Quite a few, actually.”

“Huh? Huuuh?!” Fam wailed at their sudden betrayal.

The reason for their change in attitude was pretty clear, but she didn’t seem to get it.

“Wh-Why?! You said you were going to help just a minute ago!”

“Hmm...”

Rain placed a hand against her cheek, and Shirley crossed her arms in contemplation. Their silence made even more tears well up in Fam’s eyes. Since the topic had somehow taken a turn towards Rekka, I decided now would be a good time to take a peek inside. I’d hit Rain, Fam, then Shirley.

That's so unfair of Fam! I can't believe she snuck out to play with Rekka again... Or am I just too slow on the draw? But mother said that a lady must be graceful in all things... Argh! Mother, what should I do?

Hmph! Why are they being so mean all of a sudden?! I mean, yeah, it's my fault I didn't do my homework, but... argh, I can't watch fireworks with Rekka if I don't finish! I don't want that!

Hmm... Knowing Rekka and Fam, they were probably actually playing around, so it's not really worth scolding her over... but I can't say I agree with it. To be specific, I don't agree with me not being there for it.

It was interesting seeing three different streams of thoughts back to back as I swapped targets. Especially with Rain and Shirley, it was fascinating to witness how the same jealousy could reach two different conclusions. And so the nervous silence in the room continued for a while, until Shirley eventually smiled at Fam.

“...Heehee, I’m just kidding. I’ll help you out, Fam, so don’t worry. Come on, Rain. You coach her on what she doesn’t understand.”

I guess I’ll put off the penalty for sneaking out until later, and just help out with her homework for now. Rekka would feel bad if Fam was the only one left out, anyway.

Hearing her compassionate words alongside her inner thoughts sure made her sound a lot more malicious... Like it was half kindness, half calculation. Of course, being calculating could also be a sign she was prepared to do what it takes to get Rekka’s heart, so I didn’t have a problem with that. All the better for my mission. And besides, the other half was still unmistakably kindness.

Now that I was done at Rain’s place, my last stop was to see Tetra and our most recent addition, Ai.



The two of them just so happened to be in front of the entrance to the underground village. Come to think of it, the mole people and nekomata had formed an alliance the other day. It sounded like they were here today holding their first debrief meeting.

“...And so there were no reports of humans spotted near this entrance, meow.”

“I see. Thank you.” Tetra nodded at Ai’s report.

It seemed like they were acting as representatives on behalf of their respective species. It was thanks to Rekka that they’d been able to negotiate with each other, so this felt like the natural arrangement. After Tetra finished listening to Ai’s report, she gave her own.

“Just in case, I had some of the villagers working in the shopping district ask around, but there haven’t been any rumors of nekomata sightings anywhere.”

“Really, meow? That’s great, meow.”

Ai placed a hand against her chest and sighed in relief. The nekomata had come down from the mountain for a while, so their biggest concern now was about whether or not they’d been spotted.

“Oh, and also—” Tetra bent down to pick up a paper bag and offered it to Ai. “Here are the clothes you asked me to clean. There were a lot of them, so I had to ask Lea for help, but we used both detergent and fabric softener, so they should smell nice now.”

“Ooh! Thank you, meow!” Ai accepted the paper bag and sniffed it. “I was doing my own laundry for a while, meow... But I reached my limit, so you really saved my fur.”

“It’s nothing,” Tetra said with a grin... before suddenly leaning towards Ai with a serious expression. “By the way, Ai... I heard you knew Rekka from when he was young?”

“Meow?” Ai drew back a little, her ears feeling ticklish.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, meow.” Ai shook her head to show she didn’t mind.

While they chatted, I pointed the Mind-Melding Device at them and pressed the button. Their conversation was rather interesting, after all.

“Umm, so about Rekka...”

“Rekka, meow? He used to look after me when I was a little kitten, meow.”

“I-I’d really like to hear more about that time!”

“Why, meow?”

“I want to know what Rekka was like when he was young!”

I really want to hear more about when Ai was young!

Tetra. You’ve got it the wrong way around there. She seemed to realize her mistake after yelling it out loud, and tried to cover it up by flailing her hands. So she was interested in Rekka’s childhood, huh? Was it the mentality of wanting to know everything about the person she loved? Very cute of her indeed. Ai tilted her head as she pensively watched Tetra panic.

“Do you love Rekka, Tetra?”

She pitched her question at Tetra directly, though it was obviously a dead ball.

“Hwah?! Wh-Wh-What are you saying, Ai?!”

Sure enough, Tetra was unable to respond properly. Her eyes darted about nervously.

“Am I wrong, meow?”

“U-Um, uh... Y-You’re wrong.”

You’re not wrong, but...

Tetra replied hesitantly, but denied her own denial in her heart.

“Is that so, meow? I love Rekka!”

“?!”

Was Ai playing catch or dodgeball with her questions? She was really keeping Tetra on her toes. But this was a good chance to change my Mind-Melding target from Tetra to Ai.

“U-U-Umm, when you say you love Rekka, do you mean... love-love?”

“Huh? Of course, meow. Love is love, meow.”

“I-Is that so...?”

“When I visited Rekka’s room the other day, I told him I wanted to do something for him as thanks, meow.”

“You visited Rekka’s room?! Something as thanks?! Wh-What happened?!”

You shouldn’t get worked up like this, Tetra. It’s not good for your blood pressure.

“When I told him I’d do anything for him, he asked me to let him pet me all over my body, meow!”

“A-All over... your body...”

Tetra started to sway on her feet as though she was having a dizzy spell. When Ai was talking about Rekka petting her, she meant in cat form. But Tetra had no way of knowing that with the incomplete information she’d received. Hmm... Ai’s thoughts and words were in complete agreement with each other, so there was no point to the Mind-Melding Device with her. It would help if she’d think something that I could write down in my report—oh, speak of the devil.

I really was fully prepared to do anything though, meow. Does Rekka only see me as a cat? I’m old enough to have kittens now, meow. It might have ended with just petting this time, but next spring I’ll be in heat and unable to hold back, meow! I wonder what a half-human, half-nekomata kitten would look like...

Well, that far surpassed my expectations. I had assumed that heroines without their own stories would take their time developing their feelings like your average rom-com... Perhaps she doesn’t make love as complicated as humans do because she’s a cat? Falling in love is just that—falling in love. So now that she was in love, would everything else be straightforward? It was a tremendous catch to reel in at the very end, but it seemed my mission was now complete. Time to go home... Hmm?

“Transmission received.”

Oh? A message from the future at this time?

“Singularity Branch Point Observer R. What is the status of the special mission?”

“It’s going smoothly. No need for concern. But I believe I sent a progress report several days ago.”

There shouldn’t have been a problem... or so I thought.

“Your progress report was received. However, it was deemed to be insufficient.”

“Excuse me?”

“We seek a more detailed report.”

What were they thinking?

“More detailed, you say? But I have nothing more to report on at present, and summer vacation is almost over. Once school starts again, Rekka will be commuting and moving around constantly every day, making it difficult for me to leave his side unnoticed. Any further investigation is...”

“Then conduct the rest of the investigation during the remainder of summer vacation.”

H-Huh? There were only two days remaining of summer vacation. Fifty-three more hours, to be specific.

“With all due respect, re-investigating all the heroines in the time remaining would require leaving Rekka’s side for a whole two days. The risk of my absence being noticed is far too great, especially when my original task was to stay by his side at all times—”

“Your objection is overruled. Accept the order quietly.”

“...Understood.”

“Good luck.”

The transmission ended there, but I continued to glare at the hovering text window for a while longer. I had my suspicions about this special mission from the beginning, but... Now more unreasonable orders had been piled on top of it. I couldn’t refuse the orders of my superiors, so I had no choice, but...

“It’s annoying, so I’ll leave it for tomorrow.”

Tomorrow was the summer festival, anyway. Most of the heroines would be

gathered there, making it the perfect chance for additional investigation.

So, I decided I should end my investigation here as originally planned and quickly head back to Rekka's house. He was trying to finish the rest of his homework by himself before I left—I wonder if he's done by now? I set aside my complaints about the higher-ups for the moment and turned my thoughts to Rekka instead as I started on my way home.

Episode 4: An Assassin from the Future and Summer Vacation

“I... I’m dooooooone...!”

I slumped over my desk weakly and dropped the pencil in my hand. My mountain of homework was finally complete. Just before the end of summer, no less.

“Now I can go to the summer festival tomorrow without feeling guilty...”

“Congratulations,” R said flatly, clapping her hands. “I expected you to be the type to leave the homework until the very last day, to be honest. That, or the type to be scolded by the teacher for not finishing it at all.”

“Yeah, well, maybe I would be, but Satsuki and I always go to the local summer festival every year.”

“Oh, so you did your homework because you wanted to see her in a yukata.”

“No... because she’d get mad if I didn’t finish it...”

When Satsuki got mad, she would give me the cold shoulder instead of yelling. It really sucked... At any rate, that’s how I managed to finish my homework before the end of vacation every year.

“So, where are they holding the summer festival?”

“At the community center plaza up the hill.”

“What do you do there?”

“Visit stalls and stuff. Oh, Tsumiki and Tetra said they might be helping with one from the shopping district... There’ll also be a wooden frame put together with taiko drums playing on top, and at the end of the night, there’ll be fireworks.”

“Ooh! I’m looking forward to the fireworks,” R said, finally sounding interested.

Since she normally wasn't able to touch anything, the idea of watching the fireworks must have been exciting. It'd be nice if she could enjoy more things like that.

"They're no match for the fireworks show at Sumida River, but ours are still pretty nice. We should go earlier this year to get a spot..."

"Yes, please!" R nodded, agreeing before I had even finished my sentence.

She was expressionless as always, but for some reason she seemed kind of happy.

As I basked in the comfortable feeling of being free from homework, I went over my plans for tomorrow in my head, when— RRRIP!

It sounded like something was tearing through the air.

"?!"

I threw myself back in my desk chair and swiveled around in a panic. The disturbance had happened in the empty space over my bed... that was no longer empty.

There was some kind of rift there. It tore itself bigger and bigger with a grating, ripping sound. So, nothing had torn through the air—the air was literally tearing.

"What the hell...?"

Though I was pretty acclimated to crazy experiences, this still took me by surprise. To think I'd get involved in such a bewildering situation just studying in my room... Had my bloodline leveled up?

"..."

R was staring at the rift in silence. It stretched vertically until it was large enough for a person to pass through, then suddenly spread itself open. Then, a petite silhouette appeared from inside.

"Whew... I finally arrived!"

That was what she said after stepping out of the rift. It was a girl who looked slightly older than Harissa or R. She wore a red, caltrop-patterned, long-sleeved

kimono with black knee-high socks and fancy geta sandals. With her fashion sense and sharp facial features, she gave off a rather mature impression. She stepped out onto my bed in her sandals and stretched her arms.

“Mmm... All right, time to get to work on my mission...!”

Then she stopped cold. She took one look at me and froze like a deer in headlights.

“...”

She mechanically stuck her hand into one of the sleeves of her kimono and pulled out a small piece of paper—probably a photograph—and compared me to it. After looking between me and the photo several times, she pointed a finger at me.

“Aaaaah!” she suddenly screamed. “H-How?! I thought I set my materialization point away from the target’s location!”

What? What was happening here? Why was I being screamed at by a girl who’d suddenly appeared in my room? She panicked for a moment before clearing her throat with a cough and straightening up. She looked at me with determination.

“Commence mission! Apprehend the target!” she said, pulling a gun out of her sleeve.

“Huh?”

Now when I say gun, I don’t mean a pistol. It was more like the laser gun Iris had... Hey, wait a minute! I still don’t know what’s happening!

“Die!”

“H-H-Hang on a sec! Wait! Whoa!”

I threw myself backwards to get away from the gun, but the sudden shift in weight toppled my desk chair right over. The girl pulled the trigger. The next instant, a deadly-looking red light tried to disintegrate me... but suddenly struck a semi-transparent blue wall and scattered.

“What?!”

The red girl was shocked. To be fair, I was too.

“Restrictions released by covert Special First Class authority. Shields activated. Transmitting inhibitor identification sonar. Status: clear.”

The blue girl muttered her usual cryptic nonsense calmly, positioning herself between me and the red girl as though to protect me.

“R...?”

“Stay near me, Rekka. Don’t worry about Harissa. The sounds and impacts that occur in this room won’t be heard from outside, and I’ve placed a shield over the entire room. It’ll keep her from rushing in here.”

R adjusted her hat and looked at her opponent quietly. The girl who had fired at me without warning glared at her menacingly in return.

“It’s you, R!”

“I was informed of your disappearance from the protected residential division. Why are you here, L?”

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

The red girl—L—screamed in an outrage and fired off another shot, but the red light was again deflected by R’s shield.

“Your attacks are futile. You’d need a gun on par with the main battery of a super dreadnought class battleship to break through my shield.”

“Damn it!”

“Stop resisting and surrender. I wish to talk to you.”

“Shut up!” L shouted.

With that, she stowed her gun and pulled a kunai from her sleeve. The blade looked red-hot, and she used it to slash at the shield with all her strength. But R didn’t budge.

“An electromagnetic volsppear? It seems like you’ve equipped yourself with the latest gear. Considering that and your materialization via space-time translocator from before, just who is pulling your strings?”

“Stop speaking so calmly! It’s infuriating!”

“This isn’t much of a conversation.”

Behind her shield, R hadn’t moved an inch. L continued to unleash her attacks on us. Several dozen blows later, she finally accepted that it was useless and tried to back away... tripping right over a dictionary I had lying on the floor.

“Ow!”

It seemed this girl was quite a klutz. R and I exchanged a silent look. The girl rubbed the back of her head before paying any mind to us. She then gasped suddenly and scrambled back up, blushing red as she pointed her finger at us.

“Tch, fine! Immediate contact with the target was unforeseen, so I’ll retreat for now! Just remember this—”

“Wah!”

L started disappearing from her feet up as she spoke. What was going on?

“I’m definitely better than you, R!”

With those final words, L completely vanished.

“She even had a particle relocator prepared... How troublesome,” R said.

“Wh-What was that about?”

Despite being smack in the middle of it all, I felt completely lost. Um, I was attacked just now, right? And R protected me from this so-called L. Wait...

“R, are you secretly, like, super awesome or something?”

“Huh? What are you saying, Rekka?” R’s shoulders slumped. “I’ve been telling you this whole time that I’m extremely high-spec.”



The day after I survived the late-night assault. It was now the day of the summer festival, and I had guests from another world in my house. They were the sylphs, Lyun and Sophie.

“Hmm... So you have wear these ‘shoe’ things in this world.”

Lyun inspected the zori sandals I handed her. Spirits usually went barefoot, so I had gotten a pair for both her and Sophie. The sisters then tried them on.

“It feels weird between my toes...”

“But they’re kind of cute, Sis.”

“I suppose you’re right, Sophie.”

I had specifically gotten a cute pair meant for girls, so I was glad they seemed to like them.

“Your sylpheed clothes look enough like a dress that all you have to do is put away the ring around your head, and you should blend in fine.”

We were going to a festival, after all. Slightly strange outfits would just be written off as costumes.

“What about Mio?”

“She’s recording her new song right now, so she can’t make it. She was really sad about missing it, though.”

Pop star Mio was busy working during her summer vacation, so she didn’t get a lot of time off. She’d had to make special arrangements just to go to the pool with us.

“Too bad... I wanted to hear Mio’s singing again.”

“In that case, I bought her newest single at the concert the other day. Want to listen?”

“Really, Nammy?!”

The sylpheed sisters and I continued to chat away until the doorbell rang. Iris, Hibiki, Chelsea, and Ellicia had arrived.

“Sup, Rekka?”

“Haven’t seen you since the pool, Rekka.”

“It’s been so long since I came to Rekka’s house!”

“This is my first time here.”

The four of them all greeted me, and I led them to the living room where Lyun and Sophie were.

“I thought we were right on time. Where’s everybody else?” asked Hibiki.

“Tsumiki and Tetra are helping out at the shopping district’s stall. Lea went on ahead with them. Rosalind, Suzuran, and Corona are heading straight there from the mansion. Tokiwa and President Momone will meet up with us there, too. Fam still hasn’t finished her homework, so Rain and Shirley are helping her with that before they come.”

“What about Satsuki? I don’t see Harissa here, either...” Hibiki said, looking around the kitchen curiously.

“Oh, Harissa’s at Satsuki’s house—”

Before I could finish my sentence, the doorbell rang. It was Satsuki and Harissa, both now dressed in yukatas. Harissa was wearing one of Satsuki’s old ones. They’d gone over to her house to change so Satsuki’s mom could help them.

“Thanks for waiting. Changing took quite some time.”

Satsuki had her hair tied back. She was clutching a purse in one hand and Harissa’s hand in the other. She seemed to be supporting Harissa, who wasn’t quite used to walking in geta. Huh... Seeing her geta reminded me of the incident with L last night, but I didn’t let it show on my face. I was trying to keep that between me and R.

“Wh-What do you think?” a yukata-clad Harissa asked, looking up at me nervously.

“Me...? Well, it suits you. It’s very cute.”

“Th-Thank you very much!” Harissa bowed her head in embarrassment.

“Rekka, what about me?”

“Hmm? Isn’t that the same yukata you wore last year, Satsuki?”

“Stupid!”

With tears in her eyes, she gave me a swift karate chop.

“It’s also cute, too...”

“You’re too slow!” Satsuki huffed and turned away to take off her shoes.

We then moved into the living room where everyone else was, and the girls

who were unfamiliar with yukatas all came over to get a look at Satsuki and Harissa.

“Sheesh. I’m always left utterly dumbfounded at how thickheaded you can be.”

“Quiet, you.”

I retorted to R’s comment on the conversation between me and Satsuki just now. Actually, now was a good time to ask her about *that* while everyone else was distracted by the yukatas.

“By the way, are you sure I shouldn’t be concerned about that L girl?”

“Yes, don’t worry. Just leave it to me,” R replied while spinning on the spot.

After seeing how easily she’d repelled her, I felt better, but...

“You know, it’s rare having you save me for once.”

“That’s because it had nothing to do with your bloodline.”

“Huh?”

“That was an assassin from the future.”

“An assassin?!”

She said such a dangerous word so casually that I doubted what I’d heard.

“The future... That’s where you came from, right?”

“To speak of it as a place is odd... But you have the right idea, I guess.”

“Why would an assassin come here from the future, though?”

Personality aside, I thought R and I had been getting along pretty well. So why would an assassin be coming after me from her future?

“Humanity remains the same regardless of the passage of time—past, present, and future.”

“Huh?”

“Do you remember how I told you the War of All could be avoided with your death, Rekka?”

“Y-Yeah.”

I recalled having a conversation like that with R before.

“I was mobilized by the agency I belong to with the goal of saving the future by making you choose a heroine. However, that option might not be supported across all dimensions, worlds, races, or alliances in the future.”

“Which means?”

“There may be those who would choose to eliminate the cause of the War of All at its root—you.”

Well, that was alarming to hear.

“But you don’t need to worry.” R’s optimistic attitude didn’t waver. “Such radicals are few and far between. The dominant power in the future is the agency, and they wish for a peaceful solution. That’s why yesterday’s exceptional situation warranted me protecting you, Rekka.”

In other words, R was still staying out of things that involved my bloodline and stories, but she’d help with any trouble originating from the future. I guess that made sense. I would have preferred her helping out on a more regular basis, but it was a bit too late to start complaining about that now. It seemed like she’d be willing to protect the heroines, too, so I was at least grateful for that.

“I am your ally, after all.”

“...Didn’t you say when we first met that if I died, it would serve me right?”

“Oh, please, Rekka. You shouldn’t take all the snappy jokes from yours truly, the fantastic and adorable R, seriously.”

“I don’t know what’s so snappy or joking about it when you speak in such a monotone voice.”

R and I continued to chat until Satsuki called for me. I still had my worries, but I decided to focus on having fun at the festival for tonight.



“Whew...”

One relatively tiring hike up the hill later, we had arrived at the community

center where the summer festival was being held. We passed through the completely full parking lot and headed for the grounds where the stalls were set up. We'd passed quite a few people on the way there, but the festival itself was absolutely packed in comparison. It was enough to make you wonder where they'd all come from.

"Wow, that's a lot of people," Harissa muttered, echoing my sentiments. Her geta clacked against the ground noisily.

"The hustle and bustle of festivals is the same in every country."

"You must have seen lots of festivals before, Chelsea."

"I guess so. I've even seen some where you throw tomatoes and oranges. Oh, and sometimes phones, too."

"...Is that really a festival?"

I vaguely remembered hearing about a tomato-throwing festival before, but what was this about phone-throwing? The world was a big, strange place.

"The Carnival in Rio was amazing, too. It might be a bit too much for Rekka, though."

The Carnival in Rio? Was that the festival where people paraded in those elaborate, revealing costumes...? Yeah, that might be too much for me. As my imagination ran wild, Chelsea realized I was blushing.

"If it's just the costume you want to see, then I have one. Shall I wear it for you sometime?" she asked with a teasing laugh.

"N-No, that's all right!"

"Really...?" Chelsea poked my bright red cheeks mockingly.

"Come to think of it, you don't have many other big sister types around you," R mused, nodding pensively with a finger pressed to her cheek.

It's true that Lea and Corona were older, but they would never do something like this... Wait, who cares about that? More importantly, how was I supposed to deal with Chelsea right now? Her chest pressed up against my shoulder as she leaned in... I had no idea what to do, but someone suddenly pulled on my other arm.

"Rekka, I'm not really used to Japan yet. Could you tell me more about it?" Ellicia asked as she pressed up against my other shoulder.

"Ooh, Ellicia's packing a nice set, too. Good for you, Rekka, getting all that sisterly love."

She was definitely enjoying this! I really wanted to yell at her, but couldn't in front of everyone.

"Hey, Nammy. Weren't you going to tell me and Sophie about Earth today?"

"...Found you, Rekka..."

Lyun approached from in front of me as Tokiwa jumped on me from behind, completely sandwiching me in. I was trapped with no way to escape now.

"..."

And worst of all, Satsuki and the others were looking pretty unhappy...

"What's this, problem child? Seems like you're up to no good again."

"Please save me..."

I begged the latest arrival, President Momone, for help. At least our group was coming together. That was a good thing at least... sort of.

"Are Rosalind and the others here yet?"

"She was here just a moment ago, but two of her group went missing, so she went to look for them."

"Two of them?"

The mansion group consisted of Rosalind, Suzuran, Ulaula, and Corona. If two of them went missing... it'd be Ulaula and Corona, I guess? They'd probably gotten distracted by something and had wandered off.

"Then I guess we can get going, too. We'll mostly be walking around, so we'll run into them eventually."

I mean, all four of them stood out, so they should be easy to spot. And so our group of 11 headed over to where the stalls were set up.

"So, what brings you to Japan, Ellicia? Don't tell me you're only here for the

festival.”

“Well, sort of. Yang’s establishing a Japanese branch of the organization soon, so I’m supervising that, as well.”

Yang was the leader of the psychic organization that Ellicia was a part of.

“We’ve got a few branches around the world, but this is our first one in Japan.”

“What made you decide to open one up here?”

“Because you’re here.”

“Me?”

“We wanted to keep up our relationship with you.”

That was... a surprise.

“I’m really not anyone that special...”

“I guess what they say about the Japanese being humble is true.”

“That’s not what I meant...”

“You’re very special, Rekka,” Ellicia stated firmly. “What you showed me that day was so extraordinary... especially for someone who’s lived the kind of life I have. You solved a multitude of problems all by yourself when any normal person would have been overwhelmed dealing with just one of them. And I was a part of that... that’s why I—”

“It wasn’t like I did anything on my own. If it were just me, I’d be useless.”

I was able to solve the four intertwined stories because I had everyone’s help. And as Ellicia and I were talking about that, Harissa, Lyun, and Sophie approached.

“Sir Rekka, there’s something interesting over there.”

“Nammy, come with us for a sec!”

“Hurry, Nammy!”

“Wh-Whoa, stop pulling me!”

I was being dragged over to the goldfish scooping game.

“Hey, what is this? Are they real?”

“Yes, they’re real. They’re animals called goldfish.”

“Wow...”

“Wow...”



The sylpheed sisters expressed their awe in unison. Now that I thought about it, the only living creatures in the spirit world were spirits. They'd never seen animals before, much less a whole pool of goldfish.

"What do you do with these goldfish?"

"You fish them up with the scoop. See?"

I pointed to the parent who was helping their child attempting to nab one with a paper scoop. It was like a game because the paper dissolved quickly and you didn't get many chances to try. There was a dad next to them who was using the corner of the pool to round them up and nab one after another... Wow, he was good. While I watched him work his magic, Harissa tugged on my sleeve.

"Sir Rekka, what do you do after you get one?"

"Oh, you get to keep it as a pet."

"As a pet?!"

"I'm pretty sure we have an unused tank back at home."

Harissa eyes sparkled when she heard that.

"Do you... want to try?" I asked.

"Please!"

"Me too, Nammy!"

"All right, all right. You want a go too, Sophie?"

"Yeah!"

I paid the man running the game and got three scoops.

"Here," I said as I handed them out to the girls. "This won't last long in the water, so you gotta make it count."

"Got it!" Harissa replied energetically.

Lyun and Sophie looked ready to go, too. But less than five minutes later...

"Aaah!"

Lyun's scoop was the last to break, but not one of them had anything to show for their efforts. I guess goldfish scooping was a little difficult for three beginners. Well, it wasn't like I was any good at it, either...

"Sir Rekka, please give it a try!"

"Huh?"

"That's right, Nammy! You catch them for us!"

"Good luck, Nammy!"

The three girls turned their hopeful eyes on me... causing me to break out in a cold sweat. What was this? The tension of a man about to prove his worth in an all-or-nothing battle... One I couldn't afford to lose! I silently paid the man again and got a scoop and bowl for myself. I honestly had no confidence, but I had to try.

Once the scoop broke, it would all be over. I had heard once that it was best to move it in and out of the water at a diagonal angle. The less contact it had with the water, the better, of course. Only a fool would put the scoop straight in the water and try and chase a fish with it that way. I concentrated on narrowing my field of vision, imagining a rectangular space in the goldfish pool and fixing my gaze on it. As soon as a goldfish swam in that imaginary box, I'd nab it. That's all I was thinking about. Nothing else passed through my mind. I focused on this single task. And then, when the moment came...

"Aha!"

My right arm reacted nearly reflexively. The scoop entered the water at a perfect 45-degree angle, caught the fish, and exited the water the exact same way—wait, why was it so heavy?! There was no way a goldfish weighed this much. But that was as far as my train of thought reached before I snapped out of my zen concentration mode and back to my senses. And what I saw in my scoop... was a fish snapping its teeth at me.

"Whoa!"

It was a fish, so I didn't scream all that loudly, but I dropped the scoop for fear of being bitten.

“A-A piranha?”

I’d never seen one in person before, but that was the first thing that came to mind when I saw the fanged fish.

“Wh-What is that?! How did it get in there?!”

The man running the game was so surprised that he fell out of his chair. The other customers started to back away, too.

“Get back, you three...!” I said, waving a hand at Harissa and the sisters.

Just then, the piranha jumped straight out of the water at me like it was chasing after prey that had gotten away.

“?!”

I instinctively covered my face, but even after several seconds passed, I still didn’t feel anything biting me.

“Are you all right, Master Namidare?” someone asked.

I fearfully moved my hands away from my face and saw Suzuran standing there in her usual maid outfit, casually holding a silver knife with a piranha skewered on it. Behind her were Rosalind, Corona, and a disgruntled Ulaula. They’d apparently all managed to find each other.

“Here.”

“Oh, yeah. Thanks.”

I grabbed Suzuran’s extended hand and stood up.

“Tch...”

Did I just hear someone click their tongue? I turned around to look and caught a glimpse of someone in red disappearing into the crowd of people... before they promptly tripped over a stone and face-planted into the ground.

“You all right, missy?”

“Oww... Huh? Yeah...”

A man passing by seemed to be extremely concerned, brushing off the dirt on her kimono for her. She just squirmed in embarrassment.

That was L, right? I became sure of it when she suddenly snapped her head in my direction and shot me a dirty glare. Then she took off into the crowd and disappeared successfully this time. Watching her run off, the only thing I could think was that she was gonna trip again any minute if she kept it up.



"Sheesh. It's a good thing nothing bad happened to Rekka. Otherwise that stall owner would be in a *lot* of trouble..."

"That's enough, Rosalind. He gave us goldfish as an apology anyway."

The man had given us three goldfish for the trouble. I didn't think he was responsible, but Harissa really wanted them, so I accepted graciously.

"Thank you as well, Suzuran. For saving me."

"It was nothing," she replied coolly.

Like usual, her emotions didn't really show on her face. She was a little like R in that sense, just way nicer. She even laughed on occasion, which I wished she did more. But setting that aside for now, there were more important matters at hand...

"R."

"Yes?"

"That piranha... Was that L's doing?"

"So it seems," R said with a nod.

"Didn't you say you'd protect me from L's attacks?" I whispered in her ear to avoid any of the festival-goers overhearing.

"And I did. Yesterday. Just so you know, if I hadn't protected you then, you'd be atomic dust right now."

"...Huh? Seriously?"

"Yep, seriously. But regarding the incident just now, I sensed Suzuran approaching and deduced there was no need for me to get involved since she would take care of it. I could have done what she did, but as you know, I cannot be seen by other people. Wouldn't it be troublesome explaining to the crowd

how the piranha suddenly vanished?"

"...Well, when you put it that way, yeah."

"I'm glad you understand. I must say a piranha was a rather primitive tactic... but it was successful in that I only had my guard up for futuristic weapons. She sure does have some unique ideas. Perhaps she tried the piranha because no weapons from the future can break through my defenses."

"Okay, so..."

"What is it?"

"Do you and L know each other?"

That's what it was starting to feel like, so I had to ask. L seemed like she had a lot of hostility towards R, and R kept talking about her like she knew her well.

"L is my older sister."

"Oh, okay... Wait, your what?!"

I accidentally raised my voice at the somewhat unexpected answer.

"Hmm? What's wrong, Rekka?"

"O-Oh, n-nothing."

I nervously waved off a concerned Satsuki who'd turned around to see what I was yelling about.

"Really? Oh, they're selling candy apples over there."

"I say sister, but we're not related by blood. I believe I've told you before how I'm an artificial life form called a Kiklim. L is a Kiklim from the prior generation."

Satsuki had struck up a completely different conversation with me, so R continued to explain without waiting for my response. Thanks to that, I understood a little bit of the picture. As we lined up at the candy apple stall, I took out my phone and started to type.

But why is your sis targeting me?

She'd mentioned how I might be targeted in order to put a stop to the War of All, but why would her sister be doing that? If she was a Kiklim like R, surely she

was made by the same “agency” or whatever. So surely they were on the same team. Right...?

“L was the one who was supposed to be sent to you, Rekka.”

Really?

“Yes. So she underwent a one-year training course for this mission, but... Well, even if I explained it to you, you wouldn’t understand, so let’s just say that there were several issues that cropped up, leading to the production of a fifth generation.”

And that fifth generation was R, I guess. Did that mean L was discarded after being taken off the mission...?

What happened to L after that?

“In the future, artificial life forms also have human rights. So L was sent to a protected residential division to take courses that would habilitate her into normal society so that she could live an ordinary life... But she disappeared from there a little while ago.”

Disappeared?

“Yes. The agency did everything they could to locate her, but never did... until the other night when she suddenly appeared here.”

So, after she vanished, she had a change of heart and came to this time to assassinate me? Cool. That could only mean one thing.

“She was probably taken in by one of those groups that want to see you dead, Rekka. While I cannot deduce whether she was brainwashed or converted of her own will, chances are that’s what happened.”

Yeah, totally cool... At least I now knew why she might be trying to assassinate me.

“Here, Harissa.”

“Wow! Thank you so much!”

I handed Harissa the candy apple and tried to clear my mind, when...

“There’s no need for you to worry about L, Rekka,” R said, interrupting me.

I pulled out my phone again.

Why not?

“Like I said before, this has nothing to do with your bloodline, so I will deal with L myself,” R said flatly, pulling her hat down so I couldn’t see her eyes.

Even though she said that...

I stealthily pointed my index finger so that only R could see it. She turned to look in the direction I was pointing, where L was hiding—or trying to hide—behind a stand, clearly tailing me. Oh, she just dropped something and was getting scolded by the stand owner.

R and I exchanged looks silently. While the piranha before really did surprise me, I was starting to doubt whether such a clumsy girl really needed to be “dealt with.”

After that, L continued to interfere—replacing the ring toss rings with chakrams, sneaking a strange white powder into my cotton candy, and such—but didn’t cause much trouble on the whole.

“I feel like I keep seeing the same girl around.”

“R-Really?”

If anything, I was having more trouble coming up with excuses to give Satsuki and the others about it. They would worry if I told them I was nearly assassinated, and I didn’t know if I should tell them about the War of All in the future, so I kept quiet about L.

“...Oh? It’s already eight.”

Over an hour had passed by in the blink of an eye. With our curious group gathered, I’d been dragged straight from one place to another. Before I realized it, we were in the full swing of the festival. The fireworks were supposed to start at nine o’clock... Would Rain and the others make it? Just as I was wondering about them, I felt the sensation of something soft squishing up against my back.

“Rekka... I’m tired.”

“Ack! There you go again trying to seduce Rekka with your oversized

peaches!"

"...Peaches? If it's Momo you're looking for, she's over there..."

No, Tokiwa, that wasn't what Rosalind was talking about at all...

"You know, if you're overwhelmed by the crowd, you should take a break," I suggested to Tokiwa, whose face seemed rather pale from what I could see as she crawled up on my back.

"...Yeah. Since it's a special occasion, I wanted to stay with you, though..."

It was hard to deny her when she put it that way, but I couldn't afford to carry her on my back until the end, either... mostly because of Rosalind's mood.

"Oh, um... that's right! Tsumiki and Tetra said they were helping out at a stall, right? Let's check it out!"

It was an obvious ploy to change the subject, but thankfully no one had any objections, and we all made our way over to the stall from the shopping street.

"Oh, if it isn't Rekka."

"Rekka!"

Tsumiki and Tetra were on promoting duty when they saw us and waved.

"What's up? You guys busy?"

"There was a long line before, but things have calmed down now. You might as well buy something while you're here."

"What are you selling, anyway?"

"Kebabs."

"Heck yeah!"

I asked to see if the girls wanted any, but surprisingly few of them did—only Chelsea and Corona.

"Um... we've eaten a lot already."

"Too many calories, you know?"

"I've had enough greasy food..."

The rest of them all just said the same things. It seemed like they were all on the same page, except for Hibiki, who looked like she wanted some, but reluctantly gave up after counting something on her fingers.

“I’m always active, so I don’t really worry about things like that.”

“I’ve never worried about such things before in my life.”

And so Chelsea, Corona, and I ordered kebabs for three.

“Coming right up! Lea, three skewers!”

“Roger that.”

“Wait, Lea’s the one grilling them?”

“Huh? What, you didn’t notice?”

I couldn’t see her through all the smoke from the grill until she started waving it away to say hi.

“I heard you came with Tsumiki and Tetra, but I didn’t think you were helping out, too.”

“I’ve been asked to help out at other places, too, so I’m making my way around.”

“Sales always are always up when Lea helps out,” Tsumiki added.

“And all the other stores said I could eat their leftovers once the night is over,” Lea said as she flipped a kebab over happily.

How typical of Lea to be lured in by food...

“Okay, these are done,” she said.

“Thanks.”

We handed over the money and got our kebabs.

“Ooh! Delicious!”

“You’re using some good meat.”

“This is pretty different from meat in the demon world.”

We each gave our opinions as we chowed down on the kebabs. As I was

eating, Lea beckoned me closer. I leaned in, wondering what she wanted.

“It’s actually not beef; it’s my meat.”

“Ack!”

Leviathan meat was meant to be an offering for the gods! No wonder it was so good! Lea grinned like a child that had pulled off the perfect prank. I was about to say something in return, when suddenly...

“Mmph! Mmph!”

I heard a muffled voice from behind the stand that made me freeze on the spot.

“Lea, is there someone back there?”

“Hmm? Yeah, there is.”

She retreated to the back for a moment, then came out again holding a tied-up L by the scruff of her neck.



"I caught her over there just a while ago. She's been causing mischief all over the place."

"Hmph! Mmrgh!"

L was murmuring something from under her gag and glaring at me with somewhat tearful eyes.

"Yeah, about that... Lea, could I borrow that for a second?"

"I don't mind."

I took L from Lea and headed for a secluded place away from everyone else.



We ended up in front of the main building of the community center, a fair distance away from the festival grounds. The center itself was closed, so there was no sign of anyone around.

"Pwah!"

I removed the gag from L, who didn't say anything despite all her mumbling earlier. She just stared at me.

"Um..."

Ah, crap... I hadn't really thought about what I was going to say, either. Maybe start with an opener?

"Hey, L."

"Don't act familiar with me, world's worst womanizer."

"Okay..."

What was I supposed to do? That hurt more than I'd expected. As I was reeling from being insulted right out of the gate, R stepped forward.

"L, stop this already. You are not capable of assassinating Rekka."

"What?! Are you saying I should give up? That I'm inferior to you?!" L yelled with all her emotions bared.

But R just calmly replied, “It’s only natural that I would have superior abilities to you.”

“What did you say...?!”

“L, we are artificial life forms. That makes us manufactured products. It’s natural for the newest generation to have higher specs than older models. You could say that’s the whole point. New versions are evolutions achieved by continuous optimization and refinement, after all.”

“H-Hey, R...”

What R was saying made logical sense, but it was a heartless way of putting it. I tried to stop her, but L’s rage lashed out first.

“What... What’s with that?! I was the one who was meant to take that mission!”

“...And so you decided to side with those trying to eliminate Rekka because you were removed from the mission? Just stop.”

Huh? Was it just me, or did R seem a little angry...? She was her usual expressionless self, sure, but she legit sounded kinda mad. No, I had to worry about mediating between these two before anything else.

“Why don’t you both calm down first, you two?”

I stepped between them with my back facing L, and then I heard something snap behind me. I turned around to see L had cut through the rope restraining her with a kunai and was making a break for it... right up until her geta strap snapped, sending her hurtling into the ground.

“...”

Did she hit her head? She was silently lying on the concrete...

“You okay?” I ran over to her and helped her up. “Ah, you skinned yourself a bit. I’ll get Satsuki or Harissa to heal you up—”

“D-Don’t touch me!”

L slapped my hand away and took a few steps back. She must have been

embarrassed. Her cheeks were pretty red.

“Y-You have no reason to be treating me nicely!” she screeched before disappearing like she had in my bedroom the night before.

“Seems I failed to convince her...” R mumbled.

“Convince her? It sounded like you were provoking her.”

“Huh... You think so?” R did several midair somersaults before quietly saying, “I guess I’m not as good at this as you are.”

In that moment, she had a rare moment of truly looking like a girl her age, which made me regret what I’d just said. But I pulled myself together.

“The fireworks start at nine. Let’s go back to the others.”

“...Right.”

We left the lot and headed back to the festival where everyone else was.



After telling Lea that L had gone home after promising to never cause trouble again, we got back to the business of enjoying the festival.

“Hey, Brother Rekka!”

“Rekka.”

“Fam, Rain.”

It wasn’t long before we ran into Fam and Rain—who were finally done with Fam’s homework—as well as their guardians, Shirley and Garnet.

“We somehow made it in time for the fireworks.”

“I’m glad. You sure must’ve had some holdup, huh?” I asked a somewhat shaken Shirley.

“Fam hadn’t touched most of the more time-consuming tasks, like her research project. We had to start by searching for projects that could be done in half a day, then find a way to motivate her into doing them... I’m exhausted.”

“Wow, good work.”

Shirley could probably do a middle school science project in her sleep, but as

a teacher, her greatest struggle was motivating a reluctant Fam to do it for herself. And despite what Fam had accomplished over the last day, it seemed like Shirley might really be the one deserving of praise.

“Would you like a sip of this? I mean, if you don’t mind that I’ve already drunk out of it...”

I offered her some of my half-finished slushie. The drink in the pouch was a mixture of sweet juice and crushed ice, making it perfect for the fun mood of the festival.

“Thank you.”

There was a sparkle in her bespectacled eyes as Shirley accepted the slushie from me and put her lips to the straw.

“Aaaaaah!”

For some reason, the other girls around me started screaming, but Shirley continued to sip with a refreshed expression. After drinking most of the bag, she let out a big sigh.

“I feel like all my stress from today has been released,” she announced grandly.

“That’s so unfair, Sister Shirley!”

“Don’t make a fuss, Fam. I’ll buy you one, too.”

“That’s not the issue!” Fam shouted, stamping her feet.

“Hmph...”

Rain, who was standing next to her, looked like she was about to throw a tantrum, too.

“U-Um... The fireworks should be going up soon. Shall we hurry to the baseball field?”

The stalls were all set up along the track and field area of the community center, while the adjacent baseball field was what would be used for the fireworks. It was where our school’s baseball team did a lot of their training. The fireworks would be launched from the pitcher’s mound, while the

spectators would either sit in the stands or watch the dancing lights in the sky from the bank around the outside of the field. We arrived early enough to secure stand seats, but we took up a good amount of space with the whole group of us.

“Should we bring a picnic blanket and watch from the bank next year?”

“That’d probably be better,” I said, agreeing with Satsuki, who was seated next to me.

“How about we watch from the sky in my spaceship next year? Just the two of us!” Iris suggested, leaning in over Satsuki.

While watching from the sky sounded nice, just the two of us was a little... But I couldn't say that out loud with her chest pressing against my arm!

“Or do you want to do it this year? If you wait here, I can bring my spaceship over right away!”

“Oh, Iris! Don’t say such selfish things,” scolded Satsuki.

“That’s right, Iris. Hogging Rekka to yourself isn’t nice,” chimed in Chelsea.

I felt a little like I’d been rescued. Until...

“Hey, Iris is going to steal Rekka. Don’t just sit there, Hibiki! Say something!” chided Chelsea.

“Huh? Wah!” Hibiki yelped as Chelsea slapped her back.

With that, Hibiki, who was sitting behind me, pitched forward and smacked into me.

“H-Hibiki?!”

“S-Sorry! Are you okay?”

I was fine but, umm... her unexpectedly large breasts were pressed right up against the back of my head, making me sweat profusely. Not to mention the nice smell tickling my nose...

“Hmph!”

“Gwah?!”

Two elbows jabbed into me from both sides.

“Good grief,” R sighed, just as the fireworks were launched.

Kaboom!

“Eeeeek!”

Sophie squealed at the sound of the fireworks and clung to her sister’s arm.

Pow!

But her expression changed from fear to surprise when she saw the dancing lights in the sky. The spirit sisters weren’t the only ones in awe, either. Aliens, mole people, demons... Considering how varied our group was, this was the first time a lot of them had seen fireworks. Granted, I thought they were amazing too, even though I’d seen them every year.

The shells the pyrotechnician loaded into the mortar on the mound would launch into the air with a bang. Seconds later, a fire flower would bloom in sky. There was really only one way to describe it: beautiful. Both the spectators in the stands and on the bank looked up in wonder at the final fireworks of the summer together. It was sort of like a herald of the end of summer vacation, which made them almost a little sad. And just as the show was almost over, the most amazing thing yet happened.

“...!”

I thought I heard something struggling. The fireworks had distracted most of the others from noticing, but a few of them realized that something strange was happening on the mound while we waited for the next firework. It was hard to see in the dark, but it looked like there was a scuffle. Someone was throwing a fit. It looked like they were surrounded by adults trying to hold them down. And the one responsible for said tantrum was none other than...

“...L?!”

My eyes shot open wide as she took something out of her red sleeve with a snap, causing the pyrotechnicians trying to catch her to collapse all at once. She had probably used some kind of futuristic technology on them. With her

freedom secured, L approached the firework-launching mortar and—just as I was wondering what she was up to—used all of her strength to knock it over sideways. The mortar mouth was now pointed right at where we were sitting in the stands.

“Kyaaah!”

“Whoa! That’s dangerous!”

The people who saw what was happening started to scream, causing a panic to break out. L paid no mind to them as she stood on the mound, lit a match, and threw it into the mortar... but nothing happened. While that in itself was fortunate, the problem came afterward.

She was probably wondering why the shell hadn’t launched, but L got up from her crouched position, uncovered her ears, and walked around to the front of the mortar to peer inside.

“That idiot!”

This type of mortar had gunpowder inside that ignited to launch the fireworks. Things would be fine if the match she threw in had extinguished itself before reaching the bottom... but what if it hadn’t? What if it just hadn’t reached the end of the mortar yet? Or what if something caused the gunpowder to ignite?

“Rekka?!”

Someone called my name, but I ignored them as I pushed through the confused crowd trying to scatter. If the gunpowder ignited and launched the shell, L would be in serious danger where she was standing! That alone drove me forward in a daring leap from the stands to the baseball field.

“Bweh!”

It was dark, so my landing was a little clumsy. But now wasn’t the time to be worried about that—I lifted my head from my sprawled position on the ground. When I did, I saw a flash of light from within the mortar. From there on out, it was like everything happened in slow motion. Like time itself had warped and slowed. It was impossible for me to reach the mound and save L from where I was in the corner of the field. Even if I had superhuman speed like Iris or

Rosalind, it would still be impossible. Not even my magic-wielding friends could have made it in time. But there was still one person who could save L!

“R!”

Could I have shouted her name in time in that slow-motion world? Who knows... But it didn't matter, because the exact same thought had occurred to R already. The shield she used to protect me from L's attack activated to wrap around the mortar in the distance. The explosion was restrained to the semi-transparent blue cocoon. It didn't even singe L, who was standing right in front of it. The shield capable of negating weapons from the future completely suppressed the explosive force of the firework. It even nullified the shock wave from the blast—not even one of the sleeves on L's red kimono fluttered.

“Hahh...”

I exhaled all the air in my lungs in relief as my sense of time returned to normal. Perhaps my sigh was audible, as L whipped around with wide eyes locked on me and R.

“...!”

She then turned the other way and ran away from the mound, disappearing into the night. I didn't care about me, but I would've liked to hear her at least thank R... Oh, well. At least we were safe.

“Thank you, R. You saved us.”

I hadn't even had time to ask her to do it. R had moved completely of her own will, saving not only L, but all the spectators from harm. Perhaps R had considered L's clumsiness, foreseen the accident, and made preparations to counteract it before I had even moved. That was just how skillful she was.

“It's nothing worth thanking me for,” R replied curtly and adjusted the hat on her head.



After miraculously overcoming that last incident without any injury, the year's summer festival came to a close. And safely, for the most part. All that was left was to head home, but the police stopped me for questioning because I had

seen the perpetrator up close. I asked everyone else to go on ahead of me, and answered all I could with the other pyrotechnicians. All told, it took about 30 minutes.

By then, there were barely any people left around. Only the festival workers who were cleaning up afterward were still on the grounds. I cast a sidelong glance at the people closing up their stands as I left the community center. There was nobody outside along the road up to the community center, either. All the visitors had long since left, while those cleaning up had yet to do so. Perhaps precisely because it was that liminal moment...

“Whew...”

The surroundings were too quiet. I exhaled loudly in what may or may not have been a sigh. I had a feeling this would happen. I spotted it immediately—that red kimono peeking from the shadow of a utility pole.

“I can see you.”

“Hwuh?!”

After a small squeal, L revealed herself hesitantly. She had a rather awkward expression. I waited for her to speak.

“...Why did you save me?”

“Anyone would have done the same,” I answered with a shrug.

“Liar! I came to erase you, you know? Why would you save someone like that...”

“That’s just the kind of person Rekka is,” R answered. “He’s the type of person to move instinctively when he encounters situations like that. He’s exactly as the doctor described to us...”

L reacted to the word “doctor” with a twitch.

“L, I don’t know what you’ve been told or by whom... But who do you think you should trust more: the person who told you to kill this gullible idiot, or the doctor who told you to protect him?”

“Shut up! Don’t talk about that person before me!” L suddenly raged, glaring at R furiously.

"By that person, do you mean the doctor? Why would you say that? The doctor was really worried when you disappeared."

"Lies! The doctor threw me away!" L continued to shake her head, denying R's words "We were created to save the future, you know?! That's what we were designed for! What we were trained for! And... And the doctor took that away from me! That means I have no purpose anymore!"

Suzuran's face suddenly flashed through my mind. Before Suzuran was Suzuran, she was a homunculus named Silver Slayer. Her body was made of quicksilver—a vampire's weakness—and like her namesake suggested, she was created to slay them. L seemed to be in a similar situation. She'd been created for a single purpose, but that job had been taken away by her little sister. I couldn't even imagine how crushed she must have been by that.

That was probably how the one R said was "pulling the strings" took advantage of L's dejection. It may have been a different method, but it was still a mission to "save the future" that they'd given her.

"L, the agency did not remove you from your mission with ill intent. The doctor simply..."

"Shut up! You don't understand how I feel! How a reject like me feels...!"

"..."

"The doctor threw me away because my specs were lower than yours, no?! I'm a useless reject... That's why I was tossed in the protected residential division!"

"Just stop it already." R's attitude suddenly changed as she shut L down.

"R?"

R ignored me and approached L in a careless—near defenseless—way, and then grabbed her by the collar.

"Useless reject, lower specs... As if the doctor would abandon you over things like that! There's no way I would abandon you over that!"

R was shouting with all her emotions on full display, and her roar made L cower. She must have been pretty shocked, too... I'd never heard R talk like

that.

“It’s true that after you were transferred to the protected residential division, the doctor got too busy with my final adjustments to visit you. But the doctor was still always thinking about you! And when I went to visit you after my adjustments were completed...”

“Sh-Shut up!” L smacked away R’s hand as she stumbled over her words, then distanced herself.

“L!”

“I won’t be fooled by your words! I’m going to save the future and prove my worth on my own!” L yelled at R.

She then started to disperse into particles, but before she disappeared, she pointed at me and said, “I’m *never* going to give up!”

Now only R—who had just stiffened up—and me were left on the dark street.

“R.”

“...It seems I really can’t do it as well as you, Rekka,” she muttered as she adjusted her hat. Then she did a flip in the air and regained her typical expressionless demeanor. “Now, let’s hurry back home. Harissa’s waiting.”

“Y-Yeah.”

I descended the hill with R moving at her usual place by my side. We were both silent for a while, but then...

“Hey, R...”

“What is it?”

“What are you going to do about L?”

“Who knows?”

“Don’t say that...”

“Oh, don’t worry. I’ll be sure to protect you if L tries to target you again.”

“That’s not what I mean...”

“Well, there’s nothing else to be done with someone so stubborn,” R said,

casting her eyes downward.

“She’ll be back before long, knowing her.”

“I’ll try convince her again when she does.”

“I see...”

If R wasn’t giving up, then it would probably be fine.

“But let me know if there’s anything I can do to help, okay? I’ll try persuading her, too.”

“Oh, really?” For some reason, R got a gleam in her eye when I said that.

“Then once we return home, sleep with Harissa.”

“Wh-What?!” I spluttered loudly, completely flustered.

“Didn’t you say you’d help me? If you would just put an end to my story and stop the War of All, L would have no reason to target you anymore. Everything would be solved, and that’d be that.”

“Ugh...”

“What are you grumbling about? You even celebrated your engagement in Harissa’s hometown the other day. Now go enjoy your spousal privileges.”

“Th-That was just a friendly visit! Harissa never said anything in the end, anyway...”

“That’s because you didn’t seal the deal. But whatever. I can settle for a summer fling instead. Let’s head to Iris’s spaceship immediately.”

“We can’t do that, either!”

“Oh? Are you saying you won’t be satisfied with just one? Then we can visit Rosalind’s mansion and Rain’s place, too...”

“That’s not the problem!”

—Fin—

R's Special Mission: Final Report

"Thus concludes my report."

I informed my superior of the investigation report I had just transmitted, containing all the information I had gathered on the heroines until now. With that, my special mission should have been completed, but...

"Wait, R."

"What is it?"

It was pointless, but I feigned ignorance anyway.

"Why did you let L escape?"

I knew I had that question coming.

"She had a particle relocator in her possession."

"Taking into account your abilities and equipment, it should have been possible to apprehend her before she used the particle relocator."

"..."

"Why did you purposefully let her escape?"

Well, I seemed to be in a bit of a pinch. It didn't look like I could talk myself out of this one. I had at least 20 frivolous excuses prepared, but each one only had a fifty-fifty chance of working. What to do...?

"Intentionally allowing a hostile to escape is a severe breach of orders. You will be dismissed immediately if you are deemed to be unsuitable for the mission."

"All right, that's enough."

Just then, my superior and I were interrupted by a third party cutting in on the chat log. There were only letters displayed on the screen, but I knew it was...

"Doctor?"

“Ding, ding, ding! As expected of my daughter. You knew right away.”

There was no mistaking it. This lighthearted tone had to be the doctor—the one who'd created both me and L.

“Doctor, you may be one of the leaders of the agency, but this is a breach of protocol—”

“What are you pretending to be so calm for? The jig is up, you fool.”

Jig? What was going on?

“It’s been revealed that you guys were the ones who betrayed the agency, kidnapped L, and sent her as an assassin.”

“...”

“You sure had some guts using my daughter like that, you rotten bastards. A neutralizing squad will be there within three seconds, just you wait.”

“W—”

The messages from my superior cut off there.

“Good grief, what scum...”

“Doctor. What’s the meaning of this?”

“It’s exactly what it sounds like. Humanity remains the same no matter how much time passes. I’m still investigating whether or not they were bribed, but they were the ones who took L out of the protected residential division and handed her to the other side.”

“I see. Were they the ones who sent L to this time period, as well?”

“I believe they were involved somehow. But it was reckless of them. The space-time translocator isn’t something that can be easily operated. Calculating the rewind of a constantly flowing variable like time, approximating a time line, securing four-dimensional coordinates—both pre-computed and in real time... Do they realize just how complicated that all is? No one other than me could possibly do it all properly.”

“I see. But at least I understand now.”

“Understand what?”

“This ‘special mission’ of mine.”

It was probably a ploy to separate me from Rekka and make him an easier target for assassination. L had mentioned that her immediate contact with Rekka was an unforeseen circumstance, which meant she was initially supposed to be teleported elsewhere. Then she would just have to wait for me to leave Rekka’s side so she could assassinate him. The reason why my special mission was given the oddly long deadline of “until the end of summer” was probably because they had issues getting the space-time translocator working perfectly, just like the doctor suggested. They only had a rough estimate of where they’d be sending L back to, so they were just trying to keep me busy for a while. If they’d specified the month, day, hour, and minute precisely, then they’d have to make sure I wasn’t with Rekka at that exact moment—which they couldn’t necessarily do. In the end, their inability to operate the space-time translocator properly had led to the downfall of their plan.

“I’ve got the general gist of what’s going on now. Do you know who’s behind this, by any chance?”

“No, unfortunately. Not even I have the faintest clue. The agency is investigating to the best of its ability, though.”

“Oh, well.”

Though they may have had the help from my former superior, we were dealing with someone good enough to hide L from the agency, after all. It wouldn’t be that easy to identify them.

“All right. I’ll leave the investigations to you, Doctor. I will continue my mission.”

“You got it, girl. Oh, I had something I wanted to ask you, R.”

“What is it?”

“Why did you let L escape?”

“...”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong. I’m not mad; I’m just curious. L was right in front of you, and you had the ability to catch her. So why not do it?”

“While the particulars are unknown, L technically assisted an opposing entity and betrayed the agency.”

I decided there was no need to lie to the doctor and spoke honestly.

“On top of that, I failed in trying to talk her down, and she continues to stubbornly target Rekka. I deduced that the agency would deal with her appropriately if I were to apprehend her in that state.”

“So you wanted to win her over and get her to at least offer the agency information about who was behind all this? That is why you delayed capturing her?”

I hadn't gone into that much detail with what I typed, but the doctor read between the lines.

“All right, all right. I get it. Leave the convincing in the future to me. You focus on convincing L. Oh, and I don't mind if you punish the runaway daughter a little. Mother will allow it.”

“Understood,” I replied with a wry smile. “And also... I have something I'd like to ask you too, Doctor.”

“Hmm? What's up?”

“If I recall correctly, during my pre-education stage, you said I had to know about how Rekka's... how the male mind was charmed by the female chest. You had a lot of graphic references, too.”

“Indeed. I made sure you had all the materials you'd need. You didn't have any interest at first, but you eventually got so into it you started to reach for m—”

“That's irrelevant right now.”

I put a stop to the doctor's trip down memory lane right there.

“When you showed me the footage, I asked you why my chest was flat, to which you replied: 'If Observer R had a big and charming chest, the target Rekka Namidare would be constantly in agony.' Is that right?”

“That's what I said.”

That answer made perfect sense. My mission was to have Rekka choose a

heroine—not me—in order to save the future, after all. It would have been a hindrance to my mission if he developed desires for me. And I had accepted all this.

“However, when I made contact with L the other day, I discovered her bust size was set two centimeters larger than mine.”

“Oh, my.”

“Don’t give me that. There’s no mistaking my scanner readings. What’s the meaning of this? L was meant to take the same mission I did. What is the reason for the discrepancy?”

“Sounds like you’ve finally reached that age, huh? Being bothered about things like this...”

Excuse me? What was this phony mother saying?

“I’m not bothered. I’m just questioning why such a design flaw occurred.”

“It’s not a flaw, per se. Maybe L just grew up?”

“Kiklim are artificial life forms. Growth is impossible.”

“Even artificial life forms can grow up. How else would your heart grow into worrying about things like this?”

“...!”

It really shouldn’t be possible, but that declaration sounded so certain that I could hardly say a word in return. Come to think of it... L had a really colorful range of emotions for a Kiklim. Was that because she had “grown up”?

“I can’t believe my precious R is worried about the size of her chest... Is this puberty?”

“I’m only 12 years old.”

“Heh. At any rate, I’m glad to see you have more emotions compared to before. I’m so happy you turned out to be a nice girl.”

I could feel the affection in the text from the other side of the screen. It really did seem like moods could transcend time and space.

“That’s because I’m your daughter.”

I sent that message to the future containing all of my affection.

“All right. You take care of yourself now, you hear?”

“You too, Doctor.”

The semi-transparent display screen disappeared after that last message.

“Now then...”

“Hmm?”

Rekka had been reading a magazine on his bed, and reacted to the first thing I said out loud in a while “What’s wrong, R?”

“No, it’s nothing,” I answered while looking at Rekka’s face. “Something just crossed my mind all of a sudden. Let’s do our best.”

—Fin—

Afterword

This was volume nine of the battlefield love comedy, bringing you a summer vacation full of mostly suspense and little bit of vacation. Hello again to the readers returning from volume eight, and it's nice to meet all of you who bought all nine volumes at once.

While volumes seven and eight also occurred during summer vacation, this time the story revolves around a more traditional take on high school summer vacation. You know, the usual. Baseball, training camps, yokai exterminations, pools, pools, and more pools.

And it was full of heroines in swimsuits that weren't revealed last time (volume five)! Watanuki designed numerous wonderful swimsuits for this volume (I may have been a little selfish and requested more swimsuit illustrations...). Personally, I am wholly and utterly satisfied that we were able to include the swimsuits of the "last bosses," as R put it. Make sure to check that out right away if you haven't read it yet! Volume nine of *Little Apocalypse* is also my tenth volume as the author Namekojirushi. I only realized that as I was writing this afterword, but I was kind of touched. It's all thanks to you readers who support me. Thank you all so very, very much.

When I first released volume one of *Little Apocalypse*, I wondered if it would last, but somehow... the series has been around for, uh, what? Two years now? This is also all thanks to... You all know the drill now.

And now for the acknowledgments. Firstly, to Nao Watanuki, whose continually diverse character design has allowed *Little Apocalypse* to continue as it has... I mentioned it earlier, but the lovely swimsuit illustrations and various summer vacation scenes were illustrated in the best way possible. Thank you very much.

To my editor, Mr. Nanbu, who's been looking after me since my debut, thank you very much. Also to the comic author Koji Hasegawa; the editing and sales departments at HJ Bunko; the bookstores; and the readers who are supporting

Little Apocalypse, I hope you'll continue reading.

And finally, a little self-promotion! I have actually started a new series concurrent to this one at Fujimi Fantasia Bunko. The illustrations will be done by the well-known Youta, who draws cute, sexy, cool, and beautiful artwork. The first volume will probably be released next month in October. Please check the Fujimi Shobo homepage, Twitter, or *Dragon Magazine* for further details. I hope you'll enjoy my new series, too.

Well, that's all for now. See you next volume, where we enter the second stage of Rekka's battle.

This is Nao Watanuki. Sorry for the messy writing.

How did you enjoy volume 9? There were quite a few illustrations dedicated to the swimsuits in this volume. I really hope I was able to bring out the charms of the heroines well.

(Personally, I liked the innocent scenes where they were selecting swimsuits more than when they were actually wearing them.) Our sketch this time around is the unexpected return of the nekomata, Ai. Since volume 3, the number of different species in Rekka's town has grown to be on par with any other world.

The other new character, L, was in tears for the whole volume, so I hope she has less pitiful scenes in the future.

[Bubble] To Namekojirushi and all the editors, thank you for your hard work and consideration in the deadlines! Also, I received fanmail! Though they were addressed to the author. They came with drawings of Rosalind and R, and I enjoyed reading them very much. I wanted to use this space to give my thanks. It's the middle of summer right now just like in the story, and I hope we can meet again in the next afterward in a different season.

[Text below bubble] Mr. K.T of K, thank you very much!



挿絵担当・和狸ナオと申します。
舌文乱筆ご失礼します。

9巻いかがござしたでしょうか、水着にかなりのページを
割いた巻になったと思いますが、
ヒロイン達の魅力がうまく
引き出せているコトを願います。

(個人的にはむしろ着るより
選んでいる時が、いじらしくて
好きなシーンだったりするのですが!)

ラフは猫又のアイです。3巻以来の
思わぬ再登場で、烈火の住む街も
異世界に負けない位、いろんな種族で
にぎやかになってきたなあ、と感じます。

新キャラのエリは今回涙目ばかりだったのと、いつか
可哀想でない展開も巡ってくるコトを期待しております。

なめこ印先生・編集様方、お疲れ様でした。
スケジュールにもご配慮頂き本当に助かっております...!
それから先生宛ですが、ファンレターが届きました~♪
ロザリンド&アールのイラスト付きで大変嬉しく読ませて
頂きました。この場を借りて御礼申し上げます。
本編同様夏真、盛りぞですが
またあとがきで元気にお会いできれば幸いです。

和狸ナオ 拝

水着は
カニタニなキ
ラインが入
色は濃い

K県K.Tさん
ありがとうございます!

コマタ



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I Saved Too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse: Volume 9

by Namekojirushi

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Original Japanese edition published in 2013 by Hobby Japan This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo English translation © 2018 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: August 2018