

Author  
**Nora Kohigashi**

Illustrator  
**Wasabi**

# I Could Never Be a Succubus!

Volume  
**2**





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Liz had on a  
white dress and  
a straw sun hat.

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Rachel's face  
was red.

"I'll come  
with you!"



"I'm the one  
who invited  
you here."

Aina's eyes  
sharpened as  
she glared at me.







Perhaps the size wasn't a complete match, as she put a hand to her chest, bashfully fidgeting as she looked up at everyone with upturned eyes.

There stood an angel. Melvy was wearing the same black negligee as me.

"H-How do I look?"





"Someone ought to set you straight!"

"Boss!"

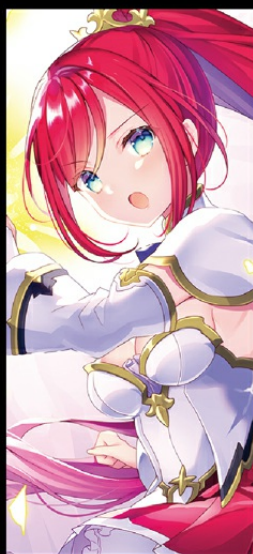
Snap! The sound of the whip echoed through the air.

Irma's face was red and blissful. She was bound in a tortoiseshell rope harness over her clothing, but her heart had never been so free.



# Characters

## OVERVIEW



### Sylphonia

The proud Princess Knight and a member of the hero's party. Princess of the nation of Bahelgarn.



### Lisalinde

A pure and well-mannered girl. She's actually a succubus, but she has lost her memories and powers.



### Cain

The hero fighting against the demon lord. He has opted to stay in the academy until his comrades' wounds have fully healed.



### Melvy

A white mage and a member of the hero's part. Also the canonized Saint by the Russel-Bell Sect.



### Rachel

A mighty hammer-toting warrior and a member of the hero's party. Confident and strong-willed.



### Aina

A flashy girl who is desperate to head her own clique within the academy. She sees Lisalinde as her sworn enemy.



# Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 15: Now—Erotic Clothes for Saint Melvy](#)

[Chapter 16: Then—The Super High-Tech Clothing of the New World](#)

[Chapter 17: Now—The Temptation of the Great Warrior, Rachel](#)

[Chapter 18: Then—The Trials of Great Warrior Rachel](#)

[Chapter 19: Now—The Super Spicy Carrot and the Sickly Sweet Stick](#)

[Chapter 20: Then—“S” Stands for the Search for Love](#)

[Chapter 21: Now—Aina and the Journalist](#)

[Chapter 22: Then—The Magician Could Never Make It Big](#)

[Chapter 23: Now—Just Two Friends in the Gym Storage Room](#)

[Chapter 24: Then—Liz and the Date](#)

[Chapter 25: Now—The Soul Quivers Once More](#)

[Chapter 26: Now—And Good Night Once Again](#)

[Chapter 27: Now—Terrifying Succubus-Style Healing](#)

[Chapter 28: Then—Ten Portions Is Nothing](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)



# Prologue

A single blinding light shone from out of the darkness. As the veil of night covered the sky and enveloped the world, this dazzling light continued to emanate from a large building. The building's warm colors spread across the darkness, painting over it with a faded silhouette.

Lively voices could be heard from within. The sound of merry laughter, the beautiful melodies of piano and violin. Soft sounds that delighted the ear.

This building was part of Forst Academy, a school with a long and traditional history. And today in the academy's prided auditorium, a large party was being held.

Everyone was dressed to the nines as they enjoyed the lavish offerings: a standing buffet of dishes flush with gourmet ingredients cooked to perfection. Although this extravagant atmosphere was so different from the norm as to put everyone a bit on edge, the academy students enjoyed it to their hearts' content.

Red, blue, and black—cloth of various colors spun this way and that among the dances, adding vibrant hues to the hall. These dresses and suits, assembled by craftspeople of the highest order, made the girls far more beautiful, and the men far more gallant.

In what seemed to be a celebration of youth itself, the students immersed themselves in the festivities, their cheeks tinged red with drink.

The academy was the educational facility that the country had invested most in. Unlike the parties held at normal schools, famed scholars and other noteworthy personnel had been invited to participate. Thus, the students were able to form connections with these important figures and widen their networks for the sake of their futures.

It was no exaggeration to say that the nation's dignity hinged on these dazzling festivities, though perhaps this fact was shrouded beneath all the



enjoyment found in the evening's spectacles.

"Ah, look. It's her..."

"Oh, how beautiful..."

Within all of this, there was a girl who drew more eyes than most.

She wore a white dress, her long, airy blonde hair trailing behind her. She had a captivating face, her beauty causing not only men, but women to lock their eyes onto her as well. Even in the boisterous party hall, the girl gave off a sense of elegance as she greeted people, as she ate. Every gesture was elegant and enthralling—her perfect manners a template for all others in attendance.

"Lady Lisalinde is as lovely as ever," someone muttered.

Indeed, Lisalinde was this girl's name. At the academy, she was known for her top grades and irreproachable conduct. On top of this, she had a noble pedigree, her looks both dainty and elegant. She was practically perfect—and there were many on the campus who admired her.

As she now wore a white dress instead of her usual uniform, her purity was more marked than ever. The fine lace and embroidery all across the dress brought out her ladylike modesty, her soft blonde hair glistening like gold against it.

They couldn't help it. Everyone was entranced by her.

"She's so pristine... She's like an angel," muttered a girl who found herself staring.

Pure and sweet. Beautiful as an angel, and popular to boot. That was Lisalinde.

"Liz."

"Ah..."

There was a man who would dare call Lisalinde by her nickname?

"Sir Cain."

"Good evening to you, Liz."

When Liz turned, she was met with the refreshing smile of a young man. He



was tall with black hair, and his name was Cain.

He was a man who bore a vital duty—the shining star of hope who would fend off the demons and bring peace to the world. The hero. From his almond eyes, one could feel the strength and pride he had cultivated over his life of battle.

Cain had earned respect from all around the world, and it went without saying that it was no different at the academy. Everyone stared at the hero, spellbound.

“How is it, Sir Cain? Are you enjoying the party?” asked Lisalinde.

“Yes, it’s quite fun, but it’s only been a month since I’ve come to this academy. I must admit, I still feel like a special guest here.”

“Oh dear.”

Cain rolled his shoulders as if he was trying to loosen up his body. Lisalinde could sense what he was implying—as the famous hero, it was quite a hassle to go around greeting all the VIP visitors.

“You’re doing a good job. But it’s not so easy for the students either, you know. I helped out a lot with the arrangements for this party.”

“That does sound rough.”

Liz and Cain shared a high-class laugh. As they began to enjoy this conversation, another two women entered the fray.

“Hey, Liz. Good evening.”

“Good evening, Liz.”

“Ah... Sylphie, Melvy. Good evening.”

The ones who appeared were the country’s princess, Sylphie, and the Saint of the Grand Cathedral, Melvy. They were both Cain’s comrades in arms and valiant warriors who fought against the mighty forces of evil.

But standing here, they looked like no more than girls enjoying the party, just as any girls their age would.

“What do you think about our academy’s parties? Pretty luxurious, right?”



“Yes, I’m honestly surprised. Of all the many parties I’ve taken part in before, this academy ranks quite highly.”

“Umm, umm... I-I spent a long time at the convent, so... These flashy parties make my eyes spin...”

“Oh...so that’s why you packed your plate with so much food. You have a larger appetite than I thought, Melvy.”

“Erk...”

Melvy was holding a plate piled with a mountain of food, wholeheartedly partaking in the delicious flavors. But once this was pointed out, her face turned red, and she bashfully hung her head.

*Was I not supposed to say that?* Liz wondered with a wry smile. “Still, Sylphie, Melvy, your dresses suit you both very well,” Liz complimented.

Sylphie was wearing a deep red dress, a nice complement to her blazing red hair. Her hair—which was usually tied back in a ponytail—had been let down, a look that Liz found refreshing.

Melvy, on the other hand, was wearing a black dress to contrast her own white hair. Her normal, innocent image as a saint was somewhat diminished, a rather bewitching aura in its place.

It was amazing how much an outfit could change the impressions they gave off.







As a matter of fact, many attending the party could look at nothing but these rare forms of the heroes.

“Hmm? You think so? Thanks.”

“Umm, umm, I think yours looks good on you too, Liz.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

They praised one another, but Liz’s interest actually lay elsewhere. Her eyes unconsciously shifted towards Cain in his formal suit.

It was a suit tailor-made for his tall build. There was not the slightest bit of slack, and when placed over his muscular body, it gave him quite the dashing impression. His necktie was properly tightened and he had a refined presence to him. The aura of this fierce warrior fit well with his suit.

Just looking at him was enough to bring a heat and a redness to Liz’s cheeks. She naturally grew nervous, her head hanging a bit to prevent herself from looking at him. Yet still she couldn’t contain her curiosity—she’d take just a little peek, only to embarrassedly avert her eyes again.

This happened again and again on repeat.

“What’s wrong, Liz?”

“Huh?! ”

Cain called out, sensing something was clearly wrong with her. And Liz’s body perked up.

“Oh...! Umm, I just...”

Her eyes wandered. *I was captivated by you*, she thought. And yet she was too embarrassed to speak the truth. In her panic, she searched for an excuse. She looked as fretful as a small animal driven into a corner as she wracked her brain to find some convenient way to explain the color of her cheeks.

And suddenly, she had a flash of inspiration.

Bringing her mouth closer to his ear, she whispered, “Well... It was just too amusing to watch you put on that act...”

“Shut it, dummy.”



His sociable smile took a complete turn. Cain furrowed his brow as his tone grew rough.

Cain the hero would never show his true self in front of people. Really, he was quite rough around the edges, and his way of speaking matched that. He was far from well-behaved and would often hide away to smoke his cigars.

Liz had certainly found it a little funny for him to be acting so respectable. Just a little bit, though.

“My shoulders are stiff from making the rounds, goddammit. Don’t tease me. Do you want me to work off some of this stress by bullying you or something?”

“It’s tough to be a hero.”

“If you think so, then you could praise me instead of playing your games.”

They spoke in whispers, their faces close to one another. No one else could hear; only Sylphie and Melvy, who were nearby, could pick up on their conversation, just barely. Their secret discussion was held close enough to share a kiss. Liz knew she had been acting suspiciously, and felt relieved that she had managed to change the topic, but now that she was so close, her heart only began to race more.

She had gotten herself even more embarrassed to cover up her embarrassment—almost a complete backfire.

“Oh, right...”

“Pardon?”

Cain brought his body even closer to hers. Liz could feel her muscles stiffening up as the distance between them shrank even further.

He whispered in her ear, “The dress. It looks pretty good on you.”

“...?!”

Liz suddenly jumped back. A surprise attack in the form of praise—she could feel her face warming. She thought that taking some distance would return her to a level head, but now her entire body was teetering like she’d taken a wallop.

Her heart was hammering away, and it wasn’t just her face anymore. She was

painfully aware that her entire body was taking on heat. The gaps in the lace of her white dress revealed her red skin, and it was like someone had dyed the thinner parts crimson.

“Ha ha ha, got you.”

And Cain, who let out a teasing laugh, was just a little red himself. He’d spoken those words as if they were nothing, but she could tell he was just a little nervous as well.

Liz was unsure what to say. She was still flustered; it was like her lips were paralyzed, and she could say nothing back.

Cain could not skillfully articulate himself either.

“Ah...aha ha...”

“Ha ha ha...”

Liz fidgeted bashfully while Cain awkwardly scratched his head. And Sylphie and Melvy, who had witnessed the exchange at point-blank, simply grinned and laughed.

It was a time so unlike others, so far away from their everyday lives. And in tandem with the mood, the two of them felt a bit intoxicated themselves.

And that was when it happened.

“Eep!”

“Hmm?”

A woman suddenly bumped into Cain.

The party was a standing buffet with a great many people shuffling around the hall. The woman had been so focused on talking to her friend that she had failed to see what was ahead of her, sending her crashing straight into the hero.

And, unfortunately, she happened to be carrying a glass of wine.

“Whoa there!”

The red wine splashed out of the glass and splattered all over him. His clothes were stained quite terribly.



“Oh, wah! S-So sorry about that! Wait, M-M-Mr. Hero?! Ah, er—! Um-um-um-um...?! I’m r-really sorry! Really, really sorry!”

“Ah...”

Realizing that the person she bumped into was the hero, the woman shrank back, her face pale. She looked like she was about to cry as she lowered her head again and again in apology.

The wine had gotten all over him, not just on his suit, but on his white inner shirt as well, coloring it in red. But Cain simply glanced down once to see the damage before putting on a calm smile.

“It’s quite all right, madame. I’m not going to be bothered over some clothes.”

“S-Sir Cain...”

He put on his fake smile to console her.

“Still, what do I do about this?”

He was certainly not in a state where he could remain at such a formal party.

“You should be able to borrow suits here. Why not borrow a change of clothing?” Liz proposed.

“Oh, is there a lending service? That’s good to know. I’ll get right to it, then.”

“Very well, then, Sir Cain. Please go and wait in the changing room. I’ll explain to the person in charge and get a suit for you.”

“Got it. I’m sure I can trust you to get the right measurements. I’m counting on you.”

“Yes, leave it to me.”

Giving a reverent bow as though she were his attendant, Liz began arranging for Cain’s suit. She went straight to the person in charge and had them lead her to where the suits were stored. And there, she chose a suit for Cain.

*Come to think of it, Cain said I should know his measurements. But why? I’ve never picked out clothes for him, so why does he trust me that much?* Liz wondered as she made her way to the changing room where Cain was waiting

for her.

She knocked on the door.

“Cain. It’s me, Liz. I brought you a change of clothes.”

“Come right in.”

“Pardon me.”

Liz opened the door and stepped in.

“...?! ”

She was startled.

Cain had stripped down, his upper half bare.

“Wha...?! Wh-Wha?! Sir Cain?! Why are you topless?!”

“Hmm?”

Liz panicked as her eyes took in Cain’s bare skin; her face flushed red again. But Cain seemed genuinely baffled as to why she was so flustered.

Confused, he explained, “Why...? Because I need to change clothes? So of course I’m gonna take off the dirty ones.”

“Please change your clothes when I’m not looking! I did knock, didn’t I?! And you told me to come in, didn’t you?! You should have some shame when you’re in front of other people!”

“Huh...?”

Cain frowned, his face like that of a child who was being scolded for something completely unreasonable.

Liz’s heart was hammering away again.

Cain was nude from the waist up, his tempered physique on clear display. His abs were sharply defined, his body firm and toned from top to bottom. It was a bit painful to see the marks that thousands of battles had left on his slender, flexible body, but even they seemed like the medals that proved his worth.

To Liz, who had begun to feel attraction towards him, this sight was both a blessing and a curse.



“A bit late for you to be so shocked by just my chest. What, are you trying to act like you’ve never seen it or something?”

“I have honest to goodness never seen it before!” Liz howled with her red face.

She shoved the clothes onto Cain and turned her back to him.

“Good grief...”

“I’m the one who should be saying that!”

To a sheltered girl like her, his bare skin was far too stimulating. With Liz’s back turned, Cain donned the clothing she’d given him and got his appearance in order. He was now looking fit for the party, but still, he needed to do something about the shirt and suit top he’d taken off.

“What do we do about these?”

“Do you want me to wash them? I think I can get the stains out for you,” Liz offered as she turned back to him.

“Are you sure?”

“With some generic bleaching magic, they should be as good as new. But it will take a bit of time.”

“All right, I’m counting on you, then. Thanks.”

“Of course.”

Cain passed his stained clothes to Liz, who cradled them in her arms.

“A’ight, let’s return to the party, then... But getting back to greeting people’s gonna be a pain. Hey, Liz, wanna ditch with me?”

“What are you talking about, Sir Cain? There are many people who are attending this party just to meet the hero. You mustn’t leave—you’re the star here.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Cain painstakingly waved her off. The hero *was* a bit of a delinquent.

“I’ll be there after I take care of these dirty clothes. There’s a spell I want to

cast as soon as possible. And so, Cain, please go ahead without me.”

“Got it, Liz. See you soon.”

“Yes, see you soon.”

And so, Cain left Liz alone in the changing room. She carefully held up Cain’s shirt and cast cleaning magic on it. The more time passed, the more difficult it would be to work out the stains. It was only good sense for a noble lady to learn spells to make cooking, cleaning, and laundry easier.

“Phew...”

Now that she’d prevented the stain from setting any further, she let out a slight sigh. Sure, the wine was still on the clothes, but that was step one taken care of. Now, she just had to take her time washing it after the party was over.

She paused. The clothes that Cain had just been wearing now rested in her hands. Cain—the man who had caused her heart to race so many times today.

Liz pondered the matter.

At first, she had been captivated by the unfamiliar sight of the man in a suit. She’d approached him to talk in secret, and he’d caught her off guard with a compliment. And, a moment ago, she’d been startled by the sight of his bare chest.

The heat that lingered within her breast wasn’t going to fade. Not tonight, at least. Cain’s shirt was right in Liz’s hand. Indeed...she held the shirt he had just been wearing.

Liz’s mind began to drift.

It was a comforting feeling, almost like she was floating within a dream. The heat returned to her face and her eyes gave an intoxicated gleam. There was no one else in the room.

She could do whatever she wanted with these clothes. She could do whatever she wanted.

Yes, no matter what she did, there was no one to stop her!

Still spaced out, her hands moved on their own. She lifted his shirt up as



though it was the most natural thing in the world and brought it close to her face.

The target—her nose. A party hall was no place to sweat. The smell of the wine permeating it was also overpowering most anything else.

*But it's me... With my finely honed sense of smell, I'm sure I'll be able to discern his scent well enough...!*

With that in mind, she brought the shirt even closer. Just a little more, and she'd be able to enjoy it. She'd be able to bury her face in it and take a good whiff.

It was time for her long-awaited supreme bliss.

Liz pulled it the final inch, and then...

"Huh...?!"

Just before her nose could make contact with the cloth, she regained her sanity and cried out.

"Wh-What was I...about to...?"

Liz was confused. Bewildered. Her hands froze as she gave up at the last second.

"I-I was trying to smell his shirt...? A-Absurd... There's no way I would ever do something so strange..."

She began to quiver in shock and mutter to herself. This was a girl who had lived as the prim and proper daughter of a noble. *How could I possibly have such perverted impulses?*

"Th-This is all wrong... I'm not a pervert... No, I'm not... I'm not a lewd girl...!"

Aghast at her own actions, she took a deep breath to try to maintain her cool.

This was some sort of mistake. Surely she was so tired that she'd just drifted into some strange reverie while standing. She tried to convince herself of it.

And slowly, she lowered the shirt back down...

*Oh, come now. It's just a little sniff. What's so wrong with that?*

A voice resounded from somewhere in her head.

*No one has ever been hurt by a sniff. In fact, it's so basic, so elementary. You can't regard it as perverted at all. It doesn't even register.*

Her arms froze. Again, it was like she was dreaming.

*This is but a trifle.*

Her internal conflict, her guilty conscience...they all seemed so idiotic and inconsequential. Liz's rationality was melting away.

*Smelling someone's shirt is an act of such little significance. Oh, how pointless, how pathetic it is to hesitate over something so minor.*

Right. How was she so caught up on something so petty?

She strove to be a girl of determination and sheer will. And what was this? To hesitate over something as minor as sniffing a shirt? How idiotic was that?

*Yes, look ahead. Your Shangri-la is right before you. Just throw away that pointless self-restraint. Dive your face into the shirt of your beloved, and by God, take the best whiff of your life.*

"..."

Her heart was set in stone. She knew what she had to do.

With a hazy mind, she was spurred on by her strong impulses. To be honest with herself...

*Right... I need to be my true self!*

Liz resumed the deed. She lifted her arms high, lowered her head, and prepared to bury her face in the shirt.

"Where is it? Did I leave it in here...?"

There was a *clack*. Suddenly, the door opened, and there was Cain.

"..."

"....."

They both froze. It was a disaster. Her nose was so close that she had left no room for excuses, and Cain was staring straight at her.



A strange sweat spouted from every pore on Liz's body, her heart hammering away. But this was not the same loving pulse it had been before.

Liz couldn't move. It was like she was petrified.

"..."

"....."

"Yep, there it is."

It was Cain who made the first move. *I didn't see anything. This has nothing to do with me*, he seemed to tacitly imply as he calmly entered the room. He retrieved his things and made off with light steps.

"Please wait! You have it all wrong!"

That was when Liz finally cried out. Cain stopped in his tracks.

"Th-This is...wrong...! It's some sort of mistake! I-I am not the sort of pervert who would take pleasure in sniffing someone's shirt...!"

"Hey, don't worry about it, Liz. Sniffing my shirt, well, it's no big deal. Really."

"It is a big deal! You're wrong! That's not the point!"

That wasn't what she was trying to say. "I-It's a misunderstanding! A mistake. I-I wasn't trying to enjoy your smell, not at all...! Umm... Yes, so, err...that's just not what's going on! It's a misunderstanding! Definitely, believe me!"

"Yeah, yeah, I guess you're right."

"You're not even listening to me!"

The way Cain was looking at her, it was as if he could see through all of her lies. Liz was on the verge of tears.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaah! I don't want this anymooooooooooooorrrreee!"

"Ah, hey! Liz!"

And Liz ran out of the room, the wine-soaked suit top and shirt in her hands.

"Stop! Liz..."

She shook off Cain's calls, weeping as she desperately ran. She cleared the party hall, bursting into the outside world feeling like her own embarrassment

would kill her.

She raced on through the town beneath the darkness of night. Above her, the stars in the sky twinkled beautifully, though whether they were trying to console her or were simply laughing at her remained unclear.

A sweet and wholesome honor student—that was Liz.

But the girl held a secret.

One year ago, she had suffered a grave injury in her battle with the demon lord. In order to repair herself, she sacrificed her memories and her powers. In order to save her life, she had to forget that she was once a comrade of the hero Cain, to forget about all the adventurers she had shared with him and his party. She had forgotten everything.

Though she herself was now unaware of it, Liz was an atavist of a certain demon race—she had inherited the powers of a distant ancestor. Her powers had once come in handy, providing much support to Cain's adventure. But now, without that power and without her memory, she lived a prim and proper life as a normal human at the academy.

She had inherited the power of those that inspired obscene dreams in humans and tempted them to darkness. The dream demons of lust—the succubi.

## Chapter 15: Now—Erotic Clothes for Saint Melvy

“Liz! Help! I need help!”

One lovely morning, as we loitered in the classroom, my friend Satina clung to my waist in tears. She seemed to be at her wit’s end as she cried out, “Help! Help!”

Seemingly, she was in quite a pickle, and a clamor grew as everyone else in the room speculated on what it could be. I, however, had already been on the receiving end of such outbursts several times in the past year, and I knew it wasn’t anything to make such a fuss about.

“Yes, yes, Satina. What is it?” I asked, patting her head to calm her.

Satina lifted her teary face, half sobbing, half wailing, “We’re in a tough spot back home! This time, it’s the needlework at the armor shop! Could you come in after class to help?!”

“And there it is.”

I sighed.

Satina was the daughter of the director of the Academy Town adventurers’ guild. Your average guild would simply take client requests and offer the jobs to adventurers, but ours went above and beyond. The guildhall was a massive facility that contained all sorts of services and amenities, including a training area, a restaurant, an inn, an armor shop, a weapon shop, and a general store, among other things.

All of this is to say: it served quite an important role within Academy Town.

Ever since she was a little girl, Satina had been helping out around the place. Thus, her cooking, cleaning, and sewing skills were almost godly. If she ever got married, her groom would be a happy man indeed. However, helping out with the family business meant that their problems were hers as well.

“Err... So basically,” I summarized, “the workload’s getting to be too much, so



you need someone to help out? And you want me to do some sewing?”

“You got it! Sorry to drop it on you all of a sudden, but you might have to pull an all-nighter. Can you do it?!”

“An all-nighter... You really are in quite a predicament.”

I pressed her for the specifics. Apparently, the armor shop had received a massive order for combat uniforms, and due to a dire shortage of help, it didn't seem like they would have them ready in time for the delivery date. Thus, they needed part-timers, and they needed them *now*. I would be helping them sew clothing, should I accept.

“Understood. I'll do it.”

“Yay! Thanks, Liz! You're an angel! A goddess!”

“Ha ha ha...”

Satina hugged me tightly again.

It didn't feel right for her to be calling me an angel over something so trivial. I had my own reasons for accepting, after all.

“Just one more! We need at least one more person!”

Satina wasn't in the clear yet. She apparently still needed another part-timer.

“Now that's the troublesome part.”

“Luna! Luna, how about you?”

Satina brought the matter to Luna, another of our circle of friends.

“I'm very sorry. I have disciplinary committee duties today.”

“I see. Well, no getting around that, I suppose...”

Satina was rather downtrodden at this. Perhaps she was in an even worse state than I thought. That was when the last member of the group skipped over, her black side ponytail bouncing to and fro. It was Adeline.

“I ain't gonna do it!” she declared. “Sewin' ain't one o' my—”

“Ah, honestly I was never expecting any sewing skills from you to begin with.”

“Say *what*?!”

Though she had just herself refused the job, being rejected from it sent Adeline into a rage. Satina could be cold, at times.

“Just one more. Just *one* more...”

Satina fretfully scanned the classroom, her face pale. She had already informed me that I’d need to be prepared to pull an all-nighter, so there was definitely a lot of work to be done.

“Umm...”

“Hmm?”

That was when someone called out to her. We all turned towards the speaker.

“I happened to overhear... If you’re all right with me, I could help.”

“Melvy?”

The one who offered was none other than Saint Melvy.

“Do you know how to sew, Saint Melvy?!” Satina asked excitedly.

“Ummm... To some extent.”

“Hooray!”

Satina zipped over to her and took her by the hand, her eyes like that of a predator seeing its prey. Melvy seemed a bit weirded out.

“Thanks a bunch, Melvy! You’re a saint!”

“Erm, I am, in fact. Technically...”

Melvy gave a wry, quizzical smile.

And so, that was how I ended up working part-time alongside Saint Melvy.

After school, I left with Satina and Melvy and headed to the adventurers’ guild. We weaved our way through the rowdy crowd of adventurers and students and quickly arrived at our destination: the armor shop.

“Glad you could make it! I’ve been waiting for you!”

As soon as we entered, a spirited lady welcomed us. It was Benvenuta, the

shop manager.

“I made it, boss. Brought some sacrifices with me too.”

“Well done, missy. Now, *this* is where the real hell begins...”

“Eep!” we squeaked, shuffling back a few paces at the ominous exchange.

If I had to describe Benvenuta in a word, it would be “dashing.” She was tall and slender with limbs so long they would put supermodels to shame. Her features were well-defined, and overall, she was a woman who would have looked stunning in men’s clothing.

She didn’t just work at the guild armor shop. She also had some clout as a fashion designer, having received high marks at some of the nation’s fashion contests. As a matter of fact, the guild’s armor shop had an excellent reputation specifically thanks to the look of its pieces, and there were many adventurers who’d journey all the way to Academy Town just to buy from them. Benvenuta also sold her own brand of clothing in the shop on the side.

“Lisalinde, thanks for coming. I really appreciate your help.”

“Ah, well, the pay here is quite enticing,” I replied as I shook Benvenuta’s hand. I’d worked part-time here several times before.

“As for the other helper... Wait, don’t tell me. Are you the saint?”

“Yes. I am the appointed saint of the Russel-Bell Church. My name is Melvy. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Melvy pinched the hem of her skirt and offered an elegant curtsy.

“I’m Benvenuta, manager of this here armor shop. It’s a pleasure to work with you, Saint.”

“The pleasure is all mine.”

The two of them shared a polite handshake. But for some reason, the manager had a sullen look on her face.

“Benvenuta?”

“Err, I’m probably going to work you like a horse today, but please don’t



resent me. And don't you go using the power of the church to crush this shop in retaliation, I'm begging you."

"I would never do that," Melvy said, but we were indeed a little on edge.

"Now then, let's get to work already. There's plenty to do and no time to spare."

And with that, Benvenuta guided us in. We passed through the shop, stepping through the employee-only door in the back, which led to the sewing room. Inside were lines of desks that served as workbenches, where the haggard employees all diligently moved their needles. Elsewhere in the room, where a few of the latest foot pedal-operated sewing machines had been installed, workers stitched clothes together faster than the eye could follow.

"I'll have you two working at this desk," said Benvenuta.

"All right."

"Very well."

"As for your specific task..."

After allotting each of us a part of the desk, she explained the procedure to us. We were to serve primarily as assistants, supporting the other employees. All the more intricate tasks would be taken care of by the dedicated tailors and seamstresses, and we would help with the other parts of the assembly, tasks that were far less detail-oriented, but far more plentiful.

"All right, I'm counting on you girls."

"Yes, ma'am."

As soon as the explanation was finished, the work began.

"Hrrraaaaaaaaaah!"

"Graaaaaaaaaah!"

Those war cries came not from us, but from Satina and Benvenuta. Their hands were moving so devilishly fast I couldn't keep up. There was a sharp ferocity behind their eyes. The demon known as deadlines was clearly breathing heavily over their shoulders.

Compared to us, Satina was something else entirely. All the years she'd spent helping her household had put her in the realm of the pros. Now, it wasn't just *helping* anymore. There was almost no job in the guild building that she could not have easily made her full-time career.

"Let's just keep our heads down and focus on our own work..."

"Right."

Melvy and I shared a nod. Clearly, we wouldn't be able to reach the same ungodly heights. We started working at our own pace instead. The needles moved; the clothes were stitched. I could tell that the material was very high-quality just from the feel of it. It was soft but sturdy and protective. Anyone who wanted to purchase an item of this caliber would need to conquer some fairly difficult dungeons to amass the requisite cash.

Adventurers made it a priority to obtain clothes that would provide them with as much defense as possible; their lives depended on it. Each time I handled the cloth, I could practically imagine their efforts, their desperate struggles.

The job we were doing concerned the lives of others. I couldn't help but feel tense.

"..."

I glanced at Melvy, who was working beside me. She was careful and precise with her work. With her small, fair hands, she moved the needle and worked her way through each garment. Although she was being very meticulous, by no means was she moving slowly. She handled needle and thread with great familiarity.

Watching her, the word "maternal" crossed my mind.

A petite lady doing her very best to stitch clothing brought to mind a wife doing her utmost to support her husband. She held the fabric up at chest level, watching it closely with each pass. I even felt something akin to affection as I observed her calmly and carefully performing domestic tasks.

There was grace in her simplest motions. She exuded the atmosphere of a warm family home straight from her body. She truly was a saint. A wholesome and virtuous woman. The epitome of a perfect wife and mother. Just gazing at

the soft look upon her face was balm for my soul.

“Oh, if only she could just marry me...”

“Huh? Did you say something, Liz?”

Luckily, I’d spoken too softly for her to hear, as Melvy simply cocked her head curiously. *How cute.*

But although the girl in question didn’t react to what I’d said, someone else did—an individual who was sitting quite a bit farther away.

“I so get you!”

Benvenuta the manager suddenly shot up from her chair. Her loud proclamation startled almost everyone, and I—as well as all the other employees—froze up for a moment.

“Wah?!”

“Yipes?!”

“I totally get wanting little Melvy there as a wife,” Benvenuta continued. “I so, so get you! I mean, just look at her. Whoever marries her is going to be happy for the rest of their life!”

“Huh.”

“Umm?” Melvy was as perplexed as me.

This sudden burst of passion from Benvenuta seemed to have come out of nowhere. I mean, I knew she was reacting to what I had said, but for a moment, I simply couldn’t keep up.

She happily and boldly went on, “Melvy, seriously, would you be my wife?! I mean, you’ll have a hot meal ready every day, right? You’ll clean and do laundry, and when I come home, you’ll be there to see me. Ugh... My life already seems so much more amazing just imagining it!”

“Err, umm, umm... Perhaps you’d prefer a boyfriend instead?” Melvy asked timidly.

But the manager shook her head. “Absolutely not! I want a wife, I do! I want a wife who’ll bring some warmth to my lonely single life, and who’ll pamper the



hell out of me! Do you get me?!”

“Ummm...?”

“My lonesome life of nothing but work—the only cure is a sweet, gentle lady who can whip up a warm meal! Do you get me?! Do you feel the pain in my spinster heart?!”

“Yes, yes, enough messing around. Please concentrate and work.”

Satina continued her brisk work pace as she wearily chastised the manager. Melvy and I were still flustered by the outburst, but the other employees were already back to normal, focusing their attention on their work. It was clear that they were already accustomed to her eccentricities.

“No, wait. You just said I was messing around, but once you grow up to be like me, I’m sure you’ll understand.”

“U-Understand what?”

Benvenuta spoke as if to give an earnest warning to everyone around her. Her voice was low, and for some reason, there was an intensity behind it.

“You’ll start to want a wife more than a boyfriend... After you’ve lived alone for so long, eating cold, store-bought meals...”

*I wonder why.*

Her words carried an incredible weight. They got me thinking about all sorts of things, and I could no longer laugh at her antics.

“You’d better look out. Understand? After you start wanting a wife or a pet more than a boyfriend, it’s over for you. You’ll be just like me...”

A stern warning from one who had lived a long life. We all shared a deep, profound nod.

With a few such nonsensical tangents, the work continued. Thanks to the efficient work the desperate employees were mustering, the uniforms were churned out one after another, piling quickly up into a large mountain.

“If we keep at it like this, we should be done soon,” I muttered as I looked at

the heap. There were so many garments there, surely we had to be nearing completion.

At the very least, I figured there was no reason we should have to pull an all-nighter if we kept going at this pace.

“Unfortunately not. We’re still working at the anticipated rate, and that means we’re stuck here all night.” Benvenuta immediately shut down my wishful thinking. Her face grim, she frustratedly went on, “Also, those clothes aren’t ready yet. We still need to imbue them all with defensive crests.”

“Ah...”

That explained it.

There was a certain spell known as Crest Bestowal—a support spell that allowed the caster to store defensive magic within a piece of armor.

It was recommended that adventurers and other warriors have their combat uniforms reinforced with defensive magic. A sigil would be embroidered or inscribed into the cloth and armor pieces, and then injected with magic. This would raise its physical defensive properties in perpetuity in addition to bestowing various other beneficial effects, such as fire or poison resistance. The process was a bit expensive, so not just everyone could purchase the resulting garments.

“We’ve already done most of the required embroidery for the bestowal. But permeating those crests with magic is going to take time.”

“I see. So it’s no exaggeration to say that the real work starts now.”

“Precisely. Good grief, it almost makes me hate my job.”

As we spoke, Melvy jogged her way over to us and placed a completed uniform on the table. “I’ve finished bestowing the first one.”

Apparently, our resident saint had begun helping with the Crest Bestowal Magic; I’d realized she’d gone off to do other work a while back, but this was a welcome surprise. That was at least one combat uniform completed.

Benvenuta picked up the uniform and looked it over. She gave a satisfied nod—evidently, she had no complaints about the results. And seeing that, Melvy

returned to her work. She was probably off to imbue the next outfit with magic.

“Still...”

My eyes drifted to the mountain of clothes beside me.

“We’re going to have to cast magic on every single *one* of these...?”

“Gives you a headache just to think about it, right?”

“You could say that again...”

What I thought had been a mountain of completed projects had completely changed—it had turned into a mountain of work left to be done. My mood immediately took a hit.

“Incidentally...by your estimate, how much time is this going to take?”

“Right, well... It takes a little over an hour for one person to complete one uniform... If we split work across our entire team, that puts us at another ten hours.”

“Ten hours...”

I couldn’t stop a bitter look from crossing my face. I knew this was going to be a grueling job, but I was stunned when I heard how much work it would actually take to complete.

“So it really *is* going to be an all-nighter.”

“Yes, it sure is, my dear...”

“I’ve finished the next one.”

Just as Benvenuta and I let out heavy sighs, Melvy returned and chipperly set another completed product on the table. Her white hair swayed as she turned and got back to work.

“...”

“.....”

We both stared silently at the completed piece. There was not a single fault to be found. Not in the uniform, or the magic embedded within it. There was nothing to complain about—yet another perfect piece.



“Hm?”

Something felt a bit off, though.

“Well... This work just takes time. There’s no way to get around that,” Benvenuta explained as though that didn’t just happen.

“Really?”

“Yeah. Crest Bestowal magic, see, it’s not fit for the battlefield. You don’t cast it when you’re in a dangerous place. No, in order to raise a fighter’s chances of surviving as much as possible, you find a safe place and take your time. It’s important to imbue it with the most powerful magic that you can.”

“I see. So it was developed under the fundamental premise that it would be a spell that took time to cast.”

“That’s right. It’s an important spell that saves lives. So no matter how much of a pain it is, you need to be slow and careful. You need to take your time...”

“Pardon me, I have another two done.”

As Benvenuta spoke on the heartwarming significance behind the time invested, Melvy stopped by again. This time, she brought two different sets she’d finished simultaneously.

We again stared silently at the clothes. They were perfect. Absolutely perfect. There was nothing to find fault with.

“I’ll get back to work, then.”

Melvy gave a shallow bow and was ready to return to her work when Benvenuta let out a hysterical cry. “H-Hey, wait! How are you going this fast?!”

“Huh?”

“You’re completing the Crest Bestowal way too quickly!”

“Um, what?”

While Benvenuta’s eyes widened in shock, Melvy simply stared back at her blankly, tilting her head in question.

She’d just finished telling me how long Crest Bestowal magic was supposed to take. And what was this? Melvy was bringing one completed piece after the

next. It hadn't been more than three minutes since she brought the first one.

In that space of time, she'd completed *three* more?

Again, Melvy cocked her head, confused about what Benvenuta was saying. That said, for some reason, she also gave off a mischievous impression, like someone who was only pretending to be in the dark for fun.

"Hee hee..." After a while more of silence, Melvy suddenly started to laugh. "Well, well, well. I'm not completely sure how I ended up here, but I am still a member of the hero party. I *am* quite confident in my use of magic..."

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

"That's right!" Melvy proudly declared. "I can cast magic one hundred times faster than the average human! I can complete a Crest Bestowal on this level in under a minute!"

"S-Say what?!"

We were stunned. Melvy bent her body back so she could puff out her chest comically. The magic that should have taken an hour per uniform—she could do it in less than a minute. This was simply too miraculous, even for a saint.

*No surprise from a member of the hero's party. They're on a completely different level.*

But...

"You seem awfully into this, Melvy."

"A-At times like these, Cain told me to be confident about myself. Not to act humble," Melvy said. All the while, her cheeks were flushed in embarrassment, and she began to fidget.

*Oh, I see. I can see him saying that.*

"She's a goddess! Melvy's a goddess who's graced our humble workplace...!"

"H-Hey! Please stop!"

Benvenuta and the employees around her clung to Melvy with teary eyes. Of course they would—someone who could speed up workplace efficiency a hundredfold had just appeared.

With this and that, the work chugged along, with Melvy making full use of her super high-speed Crest Bestowal magic. The mountain of incomplete pieces flowed down the crest assembly line one by one, each reaching a swift completion.

Melvy's casting speed really was a sight to behold. The more clothes she did, the faster she got, and before long, it was almost like she was just pressing a stamp into each piece before passing it on. She got to humming a tune while doing it—so much composure, and at such a breakneck pace.

Ten hours of work was an outrageous estimate. At this rate, it wasn't even going to take an hour.

*That's the saint for you. She possesses absurd amounts of magic. The members of the hero's party are all godly in their own right.*

"That's incredible, Melvy. Such powerful crests, and so quickly."

As I said this to Melvy, she looked at me blankly. "Can't you do it too, Liz?"

"Hmm? No, definitely not."

What was she talking about? Although I was known as an exemplary spellcaster, I was still nothing more than an ordinary student. I wasn't even worth comparing to the heroes who traveled around the world, honing their craft in battle.

As I stood there, startled, Melvy frowned and said, "This, coming from the girl who managed to imbue so many different crests into that strange pink thing."

"What?"

I had no choice but to cock my head at that. *What? Strange? Pink?* I didn't understand a word of what she was saying.

"It's nothing. Please forget about it."

Melvy averted her eyes and let out a single hefty sigh.

"Hm?"

*What's this feeling?* She was acting like a teacher at a loss on how to deal with a problem student. That weary sigh, and the way she curled her back so

wearily... I almost felt sorry for what I was apparently putting her through.

*Melvy is fed up with me?! Why?!*

“We’re done!”

“That’s the last one! Hooray!”

It was at that moment that Benvenuta’s and Satina’s cries of joy resounded through the room.

Apparently, the work was through. We really did finish in just over an hour. It wasn’t anything close to the harsh evening that I’d resigned myself to—a far cry from the all-nighter I was expecting. The workers all raised a cheer. They approached Melvy and shook her hand.

And with all the heated jubilation, my own worries seemed pointless. Whether Melvy was in fact well and truly disappointed with me, I didn’t know.

After that, Melvy and I left the shop behind.

“Hold on! My thanks! Take a few sets of clothes with you!” Benvenuta insisted as we passed through the closed storefront.

“Yay! Hooray!”

“Huh? What?!”

This was it. This was the good thing about working for the armor shop—the reason I was here. On top of the hourly pay, you also got to take a few of the clothes with you. All the clothes in the store were personally designed by Benvenuta, a prominent fashion designer, and they were all simply wonderful. Seeing as we could have them for free just as a bonus, this was a job with incredible perks.

“R-Really?!”

Clutching the envelope containing her wages, Melvy nervously looked around. *I already got paid. Is it really all right to take these wonderful clothes on top of that?* I could read her like a book.

“No need to hold back, Melvy. Giving out gifts like this, well, it’s something



like the manager's hobby," Satina explained with a wry smile. "This lady likes to dress up cute girls in all sorts of outfits. She'll pretend like it's some amazing offer; really, she has so much fun choosing out the best clothes to suit you, she doesn't know what to do with herself."

"That's right, Melvy! In fact, please take the clothes for *my* sake!"

"I-I see..."

Despite Benvenuta's proud proclamation, Melvy still seemed a bit hesitant. I'd already gotten over that iffiness a while ago, and each time I came here to work, I'd take some clothes with me. She was a trained professional, and the clothes that Benvenuta chose were all very chic. Each outfit I'd received had become a priceless treasure in my everyday life.

"Heh heh... To get to dress up such a beautiful girl... Heh heh heh..."

If there was one thing I still found off-putting, it was the way Benvenuta so heavily breathed at times like these. She really did mix her personal interests in with her gratitude.

She was a bit of a dangerous person.

"This woman....gives off the same scent as you, Liz—ever so slightly."

"Huh?! What do you mean, Melvy?"

Melvy's sudden observation took me for a loop. Why did Benvenuta acting like this remind her of *me*?! We couldn't have been any further apart! Not when I was such a pure, prim, and proper lady!

*How exactly does that saint see me?*

Incidentally, Satina did not take clothing when these opportunities presented themselves. "If I got clothes every time I did just a bit of work, my room would be filled to the brim with clothing," she would say. That's the part-time meister for you.

And so, our fashion show began.

"Hmm... Maybe this one would be better like that?" Benvenuta groaned as she scoured for the right outfits for us.

For me, she chose a brightly colored camisole with a short white cardigan over top. She paired this with a light skirt below, giving me a very neat and girly impression.

Melvy, she put in an elegant dress with a bulky cable knit cardigan over it. The warm weave gave her a calming, peaceful image.

“Yes, yes, looking good. Let’s move on to the next one.”

Benvenuta nodded lightly as she brought the next set.

Again and again, the fitting room curtains flew open and shut as Benvenuta dressed us in one outfit after another.

Next, she put me in a lace top paired with a short wraparound skirt. It was casual and comfortable, all while being very fashionable too. Melvy was in a white scalloped blouse with a soft, airy pleated skirt. This was coordinated to push her cuteness to the forefront.

Benvenuta did have a good eye for these things. They were all wonderful.

“Now then, now then. What next?” she muttered, industriously bringing us another ensemble.

She seemed to be having the time of her life, and yet at the same time, she appeared serious and professional. Choosing clothing for women was her hobby, and it was also precisely for this reason that she was so dead serious about it.



Benvenuta was even more absorbed in this than she had been in our work just minutes before. She intended to prepare quite a few sets for us to try.

She brought us article after article, so swiftly we didn't even have any time to protest. They were all incredibly well tailored, and I couldn't choose what to take with me. It was a joyful experience.

"Huh?"

But that was when a problem occurred.

One of the articles of clothing she brought me was...*peculiar*.

"Hey! What is this supposed to be?!" I complained as I threw open the changing room curtains.

"Oh! You really put it on!" Benvenuta cried out for joy.

"Wow..." Satina's cheeks flushed and her mind seemed to wander.

This garment was far too incendiary. A revealing black negligee, largely open at the chest. It was also very short—stopping at precisely the line where one might just barely catch a glimpse of my panties. This was clearly meant for nighttime activities.

"These are so blatantly lewd!"

"Yes, yes. Splendid. Very lewd..."

Benvenuta gave a number of pensive nods. She was very clearly satisfied with seeing me in this.

"I told you to stop messing with me like this!"

"But Lisalinde, despite everything you say, you still wear them for me. I am very happy..."

"When you're giving me clothes for free, it's hard to turn you down!"

She would sometimes mix in joke clothing like this. A pervy piece here, a cosplay of sorts there. She would enjoy watching my reactions as I wore them.

And it was incredibly hard to turn her down. After all, if I grumbled and said I wouldn't do it, she would be genuinely sad. She'd look like a downtrodden

child. She'd despondently mumble, "I see, you don't like it..." Her shoulders would droop so suddenly it would make me feel bad for taking clothing from her. Troublingly enough, this was not a calculated behavior on her part. She really was just doing it unconsciously.

*I do not have any desire to wear lewd clothing like this. I'm serious. I'm definitely not thinking, "Well, she's even got good sense when it comes to lewd clothing." I have no choice here... So I am very reluctantly, begrudgingly wearing these clothes that she chose as a little joke. That's all there is to it! I do not have the slightest desire to wear this!*

"How wonderful! I'm blessed! Thank you! Truly, thank you!"

Benvenuta clapped her hands together with joy. She really was an innocent soul.

"Grrrrrrrgh..."

"Each and every time, you really pull off the lewd stuff, Liz." Though Satina blushed, she was still staring right at me.

"Grrrrrrr..."

*I'm the one who's embarrassed here!*

"Urrrrrgh..."

The collection of stares turned my skin red. The negligee's cloth covered a rather small area, and I had no way of obscuring my complexion.

*If it wasn't for this, if this manager didn't have these nasty inclinations... Then having clothes picked out by a fashion designer would have been the best reward in the world!*

"Ummm..."

A reserved voice sounded from the neighboring changing room. That was when I finally realized the nasty predicament I was in.

*Right, I didn't come here alone. Melvy is here too. This is bad. We can't just dress up the Saint of the Grand Cathedral in this stuff. The manager's tastes are seriously going to get this entire guild put down.*



“M-Melvy?! Sometimes, some strange stuff ends up mixed in, but you don’t have to wear it if you don’t want to!” I said.

“I’m sorry, I was just a l-little surprised, so it took some time to change...”

But my warning did not make it in time. Melvy slowly pulled open the curtain. None of us spoke a word. We swallowed our breath.

There stood an angel.

Melvy was wearing the same black negligee as me. Perhaps the size wasn’t a complete match, as she put a hand to her chest, bashfully fidgeting as she looked up at everyone with upturned eyes.

“It’s a tad embarrassing, but... H-How do I look?”

We could say nothing to the saint’s question. All we could do was swallow our spit.

A lovely little lady in such a provocative posture. Beautiful white hair contrasted with black. Her porcelain skin was tinted a faint pink, glimpsed here and there from through the translucent parts of the black cloth. Her beauty was almost obscene—purity and seduction all at once.

Our hearts were all astir. There was no containing this feeling.

“An angel,” Benvenuta softly muttered, as though the words had simply spilled naturally from her mouth. She was so moved, tears formed in her eyes. She really was a bit dangerous.

“Oh g-goodness... Y-You’re far more stunning than anyone could have imagined, M-Melvy,” I stammered.

“A-Agreed,” added Satina. “I’m a girl, but even I’m feeling nervous...”

She’d asked us how she looked, though. So, though flustered, we gave our opinions. What else could we say? There was an angel standing before us. A devilish angel whose embarrassed blush lent her a vulgar aura.

*This is bad. Such a bewitching saint... I can’t take my eyes off of her.*

“Umm, umm... D-Do you think Cain would like it...if I wore this?” she asked.

“Huh? Y-Yeah. I don’t think there’s a man in the world who wouldn’t be happy

to see you like that, Saint Melvy,” Satina replied.

Melvy’s face turned even redder as a radiant smile bloomed across her face.

“Th-Then I...think I’ll take these ones...with me.”

The shy delight on her face froze us into place. The saint, practically the epitome of purity, was smiling in a lewd outfit, knowing it would make a man happy. Everyone knew that she was engaged to Cain.

But, seeing her like this... How could I put this?

Perhaps Melvy was actually incredibly erotic.

“Hrrrrrrngh!”

“Aah?! The manager just collapsed!”

“It was too precious for her to handle!”

Benvenuta fell with blood spewing from her nose. To the boyfriend-less manager in her late twenties, Melvy’s demeanor was far too stimulating, it seemed.

She was out of commission for the rest of the day. In various ways, it had been quite a long shift, but finally, it was over.

I walked side by side with Melvy on the way back. The job was over, and all that was left was to go home—not that there was much distance to travel. Melvy was staying in the high-class hotel run by the adventurers’ guild, which was incredibly close to the armor shop.

I myself lived in the academy dormitory, but it seemed appropriate to escort her the short distance to her accommodations.

“That was quite the day, wasn’t it?”

“Ah ha, it sure was...”

There was, inevitably, a touch of bitterness in my voice. Benvenuta had ultimately remained unconscious, and we had to leave without saying goodbye to her.

“Is she going to be all right?” Melvy had asked, seeming quite concerned.

But Satina, who had known the manager for far longer, assured her, “Don’t worry about her. It happens.”

She was ruthless.

“Incidentally, umm...” There was something else bothering me.

“Yes? What is it, Liz?”

“A-About those...black negligees we just got... What are you going to do with yours?” I timidly asked her.

We both chose to take those negligees with us in the end. However, this garment was something totally out of my wheelhouse. I would not have the opportunity to use it, nor did I have the confidence to pull it off if I did.

Melvy gave me a radiant smile. “That’s obvious,” she said. “I’m going to wear it when I go to Cain’s room today,” she replied.

I was stunned into silence. I could not shut my gaping mouth.

“Oh, we’re already at the hotel. Well, then, Liz. I guess this is goodbye for today.”

With an elegant bow, Melvy walked on ahead. Completely unmoved, without the slightest hint of nerves. She waltzed into the hotel like it was nothing.

Her destination was either her own room...or Cain’s.

“She...”

My lips quivered.

“Sh-She’s so mature!”

*Amazing. Melvy, you’re amazing...*

I watched her go, still floored. Saint Melvy had all the composure of an adult woman. Innocent as I was, I was stunned by the saint’s comportment. I was left standing there, petrified.

## Chapter 16: Then—The Super High-Tech Clothing of the New World

Once upon a time, there was a poor village. In that village was an orphanage, but just like the town, it was a destitute place, unable to provide enough food for its children. They could not afford to replace their torn clothing, nor was there money to fill in the holes in the walls. A freezing wind would blow straight through the building as the children endured the damp from the leaking roof, wrapped up in tattered blankets to survive the night.

It was an impoverished place. And yet, the children there lived robust lives. With the sister from the church watching over them, the children gave their all each and every day. Though young, they would help out in the fields or venture into the mountains to forage for wild plants. Their bellies were always aching out of hunger, but they never folded. Everyone at the orphanage lived with honor and dignity.

“This is so beautiful! Please, allow us to help out!” Melvy cried at the sight. The hero’s party had just so happened to stop by this village.

It was thanks to this impassioned plea that Cain the hero and all his other comrades were now temporarily helping out with jobs around the orphanage.

“Now then, let’s all sew some clothing together today,” said Melvy to the children. Their replies were enthusiastic.

“Okay!”

“On it, Saint!”

They’d received a shipment of scrap cloth from the neighboring town, which they began using to make clothing. However, the shipment consisted mainly of small remnants that would have otherwise been thrown away. They had to start by stitching them together into larger sheets, which made this quite the undertaking. However, everyone put in an earnest effort and completed the work nonetheless.

“Thank you so much for all you’ve done these past few days,” the nun in charge of the orphanage said, bowing her head deeply to Melvy and her comrades. She was from a church in the neighboring town and would walk the long stretch to the orphanage every day. Tending to the orphanages all across the land was one of the many duties of the church and she looked after her charges with love and affection.

“I’m certain our meeting was by God’s design,” Melvy told her with a gentle smile.

“You truly are a saint. I am part of the church myself. I have heard the rumors about you, Saint Melvy. A pristine heart of perfect innocence. Now, I know that those rumors were true.”

“Perfect innocence...”

The nun’s compliment did not leave her bashful or boastful. For some reason, her eyes trailed off in sorrow.

“Yes, there was a time like that... How nostalgic.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s nothing. Nothing at all. A long time has passed, and I’ve experienced quite a few things. The world is a vast place.”

The nun looked at her quizzically.

Over the course of her journey, Saint Melvy had blossomed into a grown woman. Her innocence was by now a thing of the distant past. But Melvy would not bend or break. She puffed her chest out with pride. There was nothing to be embarrassed about. She’d simply climbed the stairway to adulthood, as many others had done, and many others would continue to do.

The nun had no idea what she meant. But the saint knew the world now, and she had accepted her place in it.

With only a few hitches such as this, Melvy continued to enjoy talking to the orphans as they diligently stitched together the clothes.

The male members of the hero’s party—as well as Rachel—ventured deep into the forest to hunt. The party had been split into a sewing team and a food-



securing team.

Although Cain would complain, “Tsk, what a pain. A damn pain,” as he set off, he was always more eager to work than anyone else. He was a rather earnest and diligent man, deep down.

When it came to these philanthropic deeds, the heroes would never offer financial assistance. There was a depressing number of places where money was short and the people lived destitute lives, but they could not save all of them; they simply lacked the funds to do so.

When they did stick their hands into money-related matters, it more often than not resulted in unforeseen trouble. So, whenever they helped someone, they would only do as much as they themselves were capable of with their own skills.

“Finished!”

Eventually, they completed a great many garments. To be quite honest, the results were quite shabby. These clothes had been thrown together from low-grade cloth that had nearly been disposed of; the coloring was all over the place, and the patchwork could be seen all throughout.

But the children had put so much effort into them, so the joy hit them especially hard.

“Thank you, madams!”

“Thank you!”

“That’s quite all right. Please wear those, and be warm.”

“Okay!”

The saint smiled warmly as the children donned the clothes they had just made, beaming back at her.

“By the way, Ms. Liz. What are you doing?”

“Me?”

But as they basked in the joys of completion, Liz was still working on something a short distance away. They already had enough clothes for

everyone, and yet she continued to move her needle. The children approached her curiously.

“Pink clothes?”

“What are those for?”

Liz was putting together something pink. It didn’t look like any ordinary clothing, and just by looking at it, the children couldn’t even imagine what the completed product would look like. There was a proverbial question mark hanging over their collective heads.

“Why this, you see...” Liz grinned. “Well, it’s a secret. But I will say it’s incredible.”

“Huh?”

Her smile filled Melvy and Sylphie with inexplicable dread.

“I’m sorry... They’ve finally made the call. This orphanage is going to be shut down.”

“What?!”

Melvy was shocked by the nun’s sudden confession a few days later. Her eyes opened wide.

According to the nun, it was determined that the orphanage could no longer continue its operations due to a lack of funding. It was being managed by the church in the neighboring town—the same one that the sister commuted from—and that church had decided to close the orphanage and sell the land.

“I’m so sorry. You’ve all been so good to us, but for it to end like this... I don’t even know how I can apologize,” the nun said, her voice glum and face pale. Her eyes looked as though tears would start to pour from them at any second.

But Melvy seemed more confused than anything else.

“That’s...strange.” She placed a finger to her chin in thought and furrowed her brow.

“Melvy? You know something?”

“Well, Cain, here’s a system in place where the church and the country provide financial aid to keep the orphanages running.”

“Aid?”

“Yes. It is very normal for orphanages to have no way to make money on their own. And so, the government and the central cathedral provide capital. This money should be distributed among the orphanages all across the lands,” Melvy explained. As she spoke, she seemed to be getting her thoughts in order. “I’ve heard of orphanages that have to run a tight ship due to meager funding... But they shouldn’t close down unless there’s some major reason.”

But ultimately, she couldn’t draw a conclusion on her own. She pondered and pondered to no avail.

“I see... So something reeks,” Cain muttered.

After that, the hero’s party set to investigating the orphanage.

Were there any suspicious dealings taking place around it? Was there anything strange with the place itself? They used the information-gathering skills they had tempered in their days of adventuring to look into anything that could be a cause for concern.

And it was in that way they found their answer.

The root cause was the bishop who presided over the church that managed the orphanage. The bishop had misappropriated most of the financial support that should have gone to the orphanage and used it to line his own pockets.

Upon learning this, Melvy flew into a rage.

“That is absolutely unforgivable!”

Thus, they marched upon the bishop, resolved to take him into custody. But the bishop was sharper than they had given him credit for. He caught on to the fact that he was being investigated. Just before the heroes could storm into his office, he sneaked into the orphanage and took the children there hostage.

“Bwa ha ha ha hah! Don’t you care what happens to these children?! Heroes! First, I’ll need you to put down your weapons!”

“Tsk...”

The bishop holed himself up in a room at the back of the orphanage. He held several children under one arm, a blade pointed at them.

“What do we do, Cain?” Melvy whispered to the hero.

They were in the back room with the bishop, holding a long, fruitless staring contest. They were at an impasse, neither side with the leeway to make any careless moves.

“Normally, I’d have no issue against such a weakling, but... Hey, on that note, what happened to our idiot?”

For some reason, Liz was nowhere to be seen. As long as he had her illusion magic, Cain was certain he could resolve the situation in one fell swoop, but there was nothing he could do if she wasn’t around.

Apparently, Melvy knew precisely which idiot he was referring to. “Um, well, she said, ‘I just need a little more time to complete it, so please go on without me!’ or something along those lines.”

“Complete it? Complete what?”

“Who knows?”

Neither Melvy nor Cain had any idea. Nearly every action Liz took was incomprehensible.

“Here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to go through that door, and I’m going to get away! Don’t you dare follow me! If I see even the slightest hint that you’re chasing, I’ll kill these kids one by one!” the bishop wailed.

The hostage children sobbed and the nun shrieked in sorrow. The children who hadn’t been taken had rushed over and were watching their friends with great concern.

“I’ll rush him as fast as I can. Support me.”

“Understood.”

Cain whispered his orders.

The plan was simple—attack before he had time to react. Take him out before

he had the chance to harm the hostages. Cain would do the heavy lifting, while his comrades would support him. Though perhaps the strategy seemed a bit shaky, it was quite possible for the hero to pull off. No normal person would ever be able to keep up with his movements.

There was, however, one point of concern. The bishop's capabilities were still unknown. They'd gotten this far without a direct fight, after all. On the off chance that the bishop was so powerful he could remain standing after a strike from Cain, then the plan would end in failure.

No one spoke. The tension was palpable.

"This isn't the end! I won't be done in, not here! I'll make more and more money, and someday, I'll stand at the summit! I'll claw my way up no matter what I have to do!"

*"Go."*

As the cardinal howled like a dog, the members of the hero's party psyched themselves up.

That's when it happened.

*"Hooooold iiiiiiit!"*

All of a sudden, a voice pierced through the air. It hadn't come from within the room; it was from outside the building.

No one was sure who it had come from. But it had been so sudden that the cardinal and the heroes all froze.

Beaten to the punch, the heroes put their operation on hold. The cardinal hurriedly turned his head this way and that, searching for the source of the voice.

"Wh-Who are you?!"

"Hrraaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Gwah?!"

In that instant, the glass window behind the cardinal shattered, heralding the entrance of a mysterious figure. This individual, with all their momentum,

crashed straight into the bishop. Unable to cope with this sudden sequence of events, the bishop failed to put up any defenses and took on the full brunt of the attack. The hostages flew from his hands. The children were free.

“Grrr... You there! Identify yourself!”

Staggering, the bishop raised his face to take in his mystery assailant. “Huh?” And he was dumbfounded.

The figure wore a striking pink outfit.

“What?”

“You...”

The place was astir.

The freed children and the nun all goggled, transfixed by the mystery intruder and their outlandish appearance.

“You want to know who I am?” asked the walking enigma.

They were clad head to toe in a full-body tight pink suit and their head was covered in a pink mask. A mane of blonde hair trailed airily behind them. Their suit was engraved with complicated sigils. The mask completely obscured their face, making it impossible to tell their identity at a glance.

But more striking than anything was the fact that this figure had a pair of women’s panties stretched over their head. Below, on their bottom half, they had donned a pair of men’s boxers, and in place of a belt, they had stitched a brassiere around their waist.

It was a difficult sight to describe with words. It sent shivers down everyone’s spines. With such a figure standing before them, the bishop seemed chilled to the core.

“Wh-Who do you think you are?”

“I’ll tell you!” The pervert in pink struck a pose. “I am the Superwoman of the New World! DangeRanger Pink!”

“The hell are you doing, Liz?!”

Yes, it was Liz.



“Incorrect! I am not Liz! I am the Superwoman of the New World! DangeRanger Pink!”

“Yeah, yeah! Just get over here, Liz!”

Cain was livid. He wanted to lower a fist on her, but he was a little too far for that.

“Wh-What is that?”

“Eep...”

“I’m scared!”

The bishop was beginning to shudder as violently as the children he had terrorized.

“This is a bad influence!”

The nun was beginning to panic too. The situation was only a stone’s throw away from complete and utter pandemonium.

“Is that...could it be?! DangeRanger Pink?!”

“You know about this, Melvy?” Cain demanded an explanation.

“I was talking about it with Liz some time ago. She said she wished there was a story about a team of five transforming heroes, who were all the condensed forms of various fetishes. Liz, I never thought you would make it a reality yourself!”

“Is she stupid?”

In short, there was no real meaning to it.

“Look closer, Cain. Those pink tights she’s wearing. They’ve been imbued with an utterly absurd number of crests.”

“Whoa... You’re right. How unnecessary!”

“So that’s what she was making when we were sewing.”

The entire surface area of the pink tights had been imbued with Crest Bestowal magic.

On a pure performance level, it would be difficult to find another armor

anywhere in the world that could compare. The complicated sigils intertwined with one another to raise its defenses, provide resistance to most effects, and enhance physical abilities, among other things. And with so many patterns exponentially boosting one another, the strength of the base material had likely been elevated several hundred times over.

Whatever it was she had made, it was a rare bit of equipment, the likes that not even a top-class adventurer would be able to lay their hands on.

And yet, no one present had any desire to wear it.

“Bishop! You filthy scoundrel seeped in desire! I, the Superwoman of Justice, DangeRanger Pink, shall punish you!”

“Like you’re one to speak!” The cardinal scolded the pervert wearing panties over her head.

“I shall protect the smiles and the undergarments of children all around the world!”

“You’re the one *harming* those smiles!”

“In the name of love and justice, and panties! ♪ You must set forth again! ♪ Go go DangeRanger! ♪ Go go DangeRanger! ♪ Yay! Yay!”

“Shut it.”

Ignoring Cain’s snark, DangeRanger Pink launched her attack.

“Here we go!”

“Whoa! Here she comes!”

The bishop winced as the pervert flew at him. With that, he and Pink began exchanging blows. Pink took up the challenge of fighting hand to hand, while the bishop mainly focused on magic. As the children had taken advantage of the chaos to evacuate to a safe distance, Pink was able to fight to her heart’s content.

The rest of the hero’s party stayed out of it. They did not want to have anything to do with DangeRanger Pink.

“Gah!”

Pink was sent flying through the air, struck by a magical blow from the bishop. He was a far stronger enemy than she had expected. He was a petty small-time villain who tried to usurp the funding of an orphanage, but evidently, he had practiced a decent level of self-discipline and had trained himself well.

“Kuh! I can’t beat him like this!” Pink groaned.

However...

“Is she playing around or something?” Cain muttered.

“Who knows?”

Although the enemy was stronger than expected, he was only strong when compared to normal people. Having seen the fighting that had taken place over the past minute or so, Cain could tell that the bishop was not strong enough to compete with the members of his party. Indeed, if Liz got serious about it, he suspected that the battle would be over in under a second.

And yet, for some reason, Liz did not take the bishop down. In fact, she pretended like this was a tough struggle.

“But there is still hope!” Pink turned her face to the children. “Everyone! Give me your courage! As long as you cheer me on, I can grow stronger! Send me your strength!”

“What’s she on about?”

She seemed to be putting on her own stage play.

“Y-You’ve got this!”

“Don’t lose!”

The pure and innocent cheers of children filled the air, their boundless optimism lending strength to the hero of justice.

“Also, if you could occasionally call me a *filthy pig*, that would make me even stronger!”

“Hey! Quit it, Liz! There are kids here!” Cain scolded as DangeRanger Pink started including some of her own personal hobbies.

“You’ve got this!”

“Don’t lose!”

“You filthy pig!”

“Whooooooooaaa! I’m really feeling it now!”

DangeRanger Pink stood with renewed vigor.

“This is a terrible influence...”

“I’m really, really sorry about her.”

Cain offered earnest apology after earnest apology as the nun recoiled.

“Take this! Witness the power that everyone shared with me! *Haaaaaaah!*”

“Gaaah!”

Though she claimed it was some sort of special power, Pink unleashed a blast of perfectly ordinary fire magic, severely damaging the bishop. She had held back just enough that her foe wouldn’t instantly collapse from the blow.

“You did it! The attack worked!”

“You can do it, Pink!”

But the children were jumping for joy. They readily took to the simple structure of this production—a hero of justice who took down the evildoers. They were beginning to cheer for DangeRanger Pink from the bottom of their hearts.

Moments ago, they had feared her as a pervert who wore panties on her head. But children were highly adaptable beings, and they had already grown accustomed to Pink’s appearance.

“Oh no, oh no... I can’t let this rub off on them... What do I do? What do I do...?”

“Honestly and truly, I’m sorry.”

The nun seemed genuinely bothered.

“However! As I feared, I alone cannot overcome such a powerful foe! If only...my comrades were here!”

Yet again, Pink went off on another bit of nonsense. Her eyes undauntedly

scanned the area.

“Oh?!”

“Huh?”

Her eyes locked with Melvy’s.

“Why, if it isn’t my comrade in arms! DangeRanger White! You came at just the right time!”

“Huh?! Do you mean me?!”

Melvy was completely baffled as the conversation suddenly turned towards her, entangling her in Pink’s unreasonable demands.

Pink pulled out a white set of tights from who-knows-where, this one furnished with a brassiere just like her own. The official uniform of the DangeRangers.

“Now! White! Wear this and fight alongside me!”

“No! I don’t want to! Absolutely not!”

Pink tried to push the white tights onto Melvy, but she put up a desperate resistance. Cain and his comrades immediately took distance from her to ensure they weren’t dragged into it.

“What’s wrong?! Why do you decline?! My comrade DangeRanger White?!”

“You have the wrong person! I am the wrong person!” Melvy complained, but her excuse held little water.

“I see. So you won’t fight with me...”

“What?”

Pink stepped back a few paces.

This came as quite a surprise to Melvy. She thought it would be just like the usual—where she was overpowered by Liz’s momentum and swept up into all sorts of nonsense. This time, it seemed like Liz was backing down on her own.

Pink went on, “Then I’ll have to recruit new comrades! Now! Gather, brave warriors! Fight alongside me!”

“Nooo!”

As she said that, Pink pulled out a few sets of full-body suits sized for children. She was trying to turn these kids into *brave warriors*.

“I-I’ve got this!”

“M-Me too... Let’s do it together!”

“I’ll protect this place from bad guys!”

The boys and girls stepped forward with courage in their hearts. They were about to race to Pink’s side. Their home was about to be destroyed by a scoundrel. Of course, they would feel strongly about it, and naturally, they would want to do something about it.

“Stop! Stop, please!”

But Melvy put a stop to them. If they went to Liz now, all that awaited them was a pervert’s path.

“I-I’ll do it! Take me instead!”

She folded. With all the love in her heart she knew—it was better her than the children. She sold herself out to DangeRanger Pink. As the gentle girl she was, she couldn’t just sit back and watch the death of these young boys and girls (or at least, the death of their innocence). That was the worst threat of all.

“Oh! My comrade, White! You’ll take up arms for me?!”

“I’ll fight! I just have to fight, right? Ugh... Huh, it’s surprisingly comfortable to wear. Why do I find that annoying?”

Melvy grumbled as she took the white tights from Pink and begrudgingly put them on. DangeRanger White had burst onto the scene.

“Now let us go! White! Our combo attack!”

“Huh? Huh?! C-Combo?!”

Without discussing anything in advance, they moved on to the combo finisher. This was just ridiculous.

“Here we go! SM Double Rope Action! Tortoiseshell Box Tie Bondage Supreme!”



“Umm... Like this, right?”

Masterfully inferring the contents of the move from its name, DangeRanger White matched pace with Pink. White was incredibly adaptable.

“Gwaaaaaaah!”

Bound with a tortoiseshell rope harness and a box tie, two different forms of bondage, the bishop was left unable to move an inch. He lay on the ground incapable of combat.

“We did it!”

“Justice reigns supreme!”

The children cheered. The battle was over, and peace had descended. The New World Superwomen DangeRangers had defended the peace of the orphanage from the machinations of the evil bishop.

“Thank you!”

“Thanks, DangeRangers!”

“Ha ha ha, that was nothing! I’m just glad we managed to protect your precious smiles—the greatest treasures of all!”

“Umm... Can I take this off yet?”

Pink puffed out her chest, while White ashamedly hid behind her.

“Now then, we can’t stay here forever. We must be on our way.”

“Huh?! You’re leaving, Pink?!”

As Pink tried to take her leave, the children cried out for her to stay. This pervert had earned herself quite a bit of adoration.

“It is always hard to say goodbye... Just remember this, everyone.” Pink turned to them and said, “Look ahead! Rejoice and be brave! For DangeRanger Pink shall always be within your hearts!”

“I’d hope not,” Cain quipped from the sideline.

“Farewell! Hah!”

And with that, she leaped artfully through the same window she’d entered

from. The children watched her until she was far out of sight. They continued to wave, calling out, "Thank you, DangeRanger!"

And so, a stressful ordeal had ended, and the children's happiness was ensured for another day.

But the DangeRangers' battle wasn't over just yet. As long as there was evil in the world, the DangeRangers would continue to fight!

At a later date, the sister had some harsh words for Melvy and Cain.

"That sort of thing is a terrible influence on the children. Seriously, please. *Never again.*"

## Chapter 17: Now—The Temptation of the Great Warrior, Rachel

It was after school, when class had just ended, and it was still bright outside the window.

“And what are *you* after today, Luna?”

“Yes, well it would have to be that new parfait they’ve been talking about. I’ve been looking forward to it since yesterday.”

I chatted with my friends as I left the schoolhouse. Luna, Satina, Adeline, and I—the usual crew. We had all agreed to visit the town’s sizable shopping district together, where we would enjoy our time perusing the shops.

The shopping district contained practically everything one could ask for—from general goods to clothing and accessories, as well as a massive bookstore. It was a place of relaxation and refreshment for all the students. Whenever you wanted to have fun, you were certain to find some amusement there.

“Hmm?”

As we walked through the school gate, I saw a certain someone standing to the side.

“Good day, Rachel.”

“Mm? Oh, Liz.”

It was the great warrior Rachel, a member of the hero’s party. She had her purple hair tied into two pigtails and a strong-willed look in her eyes.

Although she possessed a somewhat petite build, she was a warrior who swung around a massive hammer in battle. This weapon seemed to be a poor fit for her physique, yet she managed to wield the hammer better than anyone, having consigned countless foes to the abyss with it. She ranked among the world’s strongest fighters.

Rachel turned to us and asked, “Do you need something?”

“Oh, err...”

I hesitated a bit on how to answer that one. I’d just called out to her because I’d happened to see her there; unfortunately, I could see things getting awkward if I just told her that straight-up.

“We’re about to go shopping. Would you care to join us?”

By the time I realized it, I’d invited her along with us.

“Shopping?” Her eyes widened ever so slightly as she parroted the word.

Although I’d invited her spur of the moment, the other three didn’t seem to be against the idea. In fact, Luna—a passionate fan of the hero and his party members—seemed to sink into a mix of nervousness and delight, with strange sounds spilling from her mouth.

But the one who declined the invitation was Rachel herself. Brushing aside one of her pigtails, she said, “Hmph! I’m off to train—on my *own*. I am a proud lone wolf warrior! Why would I ever wish to do something as weak and pathetic as going shopping with someone?!”

Her firm refusal left Luna in a state of shock.

*I see, so this is her training time. I couldn’t have picked a worse moment to ask.*

“I see. Then excuse us.”

“Yes. I might have transferred to this school, but I was just going along with Cain and the others. I don’t have any intentions of losing myself to *fun* or anything like that. My one and only goal is to get stronger.” Rachel mockingly stuck out her chest.

She hailed from a place called the Darz Ravine, a settlement of warriors who tempered themselves under a strict doctrine. To her, strength was more precious and noble than anything else.

Sure, she could be a bit stubborn and tiring to deal with. But she was disciplined and stalwart, as was fitting of the hero’s party.

With a slight bow, I said, “How very admirable, Rachel. I thought we could eat some sweet and delicious parfaits together... But I shouldn’t get in the way of your training.”

“Mmm?!”

“Hmm?”

For some reason, Rachel stiffened up the moment I said that. Her body was frozen, her face petrified. I could see slight tremors running through her.

*Wh-What’s happening?*

“Sweet, delicious... Parfait... Parfait...”

“Rachel?”

She began to mutter to herself, too faintly for me to hear.

There was a peculiar sort of pressure emanating from her. Clearly, an internal conflict had her standing there, solid as stone. I didn’t feel any malice...but the strange sensation weighed down on me nonetheless.

“W-Well then, Rachel... We’ll be taking our leave. Good luck with your training...?”

She was starting to get a little scary, so I promptly took my leave. My friends seemed to pick up the message as they, too, swiftly and silently joined me.

But, once we had proceeded around ten steps, Rachel suddenly loudly called out, “Hold it right there, Liz!”

“Eep!”

I jumped with a start and turned. Rachel’s pigtails were swinging as she stormed her way over to us. Her face was red, almost looking enraged. She came to a stop before us, standing imposingly. Loudly, she declared, “I-I’ll come with you!”

“Hmm?”

Her arms were folded in front of her, her chest thrust pompously out.

“I-I-If you really insist, I’ll come along! Not that I h-have any real interest in parfaits or anything like that, but since you’re being so annoying about it... Y-

You leave me...with little choice but to tag along for this nonsense!”

“H-Huh...”

We were bewildered.

She said it in such a strong tone, but her face was red as can be. Even though we stood so close to one another, for some reason, she was obstinate in not looking any of us in the eye.

“N-No, err, it’s quite all right. You don’t have to go with us if you don’t want to.”

“Hmph! Not that I’m interested either, but...h-how about I see just how formidable...this parfait really is! I’m sure it will amount to nothing before a noble warrior such as myself!”

“Well, as I was saying...”

Our words were not meshing whatsoever. We both seemed to be talking past one another. Although Rachel boldly puffed out her chest, there was absolutely no dignity to her appearance, and still, she couldn’t look us in the eye.

Troubled, I glanced back to seek help from my friends, but they all averted their gazes. The solemn air hanging over them was enough for me to know that dealing with this great warrior was a burden too great for any of us to bear. It was as though we were dealing with a firearm that could go off without warning at any second.

“N-Now, let’s get going already! Don’t dawdle around, Liz!” Rachel said as she marched forward, ahead of everyone else. We chased after her back, breaking into hasty walks of our own. And so, Rachel had joined the party.

Also, for some reason, all the members of the hero’s party had already gotten to calling me by my nickname Liz. *Seriously, why?*

“Hey, uh. Is that great warrior an idiot or somethin’?”

“Whoa, that’s enough, Adeline.”

I had to stop her before she said any more. Luckily, it didn’t seem that Rachel had picked up on her whisper, and we continued on our way to the shopping district.



The shopping district hadn't changed since the last time we were there. The streets were lined with all sorts of shops, bustling with masses of people. The roads were wide, the buildings even wider, and as per usual, they were all surrounded by an overwhelming hustle and bustle. This was one of the most popular spots in all of Academy Town.

"Mmmmmmm! So sweet!"

Just as we'd initially planned, we were eating the newly released parfait. The individual looking like her cheeks were about to burst as she ate—well, as you might have guessed, it was Rachel.

There were actually two new products, in fact. This popular establishment had come out with a new Mont Blanc parfait, as well as a new flan parfait. The first consisted of a chestnut mousse topped with loads of sweet cream. The second started with a bold flan base loaded up with a layer of caramel custard cream. The place's popularity was well warranted—their products really were a cut above the rest. Just a bite of their new lineup had us hook, line, and sinker.

The parfaits were delicious.

Yes, *very* delicious. And yet...

"Mmmm, such bliss..."

Everyone had their eyes glued to Rachel.

She had a look of supreme bliss on her face. Her cheeks were tinted pink, her lips curled into a grin as she stuffed her cheeks. She seemed to be having the time of her life.

Rachel was known to be a bit of a strong-willed girl. Most of the hero's party members were quite sociable, but Rachel gave off a persistent air of unapproachability. Not too long ago, she'd flown into a rage when Aina tried to butter her up.

However, could the same be said for the Rachel who now sat with us?

She seemed perfectly happy digging into her parfait, not caring for the whipped cream smeared on her cheeks. No, she didn't just *seem* it. She

proclaimed her joy numerous times herself.

I'd never seen her so at ease before. It had been a little over a month since she first transferred to the academy, but this side of her was new to all of us.

"What?"

With all of us staring, it was only expected that she eventually noticed. We didn't know what to say.

Her expression firmed up, and her usual sharp glare returned. The usual uptight Rachel—almost a different person entirely—was back, so long as you ignored the cream that was still on her cheeks.

"You must like parfaits quite a bit," I commented.

"Wh-Wh-Wh-Whatever gave you that idea?! Certainly not!" Rachel frantically insisted, her dignity crumbling away once again. "I-I don't really like this sort of stuff... I-It's your fault, Liz! Because you insisted I had to eat it with you! I had no choice in the matter and begrudgingly conceded! What do you want me to do?!"

"I don't think that excuse is gonna fly at this point," Adeline coldly pointed out.

"Would you like to try the flan one too, Rachel?"

"Hmph! Why would I?! Parfaits are all the same! It won't make much of a difference!"

"Now, now, don't be like that," Luna said as she held out her glass. She had begun to tame the savage Rachel.

"Mmmm! Delish!"

*This is starting to get entertaining.*

As a huge fan of the hero, Luna had been frozen stiff for most of the time. But by now, she had begun to play around, plying the girl with food. She'd offered her own parfait, longing to see how Rachel's expressions changed.

Yes, up until that point, she was all like, "I-I'm on an after-school date with Rachel. An after-school playdate... Oh no, oh no, oh no..." But her nervousness

had now reached its peak, causing her to go a little bit insane. Now, she grinned and watched Rachel, grinning almost like an owner giving treats to a dear pet.

“Rachel’s pretty amazing, ain’t she?”

“It feels like we’ve found a new toy.”

“Stop. Adeline, stop it right there.”

That was one of those lines we couldn’t have her overhearing.

Feeling we’d seen a side of Rachel that we shouldn’t have, we eventually finished up our parfaits and left the stop.

“All right, I’ll be heading off, then.”

“Oh? You’re already leaving, Rachel?”

Just as we were about to head to another shop, she announced she was going.

“Why not enjoy the rest of the shopping trip with us?”

“Sorry, but I don’t associate with people any more than is necessary,” Rachel scoffed. “I’m a member of the hero’s party. I don’t have the time to waste on soft, weak hobbies like shopping.”

I could feel the strength of her will. She possessed a discriminating nature. Strength was the only absolute value for her, and she had a tendency to look upon the students—who were all far weaker than her—with belittling eyes. It was this stubbornness that had caused quite a few quarrels between herself and Mitter, also of the hero’s party, back when he was still weak. Sylphie had told me about it before.

However, perhaps that sense of values was precisely what drove her to improve herself. Perhaps such pride and independence were necessary to survive countless treacherous battles.

As I myself was someone who could only enjoy her days thanks to the peace brought about by the hero’s efforts, perhaps I had no right to grumble about her lack of affability.

*I should respect her will.*

“Is that so? I was thinking of visiting a stuffed animal shop that just opened up.”

Rachel twitched.

“But we really can’t take up any more of your time. It is sad to see you go, but we will head on to those cute stuffed animals without you. Rachel, truly, thank you for accompanying us today.”

Her body began to shake, as though there were opposing forces at war within her. *Am I just imagining it?*

We said our goodbyes and set course for the stuffed animal shop when—  
“Hold it right there!”

We were stopped by a rending shout.

“Fine, I’ll go to that stupid *stuffed animal* shop with you! N-Not that I’m interested or anything... But if Liz is asking me, what can I do? I’m going with you, okay?”

I had no idea what to say.

“D-Don’t you dare misunderstand! I have no interest in cute stuffed animals! I just need a new target to swing my weapon at!”

Rachel folded her arms and looked the other way as she spoke. Her face was so red it was almost like she was a maiden confessing her love.

*No... Please don’t use stuffed animals as training dummies. I think there’s something a bit off with that excuse.*

“She is a bit easy to read, isn’t she?”

“Et tu, Satina? Please don’t tease her so openly.”

It wasn’t only Adeline anymore. Even Satina was throwing around some rash remarks. There was no telling what foul mood Rachel would be in if she heard any of it.

For the entire rest of the day, Rachel’s standing took a complete nose dive.

We went around to various shops. One that sold cute stuffed animals,

another that sold beautiful accessories. A very stylish clothing shop too. Just as before, Rachel would try to leave after each one, but it only took just a little bit of incitement to get her to tag along.

“Oh, that accessory shop’s got some really good items, doesn’t it?”

“Oh, that one from last time? I think those charms would look really good on Rachel.”

“You’re missin’ out if you don’t go.”

That was enough to get her to follow.

The way she trailed after us was almost like a small chick fretfully following a mother hen, and it was adorable to see. Rather than enjoying our shopping, this outing had turned into a game of seeing how we could tempt Rachel to go to the next shop. Luna, Satina, and Adeline all worked together to pique Rachel’s interests in one way or another. They had already lost all the respect they held for the mighty warrior.

*Seriously, sorry... I’m so sorry for toying with Rachel like this. But it’s very fun...*

“Hmm-hmmmm-hmm! ♪”

Rachel hummed a tune and smiled brightly as she sipped on a caramel macchiato. The sun was almost setting as we had our tea time at a trendy café.

“It’s already this late? We played around for quite a while.”

“What did you think about today, Rachel? Did you have any fun?”

“Hmph! It was d-decent, I guess! I had a little...just a *little* fun!”

And as she said that, I looked at the numerous paper bags littering the floor beside her. She’d clearly enjoyed shopping more than just a little bit.

*Th-That’s right. We didn’t toy with her—perish the thought. We were doing our best to escort her, to make sure she made some good memories. Yep, no doubt about that. We weren’t just thinking about messing with a cute girl. Seeing as she was spending all her time doing nothing but training, we just wanted her to see how fun the academy life could be!*

“Huh? Liz and Rachel? What are you doing out here?”

“Hmm?”

Just as I was making excuses to myself, someone called my name. Everyone turned towards the voice.

“Cain? Oh, and Mitter too.”

“Oh, Cain and Mitter. What’s wrong?”

We came face-to-face with Cain and Mitter. They were both holding cups from the café—did they just come here for a drink? By the look of things, it didn’t feel like they were looking for anyone. It really did seem like they were just fooling around in the shopping district like everyone else.

“What’s wrong?” asked Cain. “That’s what I’d like to know. Rachel, it’s rare to see you out having fun after school. What’s with this change of heart?” He and Mitter casually took their seats next to us, as though the spots had been meant for them all along.

Cain kept his voice down a bit. Perhaps he was trying to limit the number of people who heard him speaking in his usual tone.

“Sh-Sh-Shut up! It’s up to me when and how I choose to have fun.”

“They got you with sweets and cute things, huh?”

“Urk! Urgh! Shut up, Mitter!”

They weren’t party members for nothing. Mitter could apparently envision everything that had transpired, clear as day.

“Did she do anything funny, Liz? I’m sure she must have acted pretty stubborn about the sweets.”

“Oh, I will refrain from commenting.”

Cain turned the conversation to me, but I casually brushed it aside, as Rachel was staring at me with those harsh eyes of hers. If I made a slipup, her claws would be pointed at me, and that was one thing I could do without.

Incidentally, Luna had begun to stammer and panic with her beloved hero sitting so close. She had yet to recover. She was amusing in her own way.

“Don’t get us wrong. Personally, I’m just happy to see Rachel having fun with

her friends.”

“Shut it, Mitter. Are you my mother or something?”

Mitter had an air of warmth around him as he watched Rachel acting so awkwardly. His role within the party was that of a knight—he fought with a sword and shield, wearing heavy armor and taking the brunt of enemy attacks.

Mitter was a distinguished noble from a foreign land—a sharp-looking man with blond hair. His features were quite fine and androgynous, and I could imagine him looking quite nice in women’s clothing.

“I mean, Rachel, you haven’t made a single friend in the month since we transferred to the academy. I’m a little worried about you.”

“Sh-Shut it! I am a proud, lone wolf! Friends are for the weak! You got that, Mitter?!”

“As you can see, she’s got a bit of an interesting personality, but I’d be very appreciative if you could continue to get along with her. I’m asking as her guardian here.”

Mitter turned his body towards us and offered a deep and sincere bow.

“Ha ha ha...”

We smiled bitterly. What else could we do?

“Y-You little...!”

Rachel’s face turned red as she flew into a rage. As a proud, noble warrior, she couldn’t permit herself to remain on the receiving end of such teasing forever. Her chair clattered as she stood, preparing to take drastic measures.

“Huh?”

Mitter noticed what she was about to do, but it was already too late. While his head was still lowered, she got behind him and grabbed his wrist. Then, she gave it a twist. With smooth, flowing movements, she had his joints trapped in a commendable arm lock.

This girl had no mercy for her own comrades.

“Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!” Mitter cried out, his face pressed against the table and



his arm joints overextended.

“You idiot! Stupid! Fool! Dunce! Is it really that fun, teasing me?!”

“Ow-ow-ow-ow! Sorry! I said I’m sorry, Rachel!”

Mitter immediately folded and apologized. It was a little miserable to see him like that. It was clear just from watching this the sort of relationship these two had.

“She’s one of them violent heroines.”

“She really is.”

“Looks like she’s the sorta girl who tries to use violence to solve everythin’.”

Adeline and Satina conversed.

Still above Mitter, Rachel spoke to him.

“You’re worried that I don’t have many friends, huh, Mitter?! Then do you want *us* to go back to being *just friends*?! If we do that, I’ll have one more friend, won’t I?! Is that what you want?! Mitter?!”

“Sorry, sorry! It was my bad, Rachel! Seriously, I’m sorry!”

“Hmm?”

The two of them were fighting, but something was off about that exchange. It seemed we’d all picked up on it. They’d *go back* to being friends. That almost made it sound like they weren’t friends right now. They were comrades, yet she didn’t even consider him a friend?

I cocked my head and looked at Cain.

“Hmm? Oh, I guess no one outside the party knows about it.” Noticing our questioning eyes, Cain explained. “Those two are going out.”

Cain pointed at Rachel, then at Mitter. He said it like he was nothing.

“Huh?”

“Huh?! *What?!?*”

And we cried out in shock.

Rachel and Mitter were both members of the hero’s party. That was common

knowledge. But never in all my years had I heard about the two of them dating. I couldn't hide my surprise as I was suddenly privy to such a massive revelation.

"Th-That's...surprising."

"A huge bit of gossip right there."

"It's not like anyone's hiding it," Cain said calmly, sipping on his coffee.

*But, it's that...you know.* It felt like we'd just obtained some major secret information.

"How precious..." Luna muttered as she swooned right in her seat. It was simply that shocking.

"Hey! Cain! Don't go spreading that! I-It's embarrassing!"

"Owww! Isn't it about time you released me?!"

All the while, those two were still tussling.

*Hmm, so they're boyfriend and girlfriend? Hmmm...*

Hearing of a girl's love naturally brought a smirk to my face.

"Still, Rachel. Saying you want to go back to being just friends is a bad move right now."

"Huh? Why's that, Cain?"

As Cain suddenly pointed this out, Rachel frowned.

The hero's next words came as a bombshell.

"One of the girls from the academy just confessed to him today. That Aina girl."

"..."

The air froze over.

"Eep?!"

In an instant, it had become impossible to breathe. We desperately kept ourselves from shaking.

Rachel's face turned completely blank. This was far more terrifying than if she

had gotten angry. She released her hold on Mitter's arm, freeing him. But that did not mean he was forgiven. In fact, she was casting even more pressure than ever before. She continued to stare at the man, this binding far more dreadful than anything she could have done to him physically.

"Y-You have it all wrong! It's not like that, Rachel! Listen to me!"

Rachel seethed in silence.

"Why'd you have to bring it up, Cain?!"

"Ha ha ha!"

As Mitter pleaded for his life, a sinister aura oozed out of Rachel. Was this bloodlust?

Right now, Rachel was a bomb only seconds from going off. The girl who confessed to Mitter—Aina—was famous in the academy for her attempts to curry favor with the hero's party. Presumably, she'd tried to establish a claim on Mitter. Yes, Mitter had probably done nothing wrong. However...

Rachel's gaze was intense. The force exuding from her made it quite clear she was not going to hear a word of it.

*Ah, she's going to erupt, like a volcano.*

Luna, Satina, Adeline, and I all had the same idea. We all braced ourselves for the impact.

"...Guh."

"Huh?"

*What?*

Rachel's eyes grew moist, and finally teary.

"I knew it. You finally...got sick of me..." she sobbed.

"Aah! That's not it! Rachel! Please, just listen to me!"

"I always knew...it was going to happen one of these days..."

Her anger morphed straight into sadness. Her shoulders curled, her body shrinking a few sizes smaller.

*Huh? What is this? What's going on?*

"I know...I'm not girly..."

"I turned her down! I said no on the spot!"

The tears poured from Rachel's eyes incessantly; Mitter rubbed her back as he tried time and again to soothe her.

"Wh-What's going on here, Cain? Rachel isn't acting like Rachel right now..." I whispered to Cain. When it came to Rachel, she was supposed to be a firm, stalwart warrior. I never took her to be the sort to grow anxious over romance or to sob so uncontrollably. Her current appearance was so different from our image of her that we were at a loss.

"Rachel, y'see, is really, really weak to romance in general. That stacked on top of the fact that she's deeply in love."

"Hmm..."

Cain's brief explanation had us so stunned we couldn't even reply properly. Seeing Rachel as a sweet young maiden had us all petrified.

"You know. The way those two got together was pretty abrupt, right? So when it comes to all the lovey-dovey stuff, Rachel's still got no confidence."

"I...know? Say that all you like, but I don't know anything about those two... Abrupt?"

"It's nothing."

Cain spoke as though I was supposed to know the details of their romance, only to place a hand over his own mouth. A gesture as if to indicate a slip of the tongue.

I really didn't get it. Was it some sort of mistake?

"You're the only one I love, Rachel!"

"But I'm not cute, and I can never be honest with myself...and I always resort to violence... There's nothing appealing about a girl like me. Nothing..."

"But I still love you! I love you just as you are, Rachel!"

"What's going on?"

“A lover’s spat?”

As Mitter continued to try to pacify Rachel, their sudden loud entanglement started gathering attention. A couple’s love affairs were always the finest side dish for the peanut gallery. The café’s patrons were all looking at them with great intrigue.

“I-I love you! I love you more than anyone in the world!”

“*Sniff...* But, but...”

“Aah! For crying out loud!”

Mitter was between a rock and a hard place. Rachel had transformed fully into a modest maiden, and Mitter was at his wit’s end determining how to deal with her.

“Wah hah hah!”

Within all of that, only Cain managed to let out a merry laugh.

*You’re a real piece of work...*

“Fine, it’s time to pull out the last resort!” Driven into a corner, Mitter cried out boldly. He circled around to Rachel’s front, placed a finger on her chin, and forcefully lifted her downcast face.

“...?”

And then, he planted a kiss on her lips.

“...?! ”

Rachel’s eyes opened wide. So did ours—we swallowed our breath, watched, and waited.

Rachel’s tears ceased. With her mouth sealed up, she couldn’t speak either. It was a light, soft kiss, a mere touching of lips. But it lasted for an eternity. It was like time had stopped, and not a single soul around moved a muscle.

Eventually, they parted lips.

“I really do love you.” Mitter offered her words of love, his face red.

Rachel’s was redder still, like a ripe apple. Her head was hung as it had been

before. She wasn't crying now, though. Never had her cheeks had such a beautiful sheen.





“Stupid,” she feebly muttered.

Though it was a disparaging word, the insult contained her heartfelt joy.

The peanut gallery burst.

First, someone whistled. Then, another screamed, “Good going, kid!”

The rending cheers boomed through the café, with applause ringing out from every direction. The whistles were unending. A fervent enthusiasm spread across the whole establishment.

“Too precious...” Luna muttered before collapsing with a nosebleed.

*Lately, there have been an awful lot of people collapsing with nosebleeds around me.*

That lovely exchange had triggered quite a ruckus.

“Good for you, missy!”

“That was real manly, boy!”

“You’re a hero!”

The other patrons whooped and cheered.

*Wrong. The hero’s the rude guy next to him.*

“W-We can’t stick around here... Let’s get going, Rachel?”

“Huh? Oh, sure.”

And with that, Mitter took Rachel by the hand and took off. Rachel bashfully, but delightedly ran, willing to let him lead her to the ends of the earth.

“That’s youth for you!”

Words of encouragement followed at their backs. The stars of the show had run off, but no one was going to chase after them. After all, we wouldn’t dare do something so uncouth. From here on would be a passionate evening reserved for those two lovebirds alone.

And with all that support, the boy and girl vanished into the sunset.

“Well now, they sure as hell ain’t coming back today,” Cain said with a smirk.

It was almost night. The lovers wouldn't be returning to where they were supposed to be. There were some things best done in secret.

"They're gonna do it."

"They sure are."

"Too precious..."

My friends were all on the same page. But not me.

"I-I'm not sure what to say about them boldly performing deeds that go against public morals! As students of the academy, they should pay more mind to common decency!"

"I'm sure Rachel doesn't wanna hear that from *you*."

"What's that supposed to mean?!"

Cain looked at me tiredly.

*Why?!*

You won't find many women out there who uphold decency as stringently as me!

I was a bit unsatisfied with that resolution, but I'd managed to see all sorts of surprising sides to Rachel. The sun sank, the stars began to twinkle... And a passionate evening between lovers began.

## Chapter 18: Then—The Trials of Great Warrior Rachel

“I don’t accept you,” Rachel coldly declared to Mitter as he crawled upon the ground.

Her eyes were filled with clear disdain, and she took no measures to hide it. She looked down on Mitter where he lay, not even offering him a helping hand up. And Mitter in his own way accepted it—he did not provide a single word to refute Rachel’s abuses. All he could do was grit his teeth in frustration.

It was training time for Cain’s party. Rachel the warrior had thoroughly beaten Mitter the knight to the ground, casting a pall over the party.

“This party doesn’t have any room for weaklings. You’re a nuisance. Just resign already,” Rachel spat, her voice filled with a pure and utter contempt. And with that, she turned her back to him.

Mitter said nothing. He remained where he was and wept.

Mitter was the son of a prominent foreign noble. He was a brave man, who had joined the hero’s party hoping that he could provide some assistance with his skills as a knight. However, it was not said skills that had seen him made a part of the group. He had been rather forcefully enlisted, to bolster the reputation of his house, and his nation.

This led to a horrible predicament—one relatively average human had been mixed in with an assortment of absolute beasts. His presence in the party was largely political, and his lack of battle strength put him on the bottommost rung of the roster.

It was after he had already joined that the party passed through a certain village at the depths of a great ravine, and Rachel came along for the ride. Hers was a village hidden from most of the world—one of proud warriors who protected a divine gemstone. The men and women who grew up there had

more confidence in their own strength than anyone else.

Perhaps it was simply inevitable that Rachel would come to hate Mitter to such a degree. The hero's party was filled with plenty of individuals who were stronger than she was. To her, the party was the finest environment in which to grow, and she held great respect for her competent companions.

And yet, there was *one* weakling—a man who had joined with less than pure motives.

She couldn't accept it. It felt like a drop of sewer water had been added to a gourmet soup.

"You deadweight..." Rachel held Mitter in complete disdain, and spared no opportunity to shower him with cutting words.

But Mitter himself was a good person, a sincere and earnest soul who longed for peace from the depths of his heart. He respected the hero Cain and his party members who had saved so many lives, and he wished strongly to help them out in any way that he could.

Strictly speaking, he was nothing more than a victim of the wills of his noble house and his nation. He had been caught up in their self-interests and press-ganged into an absurd situation. But he could not defy the will of said nation, and ended up surrounded by fighters who were all on a completely different level from him.

And yet, he did not let his situation bother him.

He was aware of his lack of ability, and would constantly try his hardest to close the gap between him and the others, even if only by the tiniest margin. Even having witnessed firsthand the absurd strength of his allies, he did not fold, instead continuing to push himself to the limit. Rachel's toxicity wasn't enough to break his spirit. Mitter simply kept his nose to the grindstone.

*One day, I swear I'll be useful to them; I swear I'll save those in need.* With single-minded focus he endeavored, pressing on through all the dirt and bruises.

The other members of the party all acknowledged his efforts. Sure, they didn't think so kindly of the schemers who had sent this man to the front lines,

but they looked at Mitter himself with trust and respect. His abilities fell short of theirs, perhaps, but he was still a dear comrade nonetheless.

Having watched him struggle all the while, Rachel's attitude gradually began to soften.

"Hmph! Sure, you've got guts. But it's meaningless if you're weak!" she proclaimed with an awkward look on her face as she fixedly watched over his training. The frequency with which she would assail him with foul language had clearly diminished.

One day, she found Mitter training alone and said, "I-I'm going to personally oversee your training! Don't misunderstand, okay?! It's just that *I'm* the one who's going to end up in deep trouble if you continue dragging us down forever!"

Though she complained all the while, Rachel kept him company during his training session. Her face was bright red, as though she was ashamed of all the abuse she'd hurled his way. She frequently turned away, trying not to make eye contact with him.

But regardless of her attitude, Mitter was grateful just to have someone who would train with him. The sounds of their weapons clanging echoed late into the night. Day after day after day, the two warriors continued steadfastly training.

Rachel wouldn't tell him to leave the party anymore. Never again.

One day, Rachel nearly lost her life. In their battle with the demon lord's army, she found herself straying farther and farther from her comrades, forced to fight by her lonesome self.

After a very long string of consecutive battles, her stamina was running out, the number of wounds on her body growing. But there was no time for breaks. The demon lord's army assailed her mercilessly, desperate to strike her dead.

Rachel swung in a frenzy, defeating nearly all her foes single-handed. But she was already running on fumes. Her body would no longer do as it was told.

The enemy commander slowly and calmly appeared on the back line. He was

waiting for her to grow weak.

Rachel's leg was hurt, her body immobile. Knowing her own death was near, she softly closed her eyes.

However...

"Wait!"

With a rending shout, *he* appeared before her in her time of crisis: Mitter.

Mitter shielded her while engaging with the enemy leader. He put body and soul on the line as he fended off attacks of the enemy before him. His only thoughts were of parrying, dodging, and blocking as he skillfully maneuvered his large shield and slender blade.

He had once been a feeble man. His physical abilities were unimpressive, and he always lost to his other monstrous comrades in terms of brute force. That was why he had thoroughly honed his technique. Perhaps it wasn't even intentional—he'd had to do anything he could to compete with his comrades' raw strength.

He swayed like a supple willow branch, brilliantly enduring the vicious sword strokes from his foe's meaty arms.

Mitter's strength was nowhere near his opponent's. That was what Rachel's eyes were telling her. But he exercised every trick in his arsenal to the fullest, putting his life on the line to protect her. His wounds grew harsher, his foe far stronger than himself, but he did not fold. He simply defended until he could defend no more.

Mitter had never given up on anything. His body was beaten and broken, but he protected Rachel with willpower alone. And once he had persisted long enough, the others finally arrived.

"Are you two okay?!"

Sweat cascaded down their bodies as Cain and the others rushed across the battlefield, dispatching the enemy in short order, as though to vent all their resentment for what had been done to their two comrades. It was not long before they took the boss's head.

“Are you all right?” Melvy asked as she cast healing magic on Rachel, but Rachel could not provide an articulate response. She simply stared at Mitter. Her cheeks turned red as her heated gaze took in his tattered back.

Her heart was beating so violently it hurt.

By now, Rachel had completely accepted Mitter as a member of the hero’s party.

His skills had risen to a level that she never would have imagined. Sure, he still fell short in some ways, when compared to the others, but as a defender, he filled a role that no one else could.

Still, Rachel was far too ashamed of the way she had treated him to turn things around that easily. Worse still, whenever she looked at him, her chest began to ache, and her cheeks began to burn. It had become impossible to have natural conversations with him now. In fact, she had become even more antagonistic. Whenever they had a blow-up, she would return to her room at the inn and bask in self-loathing.

Rachel simply could not be honest with him.

Meanwhile, Mitter was becoming more robust over the course of the journey. Slowly, his muscles were becoming more defined, and he no longer gave off an air of weakness. Even his physical strength deficit, which had initially been the biggest issue to tackle, was gradually resolving itself.

The endless days of battle had evidently bolstered his confidence. Even his expressions seemed more macho. He stood boldly beside his fellow party members as a comrade of the hero, and saved a great many lives.

When he first joined, the populace had called him a “noble parasite.” There was some truth to that, which Mitter couldn’t deny. However, his skills had grown, and as people witnessed him fighting on the front lines, those cruel rumors were gradually forgotten. There was no one who would call him a parasite anymore.

In fact, he was now quite popular. He was a gallant young man with a pretty face in the hero’s party. He was toned and his skills were world-class. What’s

more, he hailed from an influential noble house. How could he *not* be popular? Many women were drawn to him—with romantic intent—and the more time passed, the more his popularity grew.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaah...!” Rachel cried one day as she realized this.

After all, she had no confidence in her own charm as a woman. The way she saw it, she couldn’t possibly win against all the beautiful high-status women closing in on him.

One night, in a boisterous pub...

“Waaaaaaaaah! Hic! Waaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!”

Rachel was crying her heart out. She wailed like a child, her face planted against the table.

“Oh dear, you really are a fool,” Liz consoled. “Here, use this handkerchief to wipe your nose. Take care of that, and then we can get somewhere.”

“Snnnfffffffff!”

Rachel wiped the tears from her reddened eyes.

The women of the hero’s party had gathered at the pub. Not to drink, but to advise Rachel.

Mitter was popular with the ladies. This fact had thrown Rachel off greatly.

“Ish...ish becuz I said sho many mean things to Mitter... There’s shno way he would ever like me...” she confessed through tears.

Rachel was typically all jeers when she was with Mitter. As if a sort of recoil from her affection, she would shower him with snide remarks whenever they were together. But more pressingly, she really had genuinely looked down on him back when they first met.

How could Mitter ever come to like a woman like that?

Rachel was a warrior from an isolated village. She’d never even dreamed of holding romantic feelings for anyone; she thought she’d merely be fighting day in and day out until the moment she died.



And so, Rachel had no confidence in herself as a woman.

“What do I do? Mitter’s gonna be shtolen away...”

“Yes, yes. Please calm down.”

No matter how many times Liz consoled her, Rachel wouldn’t stop crying. She’d already imbibed quite a bit of alcohol, and the situation was quickly getting out of hand.

“So you were in love with Mitter. I-I should have guessed...” Sylphie said. “I did get that inkling.”

“B-But...but, but, Rachel’s always going on about how she hates Mitter, or thinks nothing of him...” said Melvy.

“I mean, it’s embarassssiiiiing!” Rachel cried out from the pit of her chest as she smashed her head against the table.

“Err, did you all really not figure that out?” Liz inquired, a bit aghast at how dense her friends apparently were.

“I’m finished! I mean, he definitely hates me!” Rachel sobbed.

A tragedy was unfolding here in the tavern as a girl—ever the contrarian—felt the ground give way beneath her.

With a slight tilt to her head, Liz said, “Honestly, I don’t think the situation is that bad... As far as I can tell, Mitter is actually quite fond of you, Rachel.”

“Hmm?”

Everyone looked at her blankly.

“Well, I mean, you often help Mitter with his personal training, don’t you? I get the feeling that he feels indebted to you about that, maybe even affectionate. There’s quite a bit of hope, I tell you.”

“You’re lyiiiiiiiiing!”

Rachel was not in the right mental state to believe any positive information.

“Wh-Why don’t you try an honest confession?” Sylphie suggested. “Just tell Mitter that you like him. How about that?”

“If I could say it that easily, I wouldn’t be suffering this much! And telling him would just make trouble for him!”

She was not practiced enough to be able to change her very way of life on the flip of a dime.

Rachel drank and wailed while Sylphie and Melvy remained at a loss over how to deal with her. They were both engaged to the same man, but it wasn’t like they had won him over themselves. They were just as inexperienced in romance as she was.

“Oh, what to do with you?” Liz groused, smacking her wooden cup of ale down on the table. With a face like she was tending to a bothersome little sister, she leaned in. “Very well, then there’s no way around it. I, Lisalinde, will do something about it.”

“Huh?” Rachel blankly lifted her face.

“It’s quite simple... Yes, very simple indeed.” Liz grinned.

And Sylphie and Melvy, who had oft been dragged through hell by her, felt something quite sinister in her smile. They shuddered.

“L-Liz? What are you...?”

Liz grabbed Rachel by the arm and tugged her with no explanation given. She hadn’t spoken a single word ever since she left the pub, nor answered a single question.

She was headed for the inn where the hero’s party was lodging. Liz stormed her way in, Rachel trailing behind her with a proverbial question mark over her head. Sylphie and Melvy followed cautiously, nervous and morbidly curious.

Eventually, Liz threw open the door to one of the rooms.

“Huh? Liz...and Rachel? What’s wrong? You’ve got quite a look on your faces.”

They were face-to-face with Mitter—it was his room after all. He was relaxing on the bed while reading a book.

“Wah?!”

“Whoa there!”

Silently, Liz shoved Rachel at Mitter. Rachel was still just as confused as before, so it was easy to toss her around. Suddenly, Rachel found herself lying on top of Mitter on the bed.

“Liz! What’s your game?!”

Rachel rose up to lodge a complaint. But Liz acted fast. She left something on the room’s desk, slapped a talisman on the doorknob, cast some sort of spell on the door, and immediately left.

Liz was gone before they could do anything about it. But just before she left, Rachel had seen it—a smug, bewitching, devilish smile spread across Liz’s face.

“Ow-ow... What’s going on? Did something happen...?”

“Mitter...”

Mitter rose, holding his stomach, befuddled by the sudden weight atop him.

“Hmm?”

“Huh?”

They slowly made their way to the door and stared at the paper Liz had placed on the knob.

On it was written: “You cannot leave this room unless you have sex.”

“Liz!”

“Liz!”

The room was sealed by her magic. The two of them had been left behind in a sudden prison.

“H-Hey, Liz... Is this really all right?”

“Yes, of course it’s all right.”

Liz cackled as she addressed Sylphie and Melvy, who were timidly loitering outside the door.

Through the wall, they could hear the shouts. “Hey! Liz! This is ridiculous! Open this door! Open it now!” Rachel cried out. There was desperation and

embarrassment in her weak voice. She tried to bang against the wall, but that wasn't nearly enough to break through the barrier the succubus had erected.

"This will solve all of our problems."

"Are...are you sure about that?"

"Why certainly, my dear Melvy. After all..." Liz grinned. "I left some of my handmade cookies in that room!"

"You wouldn't dare!"

Sylphie and Melvy shuddered. To the two of them, Liz's handmade cookies were a terrible curse. A devilish blight upon the earth. The moment anyone ate them, it was all over for them. The poor victim would be forced into a dizzying journey of pleasure.

A while passed, and eventually, they stopped hearing the sound of Rachel banging against the walls in defiance. *She probably ate the cookies...* Sylphie and Melvy gulped, while Liz gave a satisfied smile.

They couldn't linger around the room anymore. In only a few minutes, they would hear not the banging on the wall, but poor Rachel's bewitching moans.

The night had only just begun.

"And with that said, ahem... We're officially going out..."

"Oh!"

There was applause all around. With the night behind them, the hero's party gathered for breakfast in the dining area on the inn's first floor.

Mitter was the one who made the official announcement.

Their faces were both red, and they were both restlessly fidgeting. They couldn't even put up a front to hide their embarrassment.

"Umm... G-Good for you, Rachel! You're finally dating Mitter!"

"Urrrgh!"

Rachel hung her head and buried her face in her hands, as though that would let her hide from Melvy's words. She wanted to run away so badly she couldn't

even speak properly.

It stood to reason. Everyone had a pretty good idea of what had happened the night before, and what had led up to them dating.

Even the hands with which she hid her face were bright red.

“Still, that settled down surprisingly easily. I thought that would’ve complicated things, or resulted in a few more quarrels than this...” said Cain, who was already scarfing down his breakfast. Evidently, he’d already had a good idea of their relationship.

“That’s well... Err...after Rachel said she loved me so many times in bed... Ha ha... There really was no way for me to misunderstand.”

“Aaaaaah! Graaah! They don’t need to know about that, Mitter!”

Rachel screamed as she drummed her fists against her lover. It seemed she’d had quite a night.

“As I thought, sex really is the strongest force imaginable!”

“You should learn some self-restraint, dumbass.”

Though Liz proudly puffed out her chest, there was a large lump sprouting from her head. Liz, the ringleader behind this incident, had already received a remonstrative fist from the party’s true leader.

“Umm... Liz?”

“What is it, Rachel?”

Fidgeting, Rachel said, “I-I’ve got a few things I want to say to you, and honestly, I want to smack you upside the head, but... Th-Thank you. I-It’s thanks to you...that my feelings got across...”

Rachel averted her eyes with a blush.

She was the epitome of a sweet maiden whose bud of love had just bloomed. It was a heartwarming sight indeed.

Liz returned a gentle smile. “I’m just happy to see your love going well.”

“Oh! Um... I-I do mean it. Thank you!” Rachel responded with an awkward, stilted smile of her own.

“If you ever want to consult with me on anything again, my doors are always open. I’ll be waiting for you.”

“Y-Yeah! Thanks!”

A delicate love that had sprouted along the journey had finally borne fruit. Rachel had found a reliable friend to consult with, her expression now far clearer.

The journey continued on; Rachel still couldn’t be honest with herself, and she would oftentimes berate her partner. But unlike at the start, both Rachel and Mitter now understood that this was the inverse of what she meant.

From there on, their days were filled with love and harmony.

## Chapter 19: Now—The Super Spicy Carrot and the Sickly Sweet Stick

It happened after school. The sun was easing its way towards the horizon, and the sky had just begun to take on a hint of red. I was walking through the schoolhouse.

“I will never grow accustomed to this sort of thing,” I muttered, glancing down at the letter in my hand, which I had moments ago found addressed to me in my shoe cubby.

The letter read:

*Lady Lisalinde,*

*There’s something I want to talk about. Please come to the music room at five o’clock after school.*

*- Karvarossa*

Indeed. It was *that* sort of letter.

Karvarossa was a male student from the neighboring class—meaning there could be only one reason for such a callout.

Although I don’t mean to brag, I was quite popular in the academy. I’d received several confessions before. I’d turned them all down, but no matter how many times I had to do it, I could never get used to it.

For some reason, I just didn’t feel like going out with anyone. How to put this—it felt like this just wasn’t the right time. I was waiting for something.

*What exactly am I waiting for? What, do I think some prince on a white stallion will come and find me someday?* It was such a childish notion, and I found myself offering a wry smile at my own naivete.

But still, it felt like something would happen if I waited long enough. It didn’t make sense to me either, but I just knew.

I did think Sir Cain was wonderful, yes. But in one corner we had the world's greatest hero, and in the other corner, an ordinary high school girl. It wasn't an even matchup.

With that in mind, I walked down the corridor and arrived at the door to the music room. Perhaps I should have expected it given the contents of the letter, but the music club was taking the day off. I could not hear the sounds of anyone practicing within.

Twilight had now set in outside. I could hear shouts from students participating in club activities echoing from various points on the campus. The students from the sports clubs were giving it their all in preparation for the upcoming tournament.

"Pardon me."

I opened the door to the music room, announcing myself as I stepped in.

The light of the setting sun filled the entire room with a faint reddish hue. The large piano imbued a sense of grandeur, and in the corner, I noted a xylophone and cello that someone must have forgotten to put away.

"I've been waiting."

"Huh...?"

I was welcomed by a woman's voice. The individual there was not the same Karvarossa who had signed off the letter. The woman turned towards me.

"Lady Aina?"

"Yes, are you surprised, Lisalinde?"

The girl in the music room was Aina. A girl who was desperate to forge a clique of her own within the academy. The girl who had, for some reason, been captured by the guards in the red-light district that one time.

Bathed in the red sunset, she flashed me a dangerous smile.

"Err... I was called here by Sir Karvarossa..."

"I hate to break it to you, but I'm the one who invited you here," Aina said as she leaned against the piano. Her motions were as supple as a cat's, a feminine



allure in every single one of her gestures.

“Why...?”

“Lisalinde. Stay away from Sir Cain.”

“Huh?”

Her eyes sharpened as she glared at me.

“I saw it. You sold your body to the hero in the infirmary to seduce him, didn’t you? I dare you to get any closer to the hero. Just try it, and I’ll tell the whole school what happened.”

“Umm...”

*Sold my body in the infirmary?*

*Infirmary.*

*Infirmary...*

“Ah?! Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no...! You have it all wrong! That wasn’t what you think! Believe me, Aina!”

I started to wave my hands around wildly as I recalled what had happened. Once upon a time, in the infirmary, I’d clung to Cain in nothing but a bra.

*Come to think of it, Aina did open the door and see us, didn’t she? But that was a mistake! At the time, I was kinda...kinda going crazy!*

After Saint Melvy examined me, my body suddenly began to grow hot... And I started making advances at Melvy and Cain.

*I was going out of my mind back then! I’m sure Melvy must have made some sort of mistake! It’s not my fault! That wasn’t who I really am! I don’t usually press myself against men like that! And we really didn’t do anything lewd!*

“I-It’s a misunderstanding, Aina! I wasn’t trying to seduce Cain! In fact, I’ve never been in that sort of relationship with anyone in my life!”

“Hmm? So you’re a liar, Lisalinde?” a cold voice leaked from Aina’s lips. “Fine, if you’re going to play dumb... I have a little idea of my own.”

And with that, Aina snapped her fingers. A door different from the one I’d

entered through slammed open.

“Huh?”

That was the door leading to the music equipment storage room. From behind it emerged eight male students.

“Wh-Who are they?”

“Heh heh heh...”

The men grinned as they surrounded me. I shuffled backward.

Aina seemed completely unfazed by these visitors. It was clear enough that they were her lackeys.

“Hey, Lisalinde.” She rose from the piano and walked towards me. The men parted to let her pass. “Sign this contract.”

“Huh?”

“Henceforth, you will not approach, call out to, or seduce the hero. You shall in perpetuity keep your hands off of the hero.”

Aina took out a sheet of paper and thrust it out at me. Just as she had spelled out, it detailed an itemized list of promises she wanted me to make that would distance me from Cain. It was a contract to prevent me from any intimate contact with the man.

“I’m sure you understand, Lisalinde. You have to know what situation you’re in right now. You have no choice but to sign that contract. Am I wrong?”

Certainly, when I was surrounded by intimidating gentlemen, my options were quite limited. It was probably pointless to resist. However...

“I don’t want to do anything violent if I can help it. Unless you want these guys to hold your arm and have you sign by force, you’d better give up and sign it yourself. You understand, don’t you, Lisalinde?”

I removed my eyes from the contract and stared at Aina. I understood what she was trying to do. I really did, but...

“What’s with that look?”

*She’s being kinda soft*, I thought.

A contract like this didn't have any binding force; I could just casually sign it, then pretend nothing happened at all. Sure, it would be a bother if she dramatized the events of the infirmary and spread them to everyone in school, but... Well, I could probably extinguish those rumors if I tried hard enough.

Aina was surprisingly airheaded and soft. Her actions here were completely pointless, all things considered.

"Hold on, Lady Aina."

"Hmm?"

Or so I thought, but one of the male students surrounding me spoke up. "A scrap of paper isn't enough. Any woman who bares her fangs against you needs to suffer a little."

"Huh?"

Aina looked vaguely horrified.

The one who had spoken was Karvarossa, the boy from the neighboring class. The person whose name was on the letter.

"She picked a fight with you, Lady Aina. There's a good chance a girl like that will simply break any promises she makes with you. We need to make sure she can never go against you ever again."

"But she just needs to sign the contract, right, Karvarossa? There's no need to go that far, and I personally would rather not see that happen."

"I see... Then you leave me no choice... Hey," said Karvarossa, glancing over.

"On it," said one of the other men, as he pinned Aina's arms behind her back.

"Huh...? Hey! What do you think you're doing?!"

"Please understand. We're doing this for you."

The air in the room grew heavy. Aina thrashed and squirmed, but she could not slip out of the man's firm hold.

From a shopping bag, Karvarossa produced a single whip and swung it at the ground with a sharp cracking sound.

"What?!"

“A whip?!”

My body stiffened at this show of violence.

“Oh, please don’t misunderstand. This is just to set the mood. I wouldn’t want to have to actually use it... Of *course* not...”

The nasty smile on Karvarossa’s face left me and Aina agog. He surely could not mean well.

Aina’s lackeys had staged a mutiny. They were clearly the ones in control of the situation now. If they took advantage of their numbers, I wouldn’t be able to do a thing.

I swallowed my breath.

*Will I be able to get away? And if I don’t, what exactly is going to happen to me...?*

“Heh heh heh, I’ve got something better than a whip... Something much, much better... Heh...” Karvarossa continued with his tirade as I grappled with the situation internally. He sounded like he was having the time of his life. A creepy smile spread across his lips.

“The real star of the show...heh...is right here...”

And from his shopping bag, he pulled out something new. It was...

“Hmm?”

“Huh...?”

Our eyes widened.

“A...cream puff?”

“Heh, precisely.”

The item in question was a perfectly normal-looking cream puff. It looked like a normal dessert treat. The dough had nicely puffed up, and it had just the right amount of crisp. It looked delicious.

“A perfect cream puff, but oh, hold on? What’s this? Heh heh... This isn’t your average everyday cream puff, oh no...”

What could he possibly mean?

“For you see, this cream puff...” Karvarossa grinned. “Is stuffed full of super spicy mustard!”

“What?”

“Err, okay...?”

“Bwa ha ha ha hah!”

Karvarossa burst into maniacal laughter as we cocked our heads.

“Ha ha ha hah! Once this cream puff enters your mouth, you’re finished... You’ll writhe, you’ll scream! You’ll undoubtedly experience hell itself!”

We were utterly lost for words.

“Most humans will become obedient slaves after just two of them! And five, well, there isn’t a human alive who can survive that...!”

Karvarossa seemed to be psyched as can be, but Aina and I could only stare at him blankly. With the cream puff in hand, he drew closer and closer. I instinctively backed away.

*I kinda don’t like this. I don’t know what it is, but just...no!*

“Now, now, foolish Lisalinde! The clown who dared oppose Lady Aina! What say you get a taste of this super spicy cream puff?!”

“H-Hey, don’t come any closer...”

“Excuse me?!” Aina shrieked. “Quit it, boys! What are you people even doing?! What are you thinking?!”

“Or would you prefer it if I poured piping hot stew into your mouth?!”

The boys closed in on me, grinning. I was backed into a corner of the music room, with nowhere to run.

“Now...! Open up, it’s time to take your punishment! Ha ha ha ha ha hah!”

“Nooooo!”

The music room’s soundproof construction deafened my screams; no one outside could possibly hear me.

\* \* \* \* \*

A boy and a girl were walking side by side down the hall.

“Ah, what a goddamn drag. Why do we gotta help out the teachers?”

“Oho? You say that, but you just can’t bring yourself to turn them down. Classic Cain.”

The duo was none other than the hero Cain and the princess knight Sylphie, who had stayed late at the academy to help out the teachers.

“Oh, shut it, Sylphie. It’s a pain because I gotta keep up the good boy act.”

“It’s almost like you’re our current Liz.”

“Well...she’s still pretty interesting as she is right now.”

Sylphie giggled a bit as he said that. To those who knew how Liz originally was, her current personality was a complete mismatch. It was actually quite entertaining to watch.

“Oh, but I really hope she can regain her powers soon. I want to see the good old Liz.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“It must be torture for you, not being able to sleep with Liz anymore.”

“Shut up, dummy.”

“Yowie!”

Cain tugged at Sylphie’s cheeks.

“Oh, Sir Cain. No smoking in the hall, okay?” she reminded him.

“Tsk.”

He had subconsciously pulled a cigar out of his pocket and had been inches away from sticking it between his teeth. It was only when Sylphie pointed it out that he realized and tucked it back away.

“Ah man... It’s really a damn drag, being a model student.”

“Why don’t you try going on a rampage on campus, Cain? You could say goodbye to all that.”

“What an appealing proposition. Let’s not.”

“Ah ha ha.”

And in the midst of that exchange, they passed in front of the music room.

“Hmm?”

“What’s that noise?”

A peculiar sound was coming from within the room.

“That’s a whip... I think?”

It was a snapping sound, like the explosive crack of a whip.

Thanks to the room’s soundproofing, they could only faintly pick it up, even from right outside. But it was certainly a sound that didn’t fit in the music room. And if he strained his ears, Cain could have sworn there were some screams interspersed in there as well.

Cain had a bad feeling about this.

“Hey! What’s going on in here?!”

He swiftly entered, flinging the door open with a thunderous boom, causing everyone inside to straighten up.

“Ah... S-Sir Cain...”

“L-Liz...”

Inside the room was Liz. Her brows were dropping and there were tears in her eyes.

Cain’s eyes widened. A bizarre scene was laid out before him.

“N-No... Cain... This is some sort of mistake...”

Liz was standing there in a daunting pose, a whip clutched in her hand. On top of that, for some reason, she was wearing a black bodysuit with fishnet tights—quite a lewd outfit.

Sylphie, who entered after Cain, was just as stunned. The two of them swallowed their breaths and stared. Aina was cowering in fear in the corner.

“Hah, hah...! My—my queen! Please, th-the whip!”

“M-Me too! Please punish me too!”

“Queen!”

“Queen!”

Eight male students were down on all fours breathing heavily, wearing nothing but their underpants.





It was not at all the typical scene for the music room. Cain and Sylphie were fully at a loss for words.

“Th-Th-This is all wrong...! Cain! Sylphie! It has to be some sort of mistake!”

“Q-Queen! Hurry, the whip!”

“E-Enough yapping, you pig!”

*Snap!*

Liz cracked the whip.

“Oh! Th-Thank you for this blessing!”

“Aah! My mouth and hand just move on their own! It...it’s not me. I don’t know anything about this!”

Liz ruled as the queen of the music room, yet she shook her head, tears in her eyes.

It had happened when the boys had closed in on her with the cream puffs and uncomfortably warm stew. Liz fought back like her life was on the line.

She launched a surprise attack, rushing out and attacking the student who was holding the whip, and managing to steal the weapon.

Unfortunately, the situation was still hopeless. She was outnumbered, eight to one. Sure, she had a whip, but there wasn’t much she could do when surrounded.

But what happened next was unexpected. When Liz swung the whip, the boy she struck twitched, shuddered, then fell instantly to his knees. It wasn’t that he had taken too much damage, nor had he run out of stamina. And yet, that boy would not trouble Liz again. His face had turned red, a heated breath leaking from his lips.

And he begged. He pleaded. “Please do it again...”

From there on, Liz absolutely dominated the competition.

She snapped the whip. The boys cried out in glee. They got on their knees of their own volition. *More whipping*, they pleaded. They crowned Liz as their

queen.

The way she swung that whip was simply too exhilarating, too pleasurable. Although she herself likely didn't remember it, Liz was incredibly skilled at using a whip.

"Queen! My queen...! More! Please whip me more!"

"Please! The whip! Please give me more pain!"

Cain and Sylphie simply stared.

"Please, you two have me all wrong! This! This has nothing to do with me!"

"Queen! The whip! The whip!"

"Sh-Shut your mouth! Here's your punishment!"

*Snap!*

"Thank you, my queen!"

"Aah! Th-This is wrong! It's all wrong!"

It was hell.

"Liz..."

"C-Cain?"

Cain spoke slowly and deliberately. "Don't cause so much trouble for honest, respectable people."

"You're wrong! I'm the one that's being troubled here!"

Her eyes filled with even more tears as she pleaded. But her pleas fell on deaf ears.

"Oh, you're...Aina, was it?"

"Huh...?"

With Cain calling out to her, Aina—who was curled up and shaking in a corner of the music room—lifted her head.

She had not been struck with the whip and so she maintained her sanity. But that was precisely why—she watched the boys turn into pigs without knowing

how it had happened, shuddering in fear.

“You should get going. What you saw here... Well, you’ll live a happier life if you forget all about it.”

“B-But...”

“Just get going. It’s impossible for you to do anything about Liz. Staying here’s going to do far more harm for you than good,” Cain wearily told her.

Aina hesitated.

*Snap!*

Meanwhile, Liz was still swinging the whip.

“Ooh!”

“Thank you, my queen!”

“Shut up! I never ordered you to be my pigs!”

*Snap! Snap!*

“Oh! Ooooooh!”

“Thank you! Thank you, queen!”

“Please hit me more, queen! Please hit me more!”

“Why?!”

*Snap! Snap!*

Liz was growing desperate.

“Eeeeeek...I’m scared...”

Aina could only shudder and try to make herself smaller.

“Hey, Liz...”

“S-Sylphie! You’ve got it all wrong! There’s something wrong with me! P-Please, don’t judge me!”

Liz desperately made her appeal, and to this, Sylphie awkwardly scratched her cheek and replied, “Well... You know, since you’re at it... How about you give me a good whipping too? For old times’ sake?”

“What are you talking about?!” Liz screamed out in shock.

Sylphie’s cheeks flushed.

“No way! I don’t want to!” Liz shouted. “And wait, what do you mean for old times’ sake? I’ve never swung a whip before in all my life?!”

“S-So cruel...” Sylphie fell to her knees and hung her head. “It’s been so long...”

“Liz is so good with a whip that she can turn even nonmasochists into masochists... No, well, Sylphie is a natural masochist, but that’s another story.”

“What are you talking about?! I don’t understand!”

Sylphie had already fallen captive to Liz’s whip, but the girl in question had no way of knowing that.

“Queen! More whip! Give it to me!”

“Queen! Please torment me more!”

“Aah! For crying out loud! The fact that I’m getting a rise out of this is even more irritating! Take some punishment! And you too, you worthless pig!”

*Snap! Snap!*

“Gaah! Thank you!”

“Oink! Oink!”

“How nice... I wish that were me...”

The music room was filled with a new tune—a chorus of sensual screams. A cacophonous melody.

“Why meeeeeee...?! ”

The banquet of pigs raged on.

## Chapter 20: Then—“S” Stands for the Search for Love

“Hmph, why don’t you just kill me already?” said the girl in chains before she shut her mouth once again.

Cain and his comrades held their heads. They had no idea how to handle the distraught girl before them. They had managed to capture an enemy—a member of the demon lord’s army. However, their captive refused to leak a single word of intel that would betray her cause.

It happened just as the heroes were preparing to attack Castle Wabach, an important stronghold for the demon lord’s army. The castle was surrounded by a poisonous swamp, the structure itself protected by a powerful barrier, which the heroes were struggling to find a way through.

Amid these struggles, they came across a single thread of hope. They had captured Irma the Vampire, the general in charge of Castle Wabach’s defenses. An individual who surely knew the castle well.

“Hey, c’mon, Irma. Just a hint’s enough. How about you tell us what we need to know to get through that barrier?”

Naturally, though they tried to draw the necessary information out of the vampire, their words fell on deaf ears.

“How dare you act as though you have any right to call me by my name?”

Despite the chains binding her, Irma glared back through fierce eyes. She was obstinate; she wasn’t going to give up any information on the castle.

“I feel no great debt to the demon lord, nor to the lord of this castle. However, I’d rather die than do anything that would benefit you humans. Now, kill me already! Get to it!” Irma protested while jangling her chains. She could see no option but death. “I will never fold to you! It’s not like you’re ever going to set me free anyway! I’m far better off dead than becoming a human’s plaything! Now! Hurry and kill me!”

“...”

“I’ve lived my life used and abused by humans and the demon lord’s army. I’m sick of it! Just kill me! Kill me already!”

The hero and his party members closed their mouths. It was a painful display to witness.

Eventually, Irma stopped screaming. Still bound, she hung her head.

“I’ve never known any joy. Not once in all my life...” she muttered softly to herself.

Cain and his comrades left the room where Irma was being held captive to discuss the matter.

“Now then, how are we going to get that child to talk?” asked Lalo, a seasoned sorcerer. He was an accomplished man who had contributed much to the research being done at the Great Vondas Laboratory. He was more than fifty years old, a man with a long white beard growing from his chin.

“Unfortunately,” he went on, “I don’t see any other way of conquering Wabach, save for getting Irma to talk. At the very least, we don’t have any other leads at the moment.”

No matter how hard they searched, they couldn’t find any means of breaching the barrier. The information seemed to be under strict wraps, and despite searching all the nearby villages under the demon lord army’s control, they couldn’t find a single lead.

“I feel bad for her... But perhaps torture is the only option,” Lalo suggested as he rubbed his beard, his brow drooping.

*Torture.*

A dejected expression spread across his comrades’ faces.

However, “No can do,” Cain said in a matter-of-fact tone. “No torture, no violence. I won’t permit it. You got that?” He slouched back in his chair with his legs outstretched, arms folded.

Although the words of their leader provided some temporary peace of mind,

the heroes still had no way of overcoming their current predicament.

“Sir Cain... Of course, I don’t want to stoop to that either,” said Lalo. “But then, what can we do?”

“Lalo, just shut up and listen to me. No torture. I’m not accepting any arguments on this.” Cain wouldn’t hear a word on the subject. He took out a cigar and lit the tip. “We’ll get the info through different means—whatever means those are.”

As the room grew smoky, Lalo returned a soft nod. “Understood... You’ve always been like this, and you’ve always gotten results. If that’s what your decision is, then I can’t ask for anything more.” Lalo’s wrinkled face curled into a gentle smile.

“Leave it to me, Lalo.”

“Indeed, I always believe in you, Cain.”

They shared a nod. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that their leader would devise a method that wouldn’t weigh on their consciences.

However, a single objection did come from the great warrior of the ravine—Rachel.

“Hey, now! We still have nothing! What the hell are we supposed to do?! How do we conquer that castle?!” She banged on the table to drive home her point, her purple pigtails swinging.

“Rachel.”

“No, I’m not saying I want to torture anyone. I just want an actual plan. Do you have anything in mind, Cain?”

“Well...” Cain opened his mouth wide and breathed a puff of tobacco smoke. His eyes trailed upward towards the ceiling as he thought. “I want some time to think about it.”

“Well...fine, then. Just do *something*. Seriously.”

“Yeah, you can count on me.”

Rachel placed a hand on her hip and scoffed. Though she evidently had some



dissatisfaction with the direction the party was taking, she reluctantly conceded. After all, she did place her trust in Cain. Everyone knew that Cain was a man who could manage one way or another.

That was when it happened.

“Please leave it to me!”

There was a bang as the door to the room slammed open, a lone woman entering with a loud proclamation. They knew the voice too well—it was Liz.

Cain heaved a heavy sigh as he turned around and locked eyes with her.

“Liz... Where have you been playing around? If you’re not going to be here when we have important things to...”

That was where he paused. For a moment, everyone was at a loss for words. Liz was wearing something quite bizarre.

She had on a revealing black leather bodysuit, with fishnet stockings, and she had a butterfly-shaped mask on her face. Her posture was bold but flirtatious. Her fingers were wrapped around a black whip.

“Hey, Liz...that getup...”

“My name is not Liz.”

“Huh?”

Liz snapped the whip at the ground.

“Right now, I am the perverted beast tamer, Sadoking!”

“Shut up. Just shut up.”

Yes, Sadoking had arrived.

“Th-That appearance...! It’s Sadoking!”

“You know about this, Melvy?” asked Lalo.

“Yes, well, everyone here besides you and Mitter should know...”

Melvy awkwardly scratched at her cheek.

Cain and all the women in the party had seen Liz dressed like this before. These were the clothes she wore whenever she wanted to get up to a bit of S

and M. Although Cain generally had some sadistic tendencies himself, so it oftentimes devolved into a war of sadism versus sadism.

“I, Sadoking, shall take care of Irma the Vampire for you.”

“No, you won’t.”

“Ah! Hah! *Hah!* How cheeky. Take your punishment!”

“Bitch, who do you think you’re talking to?”

“As I said, leave the vampire to me.”

“And as *I* said, it’s not gonna happen.”

The figure known as Sadoking carried herself with absolute confidence.

“Now look here, Liz. I’ve decided we’re not gonna do any torture. No violence.”

“That’s all right.”

“I don’t feel assured somehow.”

“Well then, I’m off! Farewell, you ignorant fools!”

“Hey, wait a second!” Cain called, trying to halt this rampage before it started.

“It’s okay. What I impart is not suffering. It is love. I shall shower her with love and kindness.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. You’re sick in the head. Now how about you go lie in your bed like a good patient.”

“Pig.”

“What did you just call me?”

“Rest easy, I promise not to inflict even the slightest bit of suffering on Irma.”

Again, she snapped her whip at the ground. Her comrades’ faces grew stiff.

“I’ll hammer the kindness of life into her.”

Liz grinned.

“Aaaaah...! Boss! Boss! More! Please give me more!”

“What a slovenly girl. Someone ought to set you straight!”

“Ah! Thank you so much, boss!”

*Snap!* The sound of the whip echoed through the air.

Irma’s face was red and blissful. She was bound in a tortoiseshell rope harness over her clothing, but her heart had never been so free.

And Cain felt like he had to avert his eyes from the devilish scene that had cropped up in the blink of an eye.

“Boss! Please draw the words from me! Please make me squeal! It doesn’t just have to be about that castle. I’ll tell you all about the demon lord’s army too. Everything I know. All of it!”

“You sow!”

“Thank you!”

*Snap!* The whip cracked.

Sadoking’s skill with the whip was top-class; she had exquisite control over the stimulation she caused, and in just an instant she had brought Irma the Vampire to the zenith of delight.

“Are you enjoying this?!”

“Yes! I am! I am, my queen!”

“Well, you shouldn’t be! This is your punishment!”

“Thank you so much!”

Irma divulged every piece of information she had.

“Ah, Liz... She’s already told us everything, so why don’t you free her now?”

“It’s not Liz! It’s Sadoking!”

“Shut it.”

Cain punched Liz in the shoulder.

“Yowch! Q-Quit it... You’re going to have me all switched up at this rate! Hah hah. ≡”

“Enough of this.”

“Hey! Stop that, you lowlife! Don’t lay a hand on the boss! If you want to lay a hand on anyone, lay it on me... ≡ *Hff... Hff...* ≡”

“What have you done...?”

Cain could only hold his head in his hands as he witnessed the complete transformation of Irma the Vampire.

“Saying you want to free me... How could you bring an end to my wonderful time with the boss... Are you a demon?!”

“You’re the demon here.”

“Cain, I just knew it when I first laid eyes on her. This girl has the talent to be a splendid masochist!”

“Now listen here, Liz. Just because someone’s got a talent, that doesn’t mean you just go around awakening it.”

“Here’s your punishment, you pervy dog!” Liz cried.

“Aah! Thank you!”

*Snap!*

“Sir Cain, everyone has the ability to hurt others. Anyone can cause pain.”

“Hmm?”

“But a world-class sadist is one who can provide precisely the stimulation their partner desires! A true sadist thinks hard about their partner; she senses their desires and swings her whip!”

*Snap!*

“Aah! ≡ Boss! ≡ More! ≡ More, please...! ≡”

“Sadism...is the search for love...”

“I don’t get it.”

Sadoking adjusted her butterfly mask and turned to Irma, who stared at her, spellbound.

“Are you in any pain right now?!”

“Not at all, boss!”

“You said you never had a fun moment in your life. Do you still feel that way?!”

“Not at all, boss!”

“Well said! Take your reward!”

*Snap!*

“Thank you...!”

“But you’re a pervert, so you need some punishment too!”

“Waah! Thank you!”

Irma was in the process of finding the meaning behind her life.

“Let’s just go to sleep,” Cain sighed.

Sadoking’s comrades abandoned her to this hell, opting to return to their rooms and sleep. Their contributions were not needed here.

Under a beautiful starry sky, the snap of a whip resounded all throughout the night. A snap that came in concert with cries of glee.

## Chapter 21: Now—Aina and the Journalist

Aina, a student of Forst Academy, was at a loss.

“Grrrr...”

Class had ended. As she walked home, she folded her arms and groaned. Lately, she had been plagued by a particular worry. It had to do with her classmate Lisalinde.

Aina was targeting the hero Cain in a romantic way, and it seemed that Lisalinde was thinking very much the same thing. What’s more, it was quite possible that they were already in that sort of relationship.

“Grrrr...”

However, Aina’s current worry had nothing to do with jealousy or rivalry. She was mulling over how she could apologize to Lisalinde.

Just the other day, she’d summoned Lisalinde to the music room, where she tried to threaten her into staying away from the hero. However, the boys she’d allied with had acted out and had plotted to feed Lisalinde super spicy cream puffs.

*No seriously, why spicy cream puffs?*

Aina couldn’t quite understand their intentions. But that didn’t really matter. The men had treated her roughly, and as a result, Lisalinde was forced to escape her crisis on her own.

At the time, Aina had been truly terrified. After all, everyone had suddenly started oinking and screaming “thank you” every time they were hit with a whip.

*What exactly was all of that? No, it doesn’t matter.* Aina shook her head.

What she had to think about now was the fact that she had threatened Lisalinde, and on top of that, had indirectly enacted violence upon her.

Aina never intended to go that far. And, in the end, she had been saved by

Lisalinde. Aina had been restrained by one of the men, rendered immobile. If those men had taken their violence even further, they might have even turned on Aina as well, and had they done that, she would have had no means of escape. But Lisalinde had blown that crisis away, and thanks to her, Aina had gotten out of it completely unscathed.

“Hah,” Aina sighed.

*I really should apologize to Lisalinde,* she thought. But how could she lower her head to the woman she had seen as an enemy the whole time?

Inside her school bag was a box of cakes she intended to give to Lisalinde, but she was never able to call out to her. She couldn’t bring herself to do it. She couldn’t go against her whole way of being so easily.

“Hah.” Again, Aina let out a sigh.

“Madam?”

“Hmm?”

As she was walking and pondering such things, a voice suddenly came from behind her. Aina stopped and turned.

“Do you have a moment, madam?”

Seeing the man who had called out to her, a frown spread immediately across Aina’s face.

He sported an unshaven stubble and was quite clearly a shady individual. He wore a long robe that covered most of his body, and if that wasn’t suspicious enough, he had the hood pulled down and wore tinted glasses to hide his face. And for some reason, he had a musical instrument in hand—a lute. The thought even crossed Aina’s mind: *Maybe I should scream and make a beeline out of here.*

“Oh please, madam. I’m not anyone suspicious,” the man in the hood said.

*You’re shady, no matter how you slice it,* she wanted to retort.

“Would you...care to listen to a song?”

“A song?”

“Yes. I wrote a song...”

Aina’s face twitched at the man’s sudden request.

“Well, if...it’s just one song, then all right...?” she replied in her usual high-pitched, coquettish tone.

It wasn’t like she was the only one on the road. Aina was constantly putting on an act. If her school friends or acquaintances were to pass by, and if they were to see her gently acquiescing to someone’s request instead of heartlessly turning them down, perhaps it wouldn’t be such a bad deal for her. That was the compromise she came to in her head.

“Despite how I look, I have some confidence in my songs.”

“Oh, is that so? That’s amaaazing,” Aina purred.

The man raised his lute, strumming it a few times to ensure it was in tune.

“Then please listen... The title of this piece is ‘I Think That Women Drenched with Water Magic Are Pretty Hot’... Here I go.”

“Hold on a *damn* second.”

The man had just opened his mouth to sing the first note, and Aina had already stopped him. Not in her crooning voice, but in her naturally low register.

“Is something wrong?”

“Everything’s wrong! What?! The hell kind of a title is that?! What are you trying to sing to me?!”

Aina flew into a rage. Understandably.

“Hey, hey, please listen to me! Madam! There’s a reason I need to sing this song!”

“Like hell there is! I don’t know what your circumstances are, but I’d reckon you could scour every corner of the earth and you wouldn’t find a reason to sing a song with that title!”

“Truth be told, I’m actually a pretty famous minstrel...”

“Huh?”



Sweat dripped through the gap in the man's hood. He used a finger to adjust the position of his tinted glasses.

"Very well... I'll tell you everything. My name is Delfina. Perhaps you've heard of the minstrel Baron Delfina before?"

"What...?! Baron D-Delfina?!"

Aina was startled by the name.

He was most definitely a distinguished minstrel. The man was at the top of his field, having penned many heroic epics that had spread all around the world. Anyone who lived in the country had most certainly heard at least one of Baron Delfina's tunes.

Aina fell silent in confusion. The man before her eyes was a famous minstrel? The same man who was clearly dressed like a suspicious character, and who had tried to sing her a song with a blatantly dicey title? Aina didn't have enough information to know if he was lying or not.

"Two years ago, I penned a song about a band of heroes..."

The man removed his glasses and began to tell a tale. Unfortunately, as Aina did not know what Baron Delfina's face looked like, even the absence of glasses did not help her determine if it was really him.

"That song was loved by many people and spread around the world... But... But even then! I could never be satisfied with how the song turned out!"

The self-proclaimed Baron Delfina gritted his teeth and clenched his fist.

Baron Delfina had released many songs into the world, and most were greatly beloved. *There's just one song he isn't satisfied with? What sort of song could it be?*

"Why aren't you satisfied with it?"

"Because the song...didn't depict one of the important figures in the slightest."

"Huh? Why not?"

"That's..." the man struggled to muster his voice. "Because that person...was

a complete and utter degenerate.”

“Huh?”

The hooded man hung his head in frustration as Aina cocked her head curiously.

“I...no, it wasn’t just me. In order to maintain the quality of our songs, we all intentionally refrained from any depictions of that perverted lady. All the other minstrels who met those heroes didn’t pen a word about her either... And eventually, the minstrel association decided on a complete and perpetual ban on any songs about the pervert.”

“There’s a minstrel association?”

“Yes, they manage the legal rights of our works and such. Due to the prohibition, there aren’t any minstrels who will sing any songs about the pervert even if they wanted to.”

“What sort of pervert is that?”

“An incredible pervert.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Aina sighed.

“But I think there’s something wrong with that. We’re singing about real and honest heroes, so to omit a certain individual from our songs goes against our minstrel—nay, our journalistic creed to report the truth as it is... Don’t you think that this act is an affront to journalistic integrity?”

“Sure...”

“So now, it’s occurred to me. If I have the skills to provide some erotic depictions just vague enough that they aren’t caught up in the ban, if I can satisfy that degenerate lady while still receiving the blessing of the association... Wouldn’t that be the badge of a first-rate minstrel-slash-journalist?”

“I-I don’t really get it but...essentially, you’re a professional reporter?”

Aina’s mouth twitched as she watched the man clench his fist in frustration. She didn’t know the first thing about the spirit of a professional journalist, and she still couldn’t determine whether the man before her was really Baron Delfina or not. But his heat, his enthusiasm were definitely no lie.

Not that she could sympathize.

“To that end, I must study erotic depictions.”

“R-Right...”

“So please listen. ‘I Think That Women Drenched with Water Magic Are Pretty Hot.’”

“Lck.”

Overpowered by his enthusiasm, Aina missed her opportunity to stop him.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! ♪ Won’t someone please tell me? ♪ Why are they so sexy? ♪ Women splashed with water magic, oh! ♪” The song began.

“That’s the worst start I’ve ever heard.”

“Soaked with water magic, their brassieres peeking through their see-through clothes. ♪ Oh, that part’s sexy, and it’s easy to see. ♪ But, oh but you know? ♪ Even without all of that, I’m ready to go. ♪ Won’t someone please tell me? Why are they so sexy? Just seeing a woman splashed with water, oh?”

“Don’t ask me.”

“Is it because we associate it with showers maybe? ♪ A woman whose hair is damp, just dripping a bit onto me. ♪ So beautiful. ♪ Whoa whoa whoa! ♪ What’s that hum in my chest, oh? ♪”

“That’s carnal lust, plain and simple.”

Just listening to it was making Aina’s head hurt. But the man boldly pressed on.

“Any woman soaked in water is so wonderful. ♪ But personally, a soaked woman wearing nothing but a button-up shirt hits me the hardest! ♪ Oh, it’s all wet, hee hee! She gives a bashful smile and that hits me where it hurts. ♪ She’s borrowed her boyfriend’s shirt, and it’s just a little too big and baggy. ♪ That hits right in my strike zone, and it’s got my heart dragging. ♪”

“But no one’s ever going to go outside wearing nothing but a shirt, so you’ve got no opportunities to get soaked.”

“But I’m sorry to say. ♪ You’re never out in the rain. ♪ Wearing nothing but

your boyfriend's borrowed shirt. ♪ That just doesn't happen. ♪”

“Oh, so you took that into consideration.”

*Does this guy have the same thought process as me, or something?* Aina tiredly wondered.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. ♪ By the way, I think it was twenty-five years ago, give or take. ♪ Young Fiona dressed up as a pervy magical girl while working as an A-Rank Adventurer. ♪ I wonder what she's doing now. ♪ Young Fiona who seriously dressed like those pervy magicians you only see in novels and plays. ♪ She took the world by storm. ♪ Now, I think she's in her late thirties. ♪”

“You'd better not bring it up if you see her.”

“Whoa. ♪ I was a young boy then. ♪ And when I saw her (saw her), ♪ it was like a super lewd lightning spell fell on me. ♪”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“Whoa! ♪ A super lewd lightning spell fell on me.”

Gradually, his strums grew softer and softer.

“Whoa... ♪ Whoa... ♪ Whoa... ♪”

Aina was silent, until the man said, “Thank you for your attention.”

“I wasn't attentive at all, believe me.”

“Thank you for your kind attention.”

“Are you being snarky with me? Well, sorry for not listening to all of it.”

The man lifted his face. “How was it?”

“Terrible.”

“Hmm... It just goes to show I need to be more diligent with my studies.”

“No, seriously. Stop it.”

And then...

“There he is! That suspicious guy singing obscene songs all around town!”

“Secure him! Secure him!”

An officer with wings on his back—one of those angel policemen that Aina saw now and then—spotted the man and started to run towards him. He seemed shocked.

“W-Wrong... I-I’m simply... For the sake of wholesome journalism, I’m...!”

“Wholesome?! What are you on about?!”

“There was a report that someone was accosting random strangers to sing obscenities to them!” the officer explained. “Get a rope around him!”

“Wrong! You have it all wrong! I’m challenging the limits of depictions. I’m a journalist of justice, trying to spread the truth to society...! S-Stop it...!”

The hooded man screamed as the winged officer tied him up and took him off.

And Aina was left standing there alone.

“I should go home.”

Her shoulders drooped. She trudged the rest of the way home, thoroughly exhausted. She’d completely forgotten about what she’d been so worried about only moments before. For now, she just wanted to go home and get some good rest.

*Who exactly was that man in the hood? Was it really Baron Delfina?*

Now that the angel had arrested him, there was no way of knowing.

*For the time being, the cause of all this... Yeah, the banned pervert lady. I definitely don’t ever want to meet her...* Aina swore it in her heart.

## Chapter 22: Then—The Magician Could Never Make It Big

Cain and his comrades were all unparalleled warriors. There were Sylphonia, the Princess Knight of Bahelgarn, Melvy, Saint of the Russel-Bell Church, the Noble Knight Mitter, Warrior Rachel of the Darz Ravine, and the Seasoned Sorcerer Lalo from the Vodas Laboratory.

They were all indispensable to the heroic tales of Cain, and they had all gained fame all around the world. Each and every member had left such a tremendous legacy that they could be the main characters of their own plays and songs.

They were all heroes whose names would be spoken for generations.

However, there was a black sheep among them, an individual whose name was unknown to the world.

She had been Cain's first-ever comrade and had supported him for the large majority of his travels. A young woman known as Liz the Magician.

Liz was unlike normal humans; she was a succubus atavist. A girl who held the power of the demons—a power that was supposed to belong to the enemy side. And so, the root of her powers was never told to anyone outside of her comrades and family.

Hers was the only name unknown to the world. And there was a rather profound reason for that.

It happened one day along the adventure.

"You have my deepest thanks for saving me! Dear heroes! Watching you fight has moved me to tears!"

A man was showering Cain and his party members with deep gratitude. With just seven members, they had intercepted ten thousand monsters and had completely averted the crisis befalling a large town. It was not rare for them to

be on the receiving end of such praise. Even as they spoke, there were cheers of immense joy echoing from the town, and a great feast was being prepared to honor the heroes. However, the man before them held a title that made him a little different from the others.

“Please allow me to turn your deeds here into a song! I’m begging you!”

“Huh?”

“A song?”

The man gripping Cain’s hand was named Baron Delfina—a minstrel whose name was known far and wide. A minstrel, or rather a troubadour to be more precise. A traveling musician of status who would sing of myths, legends, and epic heroes as he traveled across the land. Most of the lasting stories of heroes had only been remembered through the ages because they had first passed through a troubadour’s lips.

“B-Baron Delfina’s even famous in my country! He’s a celebrity!” cried Sylphie.

“Err, umm... A-Are we going to be famous?” Melvy wondered.

To have him sing of them would be akin to having their names known all across the world, and even into the distant future.

Later on, the tales of the hero’s party would be reproduced in books and plays and all sorts of media, but this was where it all began. Those other productions were all either based on or largely influenced by the baron’s works.

“Once I’ve finished my song, I would love it if you could be the first ones to hear it! I’ll sing with all my soul!” Baron Delfina declared, his eyes sparkling like a kid in a candy shop. His urge to create was burning bright.

The heroes couldn’t turn down his proposal. They didn’t have any reason to, and even if they did, he was making it very difficult.

A week went by.

“My song is done! Please listen...!” Baron Delfina dropped by the inn where the heroes were staying. Triumphantly, he started immediately into his song.

He told of Princess Knight Sylphonia, a warrior of passion and grace. She danced with spell and blade, her form almost like a dazzling spirit.

Of Saint Melvy, the very personification of compassion, who healed her allies, holding the lives of these brave warriors in her gentle embrace.

Rachel the Great Warrior devastated hordes of foes like a violent storm rampaging across the land. Meanwhile, the knowledge of the magicians Lisalinde and Lalo was more expansive than the abyss. And protecting them all was the shield of the noble knight Mitter.

But more beautiful than any of them was Cain the hero.

The glimmer of his holy blade was, itself, the very hope of the world, and as he fought, every fiber of his being was overflowing with the blessings of the gods.

“Thank you for your attention.”

The song was over, and Baron Delfina bowed his head. He had detailed the town’s defensive battle from beginning to end, and the way he sang it made it feel as though the listener was actually there with him.

The heroes were all red in the face, for the most part. This tale shone just as brightly as the epics of old heroes they’d heard growing up. Understandably, they felt rather bashful. Melvy was especially red, and she tried to conceal her blush behind her hands as she curled up and quivered.

“How was that, Hero?!”

“Th-Thank you... Very wonderfully done, Baron Delfina.”

“I am eternally grateful for those words!”

There wasn’t a single soul who would complain about the song’s quality. Since it was about them, it was difficult to provide any objective feedback—that was part of it. But even excluding that fact, it was abundantly clear how wonderful the song had turned out. The poetical prose overflowing with evocative detail, the beautiful melody that stirred the heart... No one could possibly decry any part of the song.

“Hey, hoooooold on!”



“Huh?”

“Hmm...?”

Save for a single succubus.

“I can’t accept that song! It’s absolutely rotten!”

“Liz...”

“What’s wrong, Liz?”

Liz angrily huffed as she stood. Baron Delfina had started to shiver and shake.

“The me in your song wasn’t me at all! Please don’t make up complete fabrications!”

“Huh?! M-My apologies, Lady Lisalinde! It all comes down to my lack of ability!” Delfina frantically bowed his head. He didn’t know what he’d done wrong, exactly, but if the very person he’d sung about was refuting his song, then he clearly hadn’t a leg to stand on.

“Hey now, cut him some slack. What are you so angry about, Liz? What’s the matter if it’s a little bit off?”

“No, no, no! This is one thing I won’t move on, even if it’s coming from you, Sir Cain! What even was that?! That song! You know...! Like this part right here...!”

Liz snatched away the score and lyrics from Delfina’s hands and scanned over them.

“‘The flames burst forth from Liz the Magician, rising as high as the heavens and incinerating her foes to cinders. Her mastery of magic had reached the realm of the gods.’ What is this nonsense?!”

“Wh-What’s got you in such a mood, anyway? I think he’s got you sounding pretty cool.”

Her comrades couldn’t understand what she was so dissatisfied with.

“It’s not sexy at all!” Liz cried out.

“Huh?”

“When I’m this cool... I’m not me!” Liz put a hand on her hip as she closed in on Delfina. “Please depict me as lewd and lecherous!”

“Huh...?”

“Oh c’mon...”

Cain and his comrades sighed, while Delfina stared at her blankly. He had no idea what she meant.

But Liz was still seething. She loudly went on. “I mean, look here! Yeah, this part too! ‘Hero Cain and Liz the Magician stood back-to-back, each fighting while protecting the other. Together, they knew that their lives were in good hands.’ Get a load of that!”

“I-It’s a good line...”

That was supposed to be an exciting scene.

“But you did not even provide a single depiction of me sniffing up the smell of Sir Cain’s sweat! It’s like it didn’t happen!”

“Keep your head in the battle, creep!”

“Yowch!”

Cain lowered a fist down on the fool’s head. The sound echoed through the room.

“Hah... ≡ Hah... ≡ That was a good fist... ≡”

Liz’s body twisted and writhed as the impact raced through her skull. Everyone else was used to it, but Baron Delfina was taken aback.

“Anyways, this cool, awe-inspiring person isn’t the real me! Please sing about me as the degenerate that I am!”

“Hey! You’re just causing trouble for the good baron!”

“Right, here it is again... ‘Down came a bolt of beautiful lightning, bordering on sublime.’ Yeah, why can’t you just say, ‘Down came a bolt of super lewd lightning’?! ”

“What sort of lightning is that?! ”

Liz was on a rampage. “Now! Right now! Rewrite it this instant, Baron Delfina! Please sing about a me that captures the essence of me!”

“Wah?! P-Please cease this at once, Lady Lisalinde!”

Liz assailed Baron Delfina, grabbing his arms and pressing his hands against the page.

“Now! Make me terrible, mean, and vulgar! Pathetic, miserable, lewd, perverted, and vile. Please spread that image of me across the world! I wish to have that willful, twisted version of myself passed down for all eternity!”

“Eeeeeeeeeeep!”

“Stop it, Liz! Quit causing trouble for honest, respectable people!”

The hero’s party did all they could to hold Liz back.

Cain and all his comrades had their names spread through the world. But the public never learned of Liz the Magician. There was a profound reason for that...

To summarize, all accurate depictions of her were strictly prohibited for public decency.

And to think, it all started on that fine, calm day...

## Chapter 23: Now—Just Two Friends in the Gym Storage Room

“Tsk, why do these damn things always happen to me...”

“Now, now, Sir Cain. Don’t be like that.”

Cain frustratedly clicked his tongue and cursed. He was currently inside the storage room for the academy’s gymnasium.

“Ah, what a drag, what a goddamn drag. Why do I got to help out the teachers, anyway?”

“Ah ha ha, it must be troublesome, being the hero and all.”

“You got that right. It’s hard work pretending to be a good guy.”

Cain and Liz were cleaning up after gym class. As Cain was trying to maintain his public image as a polite, diligent, and affable young man, he could never turn down a request from the teachers. Meanwhile, Liz was an actual honor student, and so she was helping out too.

“We’ve both got it rough with all the pretending,” Cain said with a sigh.

“Hold it right there,” said Liz. “I’m not pretending to be anyone I’m not. I quite like helping people out.”

“Oh, now that you mention it...”

Cain reflected on how she used to be. Although Liz was a degenerate, she was a woman who would always take the initiative when it came to doing chores or helping people. Ignoring that perverted side of her, she was fundamentally a well-meaning and kind person.

Yes, as long as you ignored that perverted side.

The two of them were working around the back of the room, organizing the shelf where various gym supplies were kept. Right in front of that shelf was a vaulting box that did a good job concealing them from the eyes of anyone at the

door.

It was at that moment that some students' voices came from the entrance.

"Huh? Someone left the door open."

"No one's inside, right?"

Shortly after those faint voices, the door to the gym storage promptly slammed shut.

"Hmm?"

Cain and Liz raised their heads at the voices and the sound, but it was already too late. The door was shut, and the clanking of the latch quickly followed.

"Huh?"

"Don't tell me..."

They quickly made for the door. *There's no way that could ever happen*, they both thought.

Cain put his hand on the door, but it wouldn't open. It had been locked from the outside.

"Oh c'mon. You're kidding me..."

"Really?! Excuse me! W-We're still inside!"

"Hey, you folks out there! Open up!"

They banged on the door, yelling loudly, but to no avail. The two of them had been trapped within the dim storage room.

For a while, they just stood there quietly. Eventually, Liz burst out, "Wh-Wh-What do we do?! We've been locked in!"

"H-Hey! Liz! Was this your doing?!"

"Huh...? Of course not! You were with me the whole time!"

"This isn't one of those blasted *rooms you can only leave if you have sex*, is it?!"

"What sort of twisted room is that?!" Liz was startled.

Though Cain had immediately suspected his own comrade Liz, this was, perhaps, understandable. After all, he and his comrades had experienced so many of those *rooms* that they were the first thing to come to mind when Cain thought of a sealed space.

Liz shook her head to deny it, and Cain took in a deep breath to calm himself.

He took his place before the door.

“All right. I’m busting it down.”

“We’re jumping right to that?!”

Cain made a swift and resolute decision as he readied his fist to strike.

“Th-That should be the last resort, don’t you think?! Do we have any other means?”

“Right... Well, I guess we can do a bit of thinking.”

Even Cain had the prudence to not immediately jump to destroying the academy’s facilities, and so he retracted his clenched fist. The two of them began to think of how they might escape.

“But... What are our options, really? That door is the only exit.”

“Meaning the only legitimate way would be for someone to open it from the outside... Hey, Liz, use telepathy to get in touch with my comrades. If they’re still on campus, they should be within range.”

“Huh...?”

Liz was startled by Cain’s question.

Telepathy was a spell that allowed its caster to contact distant people, and it was supposed to be an incredibly difficult spell. Although it didn’t work beyond a certain range, it should have been more than enough to get in touch with anyone on the academy campus.

With that said, however...

“I cannot use telepathy. And naturally, I don’t have permission to send messages to any of your comrades, Cain.”

“Now that you mention it...”

Telepathy was beyond what a normal student was able to pull off. What's more, a high level of skill was required for the receiver of the telepathic messages as well. But even then, it wouldn't work unless both parties had given permission by mixing their mana together to form a link in advance. Having lost her memories, Liz couldn't use the telepathy spell, and naturally, she did not remember forming a link with any of Cain's party members.

"Got it... I'm no good at telepathy, but I'll try sending a message."

"Wow, that's the hero for you. Please do."

Cain slowly closed his eyes and invoked the spell. Liz watched him with concern. A silence descended on the storage room.

"Okay, I got in touch."

"Oh?"

"She said she had some things to take care of first, but Melvy can come by. Lalo's in a staff meeting right now, so he can't."

"Ooh."

Liz stared at Cain with awe and respect. He'd so casually pulled off a spell that was supposed to be incredibly difficult.

"That's a relief, then. We'll be able to leave if we just wait around a bit longer."

"Yep. Ah, looks like I panicked for nothing."

After heaving a sigh, Cain took a seat on a nearby pile of mats. The problem seemed to be resolved, and feeling relieved, Liz took a seat next to him.

"That was incredible, Cain! You're not even a magic specialist, but you can use telepathy magic!"

"Oh... Someone said it might be convenient, and I ought to learn it. They were real casual about it too... One of my comrades."

"They just casually taught you such a difficult spell... That must have been quite rough for you."

Liz's cheek twitched. That wasn't the sort of spell that could just be casually

tossed around.

“Well, it does pull its weight. It’s super convenient whenever the battlefield’s a mess. So we went through a bit of hellish training and hammered it in. Now, all of my comrades can use telepathy.”

“Incidentally, who was that insane comrade who so casually set you off on such a grueling path? Was it Mr. Lalo? Don’t tell me it was Melvy?”

“No.”

“Sylphie? Rachel? No, Rachel’s not a magic specialist... And it’s hard to imagine Mitter...”

“Hrah.”

“Eep?!”

Cain flicked Liz on the forehead. There was a nice snapping sound and her brow was faintly tinted red.

“Huh...? Why did you do that?”

“Who knows?”

With a proverbial question mark over her head, Liz held her forehead with teary eyes. Cain shuffled a bit closer, this time softly pulling on her cheek.

“Good grief, why do you gotta make me worry so much? How long’s it gonna take before you’re healed up? We’re all worried about you, you know.”

“P-Parbom...? Whaff are you talkin’ about...?” Liz asked through taut cheeks. She didn’t quite know what Cain was talking about, and as he pulled her cheeks further and further, she quizzically cocked her head.

“Are you eating properly? You sleeping well at night? You’re looking after yourself, right? Not getting sick?”

“A-Aye’m fine... I’ve ahways been healfy...”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Cain gently pushed and pulled on Liz’s soft cheeks, and Liz simply let him do it. Their faces were close. Anyone who stumbled upon them would have sworn



they were a boy and a girl flirting with one another.

“ ... ”

“ ..... ”

Gym class had just finished, and they were both still a little sweaty. The faint smell of sweat rose from their faintly wet skin. Cain suddenly froze where he was.

They were alone together in the dimly lit storage. His heart was astir. Their faces were close.

“Hmph. Sorry about that. I got a little carried away.”

“Huh? Oh, no need to worry...”

And with that, Cain removed his fingers from Liz’s cheeks and backed off a bit more than he had to.

Liz’s cheeks had turned red. It was more from the contact and her distance to Cain than it was from all the pulling.

“ ... ”

“ ..... ”

Once again, they were surrounded by complete silence. Cain turned his head away, while Liz fidgeted. Truth be told, Cain was holding back a lot more than it looked. It wasn’t just here and now. He had carried a hazy feeling in his chest for all his time at the academy. One of his comrades had been gravely injured; she’d lost her memories and forgotten all about everyone, and yet she still lived on.

It was Cain who worried for Liz more than anyone else. To him, she was a very special woman. If he let his guard down for even a second, he would be overcome by an urge to draw her close. He would want to nestle up to her as he did before, and he would want to hold her tight. And then, he’d want to stay like that, just sitting beside her in peace for hours on end.

Cain endured, making sure not to show it.

“Umm...” Liz called to him. He slowly turned towards her. “Err...this might

sound like a strange request...”

Liz’s cheeks were red. She was looking at him bashfully with upturned eyes. Cain swallowed his breath. The dim lighting was enough for her to look so much more sensual.

Liz spoke in a soft, bashful voice. “Umm... You know how you flicked my forehead? Could you do it again...?”

“Crap. I flipped her switch...”

Liz was requesting some pleasant punishment.

After a momentary lapse, she stammered, “Huh?! O-Oh, I’m going strange again! I-I’m sorry! Please, forget about it...”

“Yeah, don’t worry. I’m used to it by now.”

“Y-You have me all wrong! For some reason, I’ve been acting very strange lately! Ah! Seriously, what am I talking about?!”

Liz turned even redder, now almost childlike in her panic. She’d completely shattered any sensuality that had been there before.

Cain was a little relieved. He calmly watched his comrade as she panicked and grasped for some resolution. “No need to be so flustered. I already know that you’re a pervert. It’s nothing new.”

“Wrong! I am not a perverted girl! I’m not! I’m really not...! I-I’m a proper and honest noble! It’s not what you think! I’ve just been a I-little strange lately... This isn’t the real me!”

Liz’s head was spinning. Her eyes were teary again but for a different reason this time.

Cain watched her and said, “Hey...”

“Y-Yes?!”

“It doesn’t really matter if you’re a pervert.”

“Huh...?”

After taking a deep breath, Cain looked at her head-on. He stared into her eyes with all seriousness.

“I’m actually a little worried about how you are right now. When your emotions explode like that, if it gets too much, and you’re unable to control it... I think you’re going to end up making some painful memories again.”

“Huh? What...?”

“You might beat yourself up for being lewd or indecent. You think your good sense and morals are on the verge of collapse; you’re afraid that all you’ve built up as an honest and diligent noble lady’s gonna come tumbling down.” He paused, and continued, “But it’s okay. You don’t have to lose anything. It’s okay if you’re a little more honest with yourself.”

It was the same advice Cain had given Liz once before. He had suddenly grown quite solemn, and Liz hesitated over how to react. But if she was being honest, it wasn’t like she didn’t have any idea where he was coming from.

And for some reason, she could feel a heat growing in her chest.

“I think you’re amazing,” Cain went on.

“Huh?”

“After living as the hero, I know just how hard it is to be your real self. I know how much easier it is to put on a mask and be a polite, well-mannered guy on the surface. If I was my real rough self, tackling my way through all my problems... Getting people to accept me for who I am, it’d be a whole lot harder. I know that all too well.”

“...”

“So I think you’re amazing.”

During the time she was active as Cain’s comrade, Liz had always confronted people as her true self. Naturally, this caused all sorts of problems, and she was oftentimes berated for it, but thanks to that, she found many comrades who accepted her for who she really was—all because she was honest with herself. Cain was the one who had offered her that piece of advice, but Liz was the one who put in the serious effort. So Cain did respect Liz.

In the dim room, Cain spoke his mind to the woman he held dear.

“If it gets to be too much, if you think you’re about to go out of control, then

come to me. I'll accept you."

"Huh...?"

"You can be honest with yourself."

They gazed at one another.

"You need to love yourself more, Liz," Cain said with a laugh.

He'd separated from her once, but now he approached her again and ruffled her hair. Liz stared blankly and didn't resist as he stroked her head. She stared into his eyes as she felt some heavy, painful emotions melt away. The blood flowing through her body was growing hotter and hotter.

She didn't understand what she was feeling anymore. Her heart was pounding. There was a peculiar feeling within her—as though she was being saved. And for some reason, she felt a sense of nostalgia too. A sense that she had always loved those words, though she'd never heard anyone say them. The heat within her turned her cheeks crimson.

"Sir Cain..."

"What's up?"

"Umm...err..."

She fidgeted as she tried to make herself smaller. She bashfully lowered her head, her entire face flushing red as she struggled to string her words together.

And suddenly, her face rose. "Please give me your underpants."

"Huh?"

All of a sudden, Liz tackled Cain down. His back collided with the mat, and Liz got a firm hold on his shoulders to keep him down.

"Wh-What are you doing?!"

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! What is this?! My body's just... I can't stop it...!"

Liz pinned him down and straddled him, trying to strip off the shirt he was wearing. Cain desperately resisted, keeping her hands at bay with one hand, and her face at bay with the other.

“You little...! Aren’t you losing control a bit too quickly?!”

“Ah! This isn’t me! My body’s going on its own! Just what exactly is... What am I saying...?!”

“Get. Off. Of. *Me.*”

An intense back-and-forth began on the mat.

Liz finally managed to get Cain’s shirt off, exposing his well-tempered abs and his navel.



“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! But this is your fault too, Cain! You say things that make me feel hot inside...! What exactly did you do to me, Cain?!”

“You’re doing that all on your own!”

“Hmm?! What am I doing...?! Sorry, but please let me get just a little whiff of your underpants... Aah?! What am I saying!”

“Pervert! I’m being attacked by a pervert!”

Liz was panting roughly. Her eyes looked intoxicated. She was like a lion that had been forced to postpone its meal for an entire year.

“Oooh...! Give me your underpants! My underpants...!”

“They’re not yours! Idiot!”

Cain desperately fended off the attacks of the succubus. With his belly button poking out, the succubus had shifted her target and had begun to reach for his trousers.

It was then—the door clicked open.

“Hey Cain, Liz. Sorry to keep you waiting. How are you holding...”

“Ah...”

“Err...”

The aid they requested had arrived. Melvy opened the door to the storage room.

Cain and the succubus froze in place with sweat dripping from their brows. The succubus was on top of him with a hand on his pants. There was no way to make any excuses for this situation. The circumstances were self-evident.

Melvy sent them a warm, understanding smile.

“Oh, were you in the middle of it? Well then... Pardon me. Good luck Cain, Pervmaster...” And with that, she closed the door behind her.

“Wrong! Melvy! It’s not what it looks like!”

“Melvy! Save me!”

The two of them jumped up and raced to the door. They hammered away at

it, but it had been locked again.

“Hey! Melvy! You little...! Why’d you have to lock it?! You’re messing with me! Open up!”

“Melvy! It’s not what it looks like! This is all one big misunderstanding!”

But even with them shouting right next to the door, there was no reaction. Melvy had acted completely out of love and kindness in her desire to not impede on their fun that had been put off for so very long.

“Let us out! Let us out!”

“I’m not...! This isn’t...!”

It took a while before they were able to escape the storage room.



## Chapter 24: Then—Liz and the Date

The sun beat down relentlessly. The town was forged of orderly rows of tall, stone buildings, with street stalls set up anywhere that would fit them. The streets overflowed with hustle and bustle.

It was a tranquil morning.

“Sir Caaaiin...!”

As a lone man arrived at the fountain in the square, a woman spotted him and waved her arm wildly, calling his name. She had a smile like a flower in full bloom, and there was delight in her voice. Cain turned towards her—towards Liz, and slowly approached.

“Did I keep you waiting?”

“Oh, not at all.”

“That’s a pretty dress you’ve got on. It suits you pretty well.”

“Heh heh, what a lady-killer you are, Cain,” Liz said with a grin.

Liz had on a white dress and a straw sun hat. Her fluffy blonde hair seemed to practically glow against the backdrop of the dress’s stark fabric, lending her a very primness and purity. She was the definition of a refined lady.

“Are you really saying this clean and tidy getup fits a succubus like me? Hee hee hee. What a flirt!”

“All right, enough. We should get going.”

“Ah! Please wait for me, Cain!”

With that, Cain strutted straight off, Liz frantically wrapping herself around his arm. With arms entangled, they walked side by side.

They were going on a date today.

“I don’t hate the usual, you know... Going out together with everyone.”

It had been quite a long time since Cain and Liz had been on a date together.

Cain was engaged to the princess of a large nation, as well as the saint of a major religion. However, he was not engaged to Liz.

The three women got along quite nicely, but considering social standing, Liz was not in any state to be wed to Cain. Putting aside what those concerned had to say on the matter, much negotiation and politicking was going on between the nation and the church. Whenever Cain showed up at a formal party or event, he would most often be accompanied by Sylphie or Melvy. He didn't have much choice in the matter.

"Sorry about all this... So much trouble and it's not even your fault."

"I don't mind at all. To be honest, none of us really care about who's on top." Liz smiled as she embraced his arm. "And if it's about trouble, I'm sure I'm the one who's causing you far more of that."

"Hrah."

"Yowch!"

Cain flicked Liz in the forehead. She lurched back.

"Hah, hah... ≡ Cain... Give me more... ≡"

"Don't just stand there. Let's go."

"Okay. ≡" Liz's smile softened in delight. "I'm looking forward to our date."

"Yeah...me too."

And so began their long-awaited date.

Time flew by, and before they knew it, it was already afternoon.

"Man! That play was amazing!"

"Well, it was all right."

"You say that, Cain, but your eyes were glued to the stage!"

"Hmph."

They spoke as they sipped their drinks. The date had kicked off with a play, and the pair now shared their opinions on it as they kicked back and relaxed at

a café.

“If I had to pick a favorite scene... Oh, I know! That scene where the protagonist confessed his love to the heroine. It moved me to tears.”

“I thought it was interesting how they depicted fighting on the battlefield.”

“Hmm, you really are a *boy*, Cain.”

“Looks like your research was on point, though.” Liz had a penchant for romance, while Cain preferred watching action and heroics. Thus, Liz had researched the showings in advance and had found a heroic epic with some prominent romantic elements. She’d hit the mark on it, and both she and Cain were very satisfied with the performance. “Thanks for looking into it. It was decently enjoyable.”

“Heh heh, that’s all I needed to hear.”

“Hmph.”

Liz smiled at Cain from ear to ear. Cain averted his eyes a bit as he took in a mouthful of coffee.

“Still... There is one thing about that play that really bugs me.”

“Hmm? What is it?”

Cain cocked his head. During the performance, Liz had been spellbound, her cheeks flush with excitement as she watched. Surely she couldn’t have anything to complain about.

Liz explained: “There weren’t any sex scenes!”

“Dumbass.”

She was asking for the impossible again.

“But please hear me out, Cain. Near the end of the story, they were in the protagonist’s room at night. He confessed his love and they shared a kiss, right?”

“Yeah, that happened.”

“They definitely did it after that!”

“Well yeah, probably.”

Cain found himself sighing at Liz’s heated enthusiasm. They were in public, for what it was worth, but at this point, he wasn’t going to be flustered by such an innocent remark coming from her. He’d heard far worse.

“It’s a normal play. Don’t be unreasonable, Liz.”

“But hear me out, Cain! I’ve simply read far too many naughty books lately!”

“Huh?”

As a healthy young lady her age, Liz had a very healthy interest in pornographic media.

“If it was one of my novels, they would have *definitely* put in a sex scene after that! And when I see something like that, it’s like, ‘*Ah! Good going! Just the right mood!*’ I just can’t help but get excited! But right after the kiss, the scene immediately changed. It was already morning, and they just went on like nothing happened. When it happened, I was struck by the disappointing revelation: *Oh, this was meant for all-ages...* It felt a bit empty... Do you get me?! Do you understand how I feel?!”

“Nope.” Cain coldly waved off her heated remarks. “You should have known from the start that there were never going to be any erotic scenes,” he said. “That was obvious.”

“That’s not it! That’s not what I’m saying! Just watching all those scenes where the male and female leads were flirting it up... It made me so restless! My heart started to act up, all on its own! I wanted to see a harmonious love scene between those two! Do you get me?! Do you understand the feeling?”

“Nope.”

Cain pulled out a cigar and casually lit the tip.

“The simple lack of sex scenes... Makes it feel like a bit of a waste...”

“Not my problem.”

“Why must porn be relegated to a minor subgenre? Even if you want to talk about a magnificent work with someone, they’ll tell you, ‘I’m sorry, I’ve never heard of that title.’ Aaah, I want to have a passionate conversation with

someone about pornography!”

“Well, that sort of stuff tends to stay off the beaten path. It could never really become a major genre.”

“Melvy and Sylphie are just about the only people I can talk to about porn... I want to proselytize it and discuss it at length with so many more people.”

“Don’t cause too much trouble.”

Melvy and Sylphie had had a healthy exposure to the corruption she called *proselytizing*. Although Rachel pretended to reject it, she would actually hide in a corner and read those same erotic books with a redness on her cheeks. Of course, Liz was well aware of that, and at times she would watch her with a grin. Rachel was a bit of a pushover, after all.

“Hear me out! There are plenty of pornographic novels that have solid stories with skilled prose. There are works that would move you to tears! I just want to discuss those books with all sorts of people! The fact that such wonderful works of art can’t reach the mainstream just because they have a few sex scenes is such a waste!”

“Hey, I’ll admit it. The porn that you recommend is pretty good.”

“Isn’t it?!”

Liz’s eyes lit up and she brought her face closer to Cain’s. Putting the content of the books in question aside, she was just like any other pure girl gushing about the books she enjoyed.

Yes, putting all the porn aside.

“That settles it, Cain! Let’s head straight to the bookstore, then! We’ll head there, and have them set up a section for ‘Pornos Recommended by the Hero’s Party’! They’ll sell out, no doubt about it! Our proselytizing will be a huge success!”

“Yep, that definitely settles it! We’re sure as hell not doing that!”

“Meanie!” Liz wailed with teary eyes.

Thanks to Cain’s resoluteness, the pair managed to have a proper date.

The sun set, and the sky darkened. They were both tired from the day's activities and were taking a break on a park bench. It was a vast, deserted park, the leaves on the trees and shrubs dotting the landscape rustling in the breeze.

A great many paper bags sat at either side of the bench. They'd visited all sorts of shops and bought all sorts of things throughout the day.

"Thank you for the fun day, Cain."

"Hey, same here."

They took sparing sips from the cups of fresh juice they'd bought at the stalls—a laid-back moment after a day of excitement.

"Once the world is at peace, do you think we can be like this every day?" Liz asked.

"Who knows," the hero replied.

Currently, there were battles with the demon lord's army breaking out all across the world. The heroes were the trump cards against these forces of evil. So long as they weren't grievously injured, it was their duty to fight at the vanguard. For as long as they had an option of pushing forward, that was the only option they could take.

These tranquil moments were a rare occurrence.

"Ah..." Liz faintly raised her voice, her eyes following something.

A couple—a boy and girl wearing school uniforms. They were beaming as they passed through the park. Liz stared fixedly at them.

"Do you want to go to school?" Cain asked her.

"..."

Ever since her succubus powers began to awaken, Liz had dropped out of school. She had a slight lingering attachment to her studies that had been cruelly interrupted.

"Err, Sir Cain..."

"What?"

"You remember last time? When I said I wanted us to do something

adolescent-ish together?”

“Yeah, I remember that.”

They’d spoken about it once before, alongside all of their comrades. Cain and his party members had all sacrificed various things for power. They had cast aside any hopes of living a decent life and had been unable to experience the normal fun and joy granted to other humans. One day, his party members got together and agreed to have some fun. To experience their shared lost youth.

“So, how about we attend school to enjoy that adolescence?”

“School...”

Cain tried to picture it. School—it was certainly the epitome of youth. It was where someone was supposed to make friends, endeavor in their studies, and enjoy club activities. A warrior such as himself couldn’t go. He didn’t have the time to waste.

But why was it that just imagining that scene brought a tightness to his chest?

Liz peered into his face with a soft smile.

“It’ll be fun... I’m sure of it.”

“Ha ha, you may be right. It may be nice.”

Night had begun to set in, and it had brought a brisk wind along with it.

“Do you think some stupid brat from the countryside could really go to school?”

“You’d be popular in no time, Cain. You’d be surrounded by loads of girls.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah. But don’t lay your hands on too many of them. Please save some for me.”

“Welp! Let’s forget that school idea! I can see you causing all sorts of problems for the female students there.”

“Aww,” Liz groaned with a mischievous grin as she took out a sweet she’d bought at the stalls. It was a bit of chocolate cream sandwiched between two

cookies. Although simple, it had become a popular treat as of late. Liz broke off a chunk and began to chew on it.

“We could hang around after school, all of us buying and eating sweets. I’m sure it would be fun and relaxing.”

“Yeah. I get that.”

Cain took out the same sort of sweet. They’d bought two each of most of what they’d purchased.

“I guess I’ll put that on my list of stuff to do in the future.”

“Hee hee, that sounds like a plan. I’m looking forward to that.”

Cain and Liz shared a smile. There was no telling when their battle would be over. There was no telling who would survive. But just because there was no way to know for sure, that didn’t mean they would avoid talking about the future.

They didn’t fear what was to come.

Cain opened his mouth wide; he was about to shove the entire cookie sandwich inside.

But for some reason, he hesitated. He paused.

There was silence.

Cain felt that something was so very slightly off, but he didn’t know what it was. It was a mystery, yet his instincts had kicked in, preventing him from eating. He could tell that Liz was staring at him. Her face hadn’t moved. Only her eyes had barely shifted to steal a glance at his motions.

“...”

The cookie was darker. It was such a slight difference that he could have written it off as his imagination, but the cookies in his hands were just a little darker than the cookies Liz was holding.

He thought back. He reflected. Liz had been the one who had spotted the stall and suggested they buy the cookie sandwiches. After that, Liz had been the one who rushed up to the shopkeeper. She was the one who bought two and



handed one to Cain.

Cain stared down at the cookie sandwich in his hands and thought. Thinking back, she'd had plenty of opportunities to switch his cookie for another.

"Don't tell me... You made this?"

"Tch." Liz blatantly clicked her tongue. "After all the research I did in advance to make an identical cookie sandwich..."

"Whoa?! That was close! That was damn close! You almost had me there!" Cain was flustered.

Evidently, Liz had looked into more than just the play; she'd investigated the cookies being sold and had studied how to make them. As for why she did that...the reason was obvious enough. Liz liked to slip a bit of her special love potion into the cookies she made by hand.

"Son of a bitch. You really went out of your way this time."

"Yowowow."

Cain tugged on Liz's cheeks, turning her soft skin red.

"I was so close... Just a little more..."

"Seriously, I can never let my guard down when I'm around you."

"The other girls would have definitely fallen for it."

"Are you a demon?"

She'd used every means at her disposal, and the girls of his party had been tricked into eating her handmade cookies far too many times before.

"Aww, I just wanted to have one passionate night," Liz complained as she stretched out. She raised her arms high and pushed her chest forward to stretch her back, moving her body a bit to distract from the awkwardness she felt now that her mischief had come to light.

The night was growing deeper. The park was steeped in silence and cold, and Liz shuddered.

Cain stared down at the cookie sandwich Liz had cooked up.

And...

“Hmph.”

“Huh?”

He opened his mouth wide, stuffed half into his mouth, and bit down, separating it with a loud crunch. Nice and crisp sounds resounded from his mouth as he chewed.

“S-Sir Cain?”

“Hmph.”

“Ngah.”

As Liz’s eyes opened wide, Cain shoved the remaining half into her mouth. Her body jerked as it forcefully entered her, but once the sweet had made its way inside, she quickly began to eat.

Their jaws had a lot of work to do devouring the large treat. Liz daintily placed a hand to her mouth, eating it like a reserved noble lady. Meanwhile, Cain chomped and swallowed until the job was done.

“All right, let’s go find a hotel or something nearby. Now that we’ve eaten them, there’s no turning back.”

Liz swallowed down the last bit before nodding.

Immediately and briskly, Cain got their bags in order. He stood from the bench and took Liz by the hand, a gentleman escorting a lady. Liz gave him a willowy smile as she accepted his hand—a graceful and lovely smile like a flower in bloom.

“You’re the only one who’ll ever accept me like this.”

“Ick.”

Cain turned his face away and spat to hide his embarrassment. But Liz simply wrapped her arm around his. Their faces both turned a slight red. Her chest was pressed against his arm, and he could feel the softness through her thin white dress. Cain calmly took out a cigar and lit it with one hand. He chuckled.

And they walked just like that, intimately entangled with one another.

“This is all your doing. Today, I’m gonna be as rough as I want.”

“Hee hee hee, I’m looking forward to it. You’ll need to work hard to satisfy me.”

“Hmph, keep yapping. You’ll be crying before you know it.”

“You’d better hope I don’t turn the tables on you. ≡”

They walked through the night, their bodies pressed against one another. The stars began to twinkle over the silent park green. Despite the chill wind, their hearts and bodies had begun to heat from deep within. Gradually, they could feel the heat of the other through their reddening skin, and they shared smiles filled with all sorts of implications.

The couple disappeared into the twilit town.

## Chapter 25: Now—The Soul Quivers Once More

“Maaaaan...”

Aina let out a long sigh as she lay prostrate against her desk.

Lately, she had been plagued by a certain worry—namely, whether or not she would be able to apologize to her classmate Lisalinde.

She still had yet to apologize to her about the spicy cream puff incident. This had remained as a lump in Aina’s heart all the while, a weight upon her shoulders. She was like a child who knew they had to do their summer homework eventually but continued to put it off.

“...meaning Cain and his party members will be absent for around three days.”

She heard Lisalinde’s voice from a short distance away. Lisalinde wasn’t speaking to her, but Aina raised her head anyway.

Lisalinde was chatting with her friends. They seemed to be talking about why the hero Cain hadn’t come to school that day.

“I only heard that the heroes would be going on an expedition, but... I see, there must have been some movement in the demon king’s forces nearby.”

“And it’s supposed to be safe around these parts. Scary stuff...”

Lisalinde’s friends Luna and Satina shared a concerned nod.

The hero’s party would be away from school for a few days. The academy hadn’t provided a detailed explanation, but according to Lisalinde, an enemy from the demon lord’s army had infiltrated a nearby city and gotten up to no good. The heroes had been sent to take care of it.

“With that said, Liz. You’re pretty close friends with the hero, right? Did you hear that from him personally?”

“Th-That’s not true at all. Surely. I don’t think I’m particularly close to him, Satina.” Liz waved her hands in denial.

“D-Despite how he seems, Cain is very kind, deep down... I’m sure he’s kind to everyone else too.”

“The moment you say, ‘Despite how he seems,’ you’re pretty much advertising how well you know the guy.”

“Th-That’s not what I’m trying to do...”

When he was in public, Cain played the part of a sincere and affable young man. Liz’s impression of him being kind despite his appearance was an impression only someone who was well acquainted with the real Cain could have.

“I-I don’t think I know Sir Cain that well... At most, I know which locker his gym pants are locked in...”

“Hmm?”

“What’s that about?”

“Is that something you should know?”

“Ah, no! It’s nothing! Nothing at all! Ah ha ha ha hah!” Liz frantically waved her hands to play it off. “What am I even talking about...?” she faintly muttered while holding her head.

Aina sent the girls a sidelong glance as she let out a sigh. Not much time had passed, yet Lisalinde didn’t seem the least bit bothered by the super spicy cream puff incident. Aina was the only one dragging this out. It felt like she was tilting at windmills.

Thinking back, nothing good had happened to her ever since the hero and his party members had transferred in. Try as she might to approach them, for some reason, their attention went to Liz and Liz alone. That sparring match with Sylphonia, that mess with Melvy in the infirmary, that incident in the red-light district... Each time, Aina would either lose face or be shooed off like it was nothing.

In the red-light district, she’d escaped being sold off to a foreign land thanks to a few words from Lisalinde. In the music room, Lisalinde had been the one to save her from danger.

Aina was going around in circles.

The person she recognized as an enemy kept countering her every move, ignoring her, and even saving her. *This is pointless. They don't even know I'm here. It's like I never even set foot on the stage*, Aina thought to herself.

“Ughhh...” Yet again, she heaved a deep sigh. “Hmm?”

After a bit of groaning and thinking, Aina finally noticed that something was off about the classroom.

“Huh?”

“What?”

“What’s going on? I smell trouble.”

The classroom was getting rowdy. A clamor was building as the students exchanged anxious words. Aina lifted her face from the desk. With all the worries rolling through her head, she was a little late to realize what was happening.

“Who’s that? There’s someone in the schoolyard.”

Everyone was glued to the classroom window, staring out at the yard.

Aina took a peek over their shoulders. There was a man in a black coat and hood standing smack-dab in the center of the yard. The academy’s teachers had gathered, surrounding him. It seemed that this man was an intruder.

“Who’s that guy in the hood?”

“The teachers will capture him soon enough.”

The students continued to watch with bated breath.

“You there!” cried someone outside. “What do you think you’re doing here?!”

“Place your hands on the ground and submit! Otherwise, we will commence our attack!”

The campus echoed with the teachers’ commands. They encircled the black-hooded man and pointed their weapons. But as the tensions filled the air, the man did nothing. He did not show any intent to submit; instead, he slowly looked around, seemingly evaluating the instructors.

“Take this!”

One of the teachers assailed the intruder with his weapon, and as he did so, another three attacked from both sides and from behind. It was a simultaneous assault from four directions, and the students were sure that the man would be on the ground in no time.

“Huh...?”

But the black-hooded man shifted his body ever so slightly and leisurely intercepted their attacks. The teacher ahead of him fell from a bolt of lightning magic. The one behind him had his attack evaded, only to be quickly met with a rending kick. Meanwhile, the teachers who attacked from his flanks were showered with flames.

“Gaaah!”

“Ah?!”

It all happened in an instant—four teachers lay on the ground, (hopefully) unconscious.

“No way!”

“This can’t be...”

“Four teachers at the same time?!”

A ripple of unease raced through the academy.

Up to that point, things hadn’t been nearly that tense. There had already been ten teachers surrounding the intruder, and everyone was sure he’d be taken in. In fact, the students had been watching with intrigue more than anything else, hoping to see a criminal taken down and arrested before their eyes.

But the situation quickly turned. Four teachers were taken down in the blink of an eye, and there were only six teachers left in the yard. The students began to see things differently: *Perhaps they can’t win. Perhaps a calamity has descended upon us.*

So many anxious, panicked voices echoed through the school.

“Listen well, you foolish students! Protected by the cage of the academy, and corrupted by peace!” A great, ear-rending voice boomed through the campus. The black-hooded man had spoken for the first time. “I am the one who shall smash through this false peace to sow the seeds of change!”

As he raised his voice, the man began to change. His body swelled. Originally, he had been around a meter and eighty centimeters, but he was growing both vertically and horizontally. Three meters, four. As his body swelled larger and larger, his hooded black coat ripped to reveal his body.

His flabby meat sagged. His skin was a faint green, and he was quite clearly not human. His hands had grown massive, proportionate to his four-meter height, and everyone was suddenly aware that he was clutching a hammer that was two meters tall.

“Wh-What is that?”

“A monster...”

An inhuman giant had appeared on the peaceful school campus.

“My name is Andy Mackinton...” His low, rumbling voice sent shudders down their spine. “I am a general of the demon lord’s army!” The giant monster loudly made his proclamation.

“Huh?”

For a moment, the academy was enveloped in silence. The being boldly looming over the yard had said something inconceivable.

“A-A demon general?”

“N-No, this can’t...”

The generals. They were the ones making a mess of the world, the entities forming the core of the demon lord’s army. Indeed, their transcendent strength could only be overcome by the members of the hero’s party or those who matched them in ability. They were undoubtedly a threat to the world.

“A-Absurd! This is impossible...!”

“What’s a general doing here?!”



The reality was finally beginning to set in, and the students cried out in terror. Their jaws quivered and their teeth clattered as they shook from the terror before their eyes.

The whole school was bathed in fear.

The demon lord's army was fear itself to all of humanity.

"I come with one goal, and one goal alone!" Andy Mackinton went on, shutting everyone up and sending a cold sweat dripping down every student's spine. "To bind you all and take you hostage!"

The booming voice of the general sent shivers down the students' spines, and many instinctively clapped their hands over their ears. Yet even this was not enough to protect their weak eardrums from the giant's overpowering intensity.

"Feeble humans of this academy, know that you shall never leave these grounds again!"

"No..."

"This can't be!"

It didn't seem that the monster had brought any allies. Considering how he had taken the form of a normal human in a black robe before growing to these enormous proportions, it was safe to assume that he had disguised himself to stealthily infiltrate human territory alone.

"Thanks to our diversion, Hero Cain and his comrades won't return for another three days! Refrain from any pointless resistance!"

Indeed, the hero and his party members weren't at the academy. They'd received intel that the demon lord's forces had infiltrated a nearby land and had sallied forth to take care of them.

Yet according to this general, it had all been a diversion.

The student's faces turned pale. Knowing that this was no coincidence—that it had all been deliberate—most sunk into the depths of despair.

"You're the one who should refrain from anything pointless, Demon Lord General Andy Mackinton!"

“Hmm...?”

A figure emerged into the schoolyard, shouting out as they approached the giant—the principal. He stood right before Andy.

“We aren’t worth enough as hostages. Not nearly enough to bend the hero to your will.”

“What?”

“I’ve already conveyed my will to the heroes—to abandon the academy and fight for the sake of the world should the need ever arise! It doesn’t matter what happens to us. You shall never bring the hero down!” the principal loudly proclaimed. “We already made our resolve from the moment we decided to welcome the hero into our school!”

“...”

“If you linger here long enough, the soldiers of the royal army will be here too! You are isolated, helpless in human lands! You have no escape routes!”

Taking the academy hostage wouldn’t alter the state of the war. The principal thunderously told him so—although this did get some shudders from the students who hadn’t made the same agreement. But as truth would have it—ignoring the fact that so many had been taken hostage—it was Andy who had been driven into a corner. He’d charged alone into human territory, where even a general would be at a disadvantage.

“You fool.” And yet, Andy smiled. “The fact that he can’t ignore your plight is the very reason he’s a hero.”

“What?!”

Andy lifted his massive hammer high and smacked it against the earth. The surrounding ground split and burst as great cracks spread across the schoolyard.

Though the principal immediately deployed a defensive barrier, the shock wave emitted by the hammer easily tore through his defenses, sending his body flying through the air.

“Gaaaaaah...!”

“Principal!”

He soared high before smacking down upon the ground, bouncing and rolling a few times before ceasing to move. It took just one blow to knock him out of commission.

“I shall make one more demand!” The general boomed, addressing all who could hear him. “You are all hostages—that remains unchanged... But apart from that, you shall present to me ten individuals who are especially close to the hero!”

“What?!”

“I’ll start by setting an example! They’ll be tormented and tattered to show the hero I mean business!”

The already pale students turned even whiter at that. The atrocities were already about to begin.

“Those who are close to the hero...?”

“Wh-Who would that be?”

“Not me! I only spoke to him once!”

The campus was astir.

“If you don’t make your decision within an hour, the number will grow to fifty. I’m sure a greater number will make for an even greater demonstration.” Everyone shook at Andy’s words. The student body was wracked with fear.

“Th-This has nothing to do with me!”

“M-M-Me neither! I never interacted with the hero’s party...!”

“So who even is it? Who was close to the hero?!”

In fear and chaos, they began to search for a sacrifice. The area around the academy had been protected by some of the strictest security the kingdom had to offer, and the boys and girls attending had hardly ever been exposed to the threat of the demon lord’s army. Terror, the likes of which they had never experienced before, had sent them into a frenzy.

“Lady Aina was always cozying up to the hero,” someone muttered.

“Huh?”

“That’s right... I always see Aina talking with the hero and his friends.”

“Maybe the hero’s taken a liking to her.”

“Wait, didn’t Aina get along with the hero?”

It started with a lone mutter. Then someone repeated it louder, and another affirmed it. Speculation and rumors spread like a plague, and that soon became the leading opinion of the school. Faint as those voices were, they managed to reach Andy. The giant knew Aina’s name now.

“Y-You’re wrong... I’m...”

Aina’s face turned pale as she teetered backward. She was the one being singled out. Her body shook, her breathing grew erratic, and she couldn’t even muster a voice.

There was silence. All eyes gathered upon Aina. She continued her unsteady retreat until she found her back pressed up against a wall.

There was nowhere to run. In all likelihood, she was going to be killed. She shook wildly, with tears pouring out of her eyes.

“I-I’m...” Her quivering mouth couldn’t string together coherent words.

But that was when it happened.

“Hm?”

“Huh?”

A girl leaped from the window of a classroom on the third floor. Her body danced through the open air and soon, she had landed without injury, from several meters up. She was now in the same yard as the enemy.

“What?”

“Th-That’s...”

The students were astir. Andy stared at the girl. She slowly walked, closer and closer to the hulking monstrosity. Her fluffy blonde hair trailed behind her. And finally, the girl was standing right before her foe.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Andy...”

She glared at him with sharp eyes. Yet be that as it may, there was sweat pouring down her brow, and she was clearly nervous.

“I am Aina.”

The girl was Lisalinde.

“Oh?”

Andy’s large eyes locked onto her.

With the demon lord’s executive standing before her, Liz was now far more afraid than when she’d been watching from afar. She felt like she was about to cry from the overwhelming pressure he was exuding. But Liz had assumed Aina’s name to protect her. She couldn’t back down here. Liz gritted her teeth to keep herself from shaking.

“I see, so you’re this *Aina* girl I’ve been hearing about. To think you’d come out on your own... Color me impressed.”

Andy didn’t realize that the girl wasn’t Aina. He’d heard the name being passed around the campus, but he hadn’t seen the real Aina, who was shaking and pale in the classroom. He had no choice but to convince himself that Liz was telling the truth.

“Very well, then, brave Aina. You shall be the first to... Wait, aren’t you...?” In the midst of his monologue, Andy’s grinning face suddenly turned grim. He furrowed his brow, cautiously observing Liz. “Don’t tell me... No, maybe not. I don’t sense any of that mana I’ve heard about... Are you someone else...?”

“Hm?”

Andy muttered something to himself, pondering something as he watched Liz, though Liz had no idea what he was talking about. There was, however, one thing that was clear to her.

“I did not come here to be your hostage, though.”

“Come again?”

Lis spoke in a stern tone, interrupting Andy’s thoughts.

“I came here to defeat you.”

Liz directed as much hostility as she could towards him, sharpening her gaze and mustering her resolve. But as Andy took on this enmity, he simply stared back blankly. It was like he couldn't quite understand what the girl was saying.

Finally, he burst into laughter. “Ha ha! Ha ha ha ha! Defeat me?! Do you seriously think you can do that?!”

“I can! This is the proud and noble Forst Academy. Don't think you can earn our surrender so easily!”

“It's pointless, woman. You are all helpless, little students. You have no chance of besting me.”

Andy faced Liz with composure, slowly lifting his large hammer onto his shoulder. His bravado made it clear that he didn't think he was going to lose to some little girl.

“I won't know until I try!”

As soon as she said that, Liz instantaneously heightened her mana and fired a magical blast, hoping to take Andy by surprise. The general was assailed by a gale of wind that could slice through anything.

In an instant, the battle kicked off.

“It's pointless!”

In the brief instant it took for Liz's magic to reach him, Andy nimbly maneuvered his massive body and promptly swung the hammer from his shoulder. The hammer was clad in fire magic, drawing an infernal trail behind it as it slammed into Liz's wind.

“Hmm?!”

He felt absolutely no resistance against the hammer. Andy's eyes widened.

Liz's spell passed straight through, not the least bit impeded. Her blast proceeded to pass through his body too—without leaving the slightest cut. Then, the wind magic dissipated like a lifting fog.

“An illusion?!”

It had all been a phantom spell crafted by Liz.

“Haaah!”

“Take this!”

The six remaining teachers assailed Andy all at once. This was their chance—the enemy had misjudged an illusion and his excess momentum had destroyed his stance. However...

“Too soft...”

Andy hardly even attempted to kill the momentum of his hammer swing, leading it into a powerful spin. The redirected blow didn’t strike any of the teachers, but the flames enveloping the hammer spread out as a great wave, inflicting massive damage in the process.

“Graaaaah!”

Of the six teachers, two were blown back by the wave of flames and incapacitated.

“Hngh!”

After that circular swing, Andy raised the hammer high and smacked it down on the nearby earth. This time, the hammer was imbued with earth magic, causing sharp spikes of soil to shoot up in every direction.

“Waaaah!”

The four remaining teachers were blown away. Now, all the instructors that had gone to the schoolyard had been taken out. Even within the prestigious academy, they were all high-ranking in terms of combat prowess, yet they had been dispatched in an instant. The students who watched began to crumble at the knees, hearts filled with despair.

But the battle wasn’t over yet.

“I’m over here!”

“Mm?!”

In that chaotic instant, Liz had positioned herself right above Andy’s head. She’d evaded the flames and the spikes and was now closing in on him.

“Haaah!”

“Grr!”

She fired her mightiest ice spell from point-blank range. The massive earth spell had Andy momentarily locked in place. Sensing he couldn't avoid Liz's attack, Andy showed the very first hint of panic since he'd appeared.

Liz's spell took the form of a lump of ice, a meter across. It forcefully burst from Liz's hand, smacking hard into Andy's brow. The air responded with a massive thud, the blast wave so great that even those watching could feel it in their bones.

Surely, this was the critical blow.

“Whoo!”

“She did it...!”

Cheers rose from all across the campus.

Andy had taken a strong blow to the head and begun to teeter. His mouth opened wide as one of his feet left the ground. Then, his large body tilted even more, and his back was mere moments from striking the ground. Everyone could imagine the scene of him lying there, still.

But that wasn't what happened.

Andy immediately shifted his raised leg behind him, mustering his strength to support himself up just short of falling. His foot struck the ground, correcting his tilt and regaining his initial stance. There was a mark on his brow with several trails of green blood flowing from it. But that was all.

“Well done, woman.”

“Ack!”

“But you lack the strength.”

Andy immediately raised his mana-clad hammer high.

“Tch!”

Having landed on the ground, Liz immediately backstepped to escape the hammer's range. But regardless of her attempts to distance herself, Andy struck



the ground with the hammer anyway.

From the impact site, a shock wave erupted and flew in a straight line—right at Liz.

“...!”

Liz swallowed her breath. The school building was behind her. If she dodged out of the way, the impact would surely reach the other students.

“Haaah!”

Liz forced herself to a stop, conjuring up a large earthen wall on the spot. She hoped that perhaps her defensive magic could dissipate the shock wave and save her school friends from injury. But Andy simply told her, “It’s pointless.”

The shock wave smacked into the dirt wall. Liz’s efforts proved fruitless, as cracks immediately spread across it, and the wall began to crumble to pieces.

“Grh!”

She gritted her teeth, but her extra exertion was fruitless. Andy’s shock wave destroyed the wall and struck Liz before smashing into the school anyway.

“Kyaaaaaaah!”

“Waaah!”

There were screams. The shock wave ravaged the building, opening large clawlike gashes through the front wall. Lockers, tables, and other furnishings flew through the air before peppering the ground in a disorganized jumble. The students caught up in it were greatly injured, a handful of them thrown outside entirely. Aina was one of the few who were tossed outside.

“Urgh...”

She’d only been struck by the residual tremors of the impact, but that alone was enough to leave her battered and bruised. She couldn’t move, let alone stand. Immense pain raced through her body.

But she was lucky.

Liz’s defensive spell had shaved away most of the shock wave’s initial force. If Liz had simply dodged out of the way and left nothing to impede Andy’s attack,

had that wave struck the schoolhouse with all its force, all the students of her class would have most likely wound up dead.

“Erk...urgh...”

Her mind hazy, Aina lifted her head.

And she saw it.

She and her classmates were in tatters from Andy’s attacks, but her eyes focused on someone who was even worse off than she was: Lisalinde.

Lisalinde had taken the attack head-on without running away, her body left in a terrible state. She was wounded all over, lying limply on the ground. Blood was oozing from all sorts of places, staining her beautiful blonde hair with red.

“L-Lisalinde?”

She was evidently very badly wounded, and with how still she was, Aina had to wonder if she was dead.

“Lis...Lisalinde...?”

Liz’s finger twitched in response to her voice. She began to take in shallow breaths, and slowly, very slowly, she began to move.

“Lis...alinde...”

“...”

“You can’t... You shouldn’t move...”

Liz slowly lifted her body up. A bloodstained body, a body that had suffered more than anyone else’s. Yet still, she was attempting to rise to her feet.

Aina watched on the verge of tears. She and the other students had still yet to stand themselves. The pain was more than they could manage—but Lisalinde was doing it.

“...”

Her mind half hazy, Lisalinde unsteadily rose and faced Andy once more.

“Splendid.”

“...”

“You are brave. A hero in your own right,” Andy said as he hoisted his hammer onto his shoulder. He no longer stood with all the composure he had before. He faced the teetering girl with a sincere respect and wariness. He concentrated the mana within his body to ensure he was able to fire off a spell at any moment.

“That is precisely why I must kill you now.”

It was Aina who recoiled at this statement. Lisalinde was in no state to fight. She was barely conscious, and she could barely even stand.

“Run away! Lisalinde! Lady Lisalinde! Please run!”

Andy took a step forward. In response, Lisalinde concentrated her mana. It seemed instinctual—she did it regardless of the fact she could hardly think.

“You can’t! You mustn’t face him! Run away, Lisalinde! Run, run, run!” Aina’s voice quavered and she shouted. She tried to approach Liz, to stop her. She pulled herself to her knees, dragging her feet behind her as she did whatever she could to have her voice heard.

“Run away!” Aina yelled.

It was then. A gust of wind carried a piece of cloth...no, an article of clothing with it, depositing the garment near the girls.

“Hmm?”

“Huh?”

It was a perfectly normal piece of clothing, but as Andy was already on edge, it was enough to give him pause.

His shock wave had scattered the school’s fixtures. Desks, chairs, and lockers had been tossed around and thrown into the air. This piece of cloth was nothing more than some gym clothes that had been kept in one of the lockers. That locker had been blown sky-high, causing it to spill its contents as it hit the ground.

As all the fixtures came raining down, the clothing was carried high into the air by the blast wave. It had ridden the wind and come down right by Liz.

With elegant motions, Liz grabbed the cloth. She was barely on her feet, she

was on the verge of death, yet her hands still moved swiftly as she dexterously snatched what was drifting above her head.

“...”

Andy furrowed his brow. To him, it felt like some tomfoolery had entered such a tense standoff. But that wasn't Liz's intention at all. Liz was more tense than she had ever been before. *This...this is...* As she spread out the item she'd snatched, Liz trembled. *Cain's clothing...his gym shorts...!*

She had in fact come across none other than Cain's gym shorts.

Liz recalled her own words from only moments before. *At most, I know which locker his gym pants are locked in...*

Everything clicked into place.

Unfortunately for her, these were *pants* and not *underpants*. They did not make direct contact with his private portions. But they were still half the word—and close enough.

Her heart was hammering away in her chest. It seemed like she had forgotten that she was bleeding from all across her body as her blood started to pump harder and harder.

*Huh...?! Th-This is...! Wh-What am I supposed to do?! How could I be given such a... Is this all right?! Is this really all right?! Huh? Huh?! Huh?!?!*

Cain wasn't anywhere to be seen. As luck would have it, he was conveniently away. There was no one to stop her. It was practically a miracle.

“H-Hey...? Why are you...”

“L-Lisalinde?”

With Liz trembling as she stared at the shorts, Andy and Aina quizzically called out to her. But Liz wasn't collected enough to answer. That was the least of her worries.

*I-I shouldn't...!*

Her self-control fought desperately with her impulses. She shook her head to rebuke herself.

*B-But it's not like Cain's around... This is just a bit of good luck...*

The wicked thoughts quickly oozed through, however. She began to pant heavily.

Liz's heart rate was skyrocketing. She was bleeding harder than before, but as she was now, that was of little significance.

*I-I really shouldn't...!*

Again, she shook her head. She averted her eyes from the shorts spread out before her.

*I am not that sort of pervert! I am a prim and proper noble lady! She cried out in her heart and disciplined herself. I've just been a bit strange lately! I'm really not like this! Honest! I'm not the sort of person who would get aroused by looking at Sir Cain's gym shorts! She scolded herself. That's right! I'm not that sort of person! I am not a pervert!*

And with that in mind, Liz tried to discard the shorts.

*"It doesn't really matter if you're a pervert."*

In that instant, some words came to her mind. She came to a complete stop.

It was what Cain had told her a short while back—when they were locked in the gym storage.

"I'm actually a little worried about how you are right now," he'd said. "When your emotions explode like that, if it gets too much, and you're unable to control it... I think you're going to end up making some painful memories again."

*"..."*

*"It's okay if you're a little more honest with yourself."*

*"..."*

More and more of Cain's words were pouring into her head. She felt a little teary-eyed.

Among them were some words of genuine concern—ones she couldn't remember ever hearing from him. But why was it? For some reason, emotions

that went beyond her memories were rising from Cain's words. Recalling the hero caused a heat to grow in her chest.

"It's fine, even if you let your desires get the better of you. It's fine if you're lewd, or indecent, or a pervert... You can let your true self out. You can be honest with yourself. It doesn't matter what anyone says, just laugh in their faces."

"..."

"Just do that, and I'm sure...someday you'll find someone who accepts you, just as you are."

There were words, scenes, memories unknown to her crossing her mind. It was like every word he said was her salvation. His words were a warm embrace, a gentle pat on the head. The man who said these words was the man who accepted her—her true self—more than anyone. He was dearer to her than anyone in the world.

"You need to love yourself more, Liz," he said with a laugh.

Just as he'd said then, just as he'd said long ago. The same laugh, the same smile...

Her soul quivered. Liz's eyes turned to the shorts in her hand. She was only looking at them, yet there was a fire in her heart. She knew what she wanted to do—what she most desired.

She was honest with herself.

Plopping down on the ground, she held the shorts up with both hands and spread them wide. Slowly, she brought her mouth and nose closer and closer to the precious place of her precious person.

*"SNFF SNFFF SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFF SNFF SNFF! SNFF SNFF! Pah! SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFF SNFFFF! PSHHHHHHHH... SNFF SNFF SNFF SNFF SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFF...!"*

Using Cain's gym shorts, huffing and puffing, she became her true self.

*"SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFF SNFF! Pah! SNFF SNFFF SNFFFFFF...! Phew...! SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF!"*

“What?”

“Huh...?”

*“SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFFFFF!”*





Liz shoved Cain's shorts against her nose, crouching down as she sniffed them with all her might. The sight left Andy and Aina at a loss for words. It was so incomprehensible they even felt a bit of fear.

"Y-You... Wh-What do you think you're doing...?"

*"SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFFFF! Huff, huff... SNFF SNFF SNFFF! Huff...!"*

"A-Answer me! What are you doing?!"

She didn't react at all to the demands of the monster. Liz was preoccupied, taking in air as though that was what she was born to do.

Met with this incomprehensible scene, the general swallowed his breath. He closed in on Liz's back, his massive hammer raised high.

*"SNFF SNFF SNFFFFFF SNFFFFFF! Phew! SNFF SNFF SNFFF SNFFFFFFF SNFFFFFFF SNFFFFFFF SNFFFFFFF!"*

"What are you doing?!"

"L-Lisalinde! Look out!"

Andy lowered the hammer at Liz, with Aina crying out to try to warn her.

Suddenly, Liz turned, her motions so perfectly natural and calm it was like she'd just been called by a friend in the classroom. She wasn't the least bit nervous. With the hammer encroaching upon her, she turned as if this battlefield was but a normal facet of everyday life. Liz twirled her finger, a massive amount of mana flooding from her fingertip.

"Wha?!"

"Huh...?!"

All of a sudden, there was a massive wall of ice towering before her. It was hefty and imbued with a ridiculous amount of mana, the frozen wall easily blocking Andy's massive hammer. Although the air rang with the violent boom of the impact, the ice wall wasn't marred at all.

"Wh-What is this?!"

Andy's eyes opened wide. It wasn't often that his hammer was stopped head-on.

The girl relinquished the gym shorts and slowly stood up. Up to that moment, she had barely remained conscious, but now she stood leisurely as though she wasn't injured at all. Her wounds had closed. The mana pouring forth from within her had naturally healed her body. The bleeding had stopped and her broken bones had been set. She took in a deep breath before saying, "It is a pleasure to meet you, General Andy."

Her lips curled into a grin.

A bead of sweat dripped down the executive's forehead.

"My name is Liz."

She boldly stood before the enemy. There was no nervousness or fear—there was no longer the plucky spirit of a challenger defying the odds.

The girl had become the champion.

Andy stumbled back two steps, his heart pounding as he sensed something ominous from his changed opponent. The hunter had just become the hunted.

"I'm back..." She clenched both her fists and stared at them. It was like she was measuring the power flowing through her. Lifting her face, she declared, "My soul quivers once more!"

The former second-in-command of the hero's party, Lisalinde, the hero's succubus, had awakened once more.

## Chapter 26: Now—And Good Night Once Again

“Y-You’re...”

“...”

“Who are you...?”

There was sweat oozing down General Andy’s brow. Up until that very moment, he had been the undisputed strongest combatant on the battlefield. He’d made quick work of the ten instructors and easily taken control.

But the situation had taken a turn.

The air surrounding the girl had completely changed. What had once been modesty had turned sharp and bewitching.

Andy looked at the girl blocking his path—at Liz—and swallowed his breath. Her body contained an endlessly deep and potent well of mana.

“Now, Sir Andy,” she said. “Won’t you dance with me?” Liz flashed him an ominous smile. “We’ll keep at it until you’re groveling on your hands and knees.”

General Andy quivered at the sight of this young woman, who was three or four times smaller than him. She was no ordinary foe—he knew he would be killed if he let his guard down for even a moment. Alarm bells screamed in his head.

“Who the hell are you?!”

Andy lowered his hammer at Liz. This wasn’t one of those composed, measured attacks he had unleashed before. He swung with all his might, the single blow creating a shock wave that buried half of the schoolyard.

All who were watching the scene shuddered. There was no way anyone could avoid such a devastating attack. They all knew that Liz would die, and so would Aina, who was far too near. The students watched with pale faces.

But Andy’s expression remained stiff as he shifted his gaze overhead. The

onlookers followed his line of sight.

“Hee hee...”

Liz was flying in the air.

Small black wings had sprouted from her back. They didn't seem to be large enough to keep a human body airborne, but those wings clearly had something magical to them. Her new appearance brought to mind an imp or some other minor demon.

“Whoa?! Uh?! Wh-What's going on?! W-We're flying...?!”

A beat later, Aina finally grasped her own circumstances and cried out. She was being held up in Liz's arms, having escaped Andy's attack alongside her.

“You're okay now, Lady Aina.”

“Eh?! Wah?! L-Lady Lisalinde?! What is this?!”

“From here on, I am going to protect you.”

Aina struggled to keep up, but Liz gave her a gentle, reassuring smile, one that would soothe anyone who saw it; Aina felt herself blushing a little.

“Now then, it's been a while since I last fought.”

“Graaaaaah!” Andy let out a groan.

Lisalinde: the hero's first and strongest companion, had finally taken the stage.

“Come at me, Miss Mysterious!”

“Let's do this!”

With that, Liz approached Andy at breakneck speed. She took off in a straight line, charging at him like a bullet. Had he been any normal foe, he would have been rammed before he even knew what was going on, and knocked off his feet.

“You'll have to do better than that!”

But Andy was perfectly able to react. He just barely managed to perceive her superspeed attack, swinging his hammer to counter. He managed to time his

strike just right, smacking the weapon into her with all his might. *Got her! Right in the sweet spot!* Andy thought. But he soon realized that something was wrong.

The moment he hit her, Liz's body let off a white light.

"Dammit!"

And in that instant, her body burst. It was a massive explosion ten meters across, and naturally, Andy was caught up in it.

"An explosive body double?!" Andy exclaimed as he struggled to endure the blast.

Indeed, Liz's body had been nothing more than a facsimile of herself—an illusion with physical substance—and she had set it to explode on impact. Andy took a great swing with his hammer to fan away the flames and smoke. His body came out a bit burnt, but finally, his vision was clear. That was when he noticed another oddity.

"Grr!"

"Hee hee hee..."

There were over a dozen Lizes floating in the air. All but one of them was an illusion. These illusory Lizes had him completely surrounded. What's more, Aina—who should have been in her arms—was nowhere to be seen. Liz had hidden her behind a tree in the schoolyard while Andy had been preoccupied with the explosion.

"Hee hee, while I have the chance..."

One of the many illusory clones settled on a rather bizarre action.

She took Cain's gym shorts in hand, and stuffed them under her skirt, sticking them there with magic. Indeed, with genius manipulation of her own mana, she generated a field of adhesion and glued the pants to the skirt's inner folds.

Her face flashed with ecstasy.

"Hee hee hee... Cain's pants are in my skirt... We're practically making love at this point... ≡"

“What incomprehensible drivel is this?!”

Although Liz’s madness had Andy gripped by fear, he managed to fire off a blast of magic at her. However, Liz was able to flit about at high speeds and she easily dodged him.

“Take this!”

“Dammit!”

Multiple illusory Lizes fired off their own spells at once, assailing Andy from every conceivable direction. He swung his hammer to smash through as many of the attacks as he could, but most were merely illusions, causing his weapon to slice fruitlessly through empty air.

“I’m over here.”

While he was focused on those illusions, Liz had positioned herself right above him. In that instant, a bolt of lightning magic crashed down right on his head—a violent bolt, thick enough to completely envelop his massive body.

“Graaaaah!”

The attack was powerful enough to singe his body all over. Eventually, the shocks subsided and his body teetered, bringing Andy nearly to his knees.

“Hee hee, you got caught in my super lewd lightning spell...”

Drifting airily above Andy’s head, Liz planted a hand on her hip and proudly proclaimed it so. Andy’s eyes sharpened as he locked onto her.

“Don’t look down on me, witch!”

He swung his hammer, this time surrounding it with a lightning spell as if to return what was given to him. The Liz that soared above him was swallowed up in a flash of electricity and burnt up.

And she promptly exploded.

“Another double?!”

Like the previous one, this Liz was also a self-propelled bomb. The force of the explosion reached him and forced one of his knees to touch the ground.

He hadn’t taken his eyes off for a second—this double had been the one to

cast the lightning spell only moments before. In short, even her doubles could freely cast real magic. This fact caused Andy to shudder. But there was no time for that. Of all the Lizes surrounding him, one of them lifted her hand high.

“Everyone, charge,” she calmly declared.

The massive swathes of Lizes took off like loosed arrows, flying at Andy.

“Dammit!” He could easily picture the next scene. If all of them were bombs, and if all of them simultaneously went off right next to him... “Dammit all!”

He moved at speeds unsuited to his massive build to avoid the charge of the clones. With a breakneck jump to the side, he set up a massive earthen wall to protect himself.

“That’s not going to help.”

All the Lizes began to giggle. They weren’t just set to move in straight lines. If Andy dodged to one side, they would change their course, and of course, they could take detours to avoid a simple wall. A great many Lizes made contact with him.

“Curse you!”

And a great many Lizes exploded.

The schoolyard echoed with the sounds of successive explosions. Again and again and again, they burst out as Andy’s body was ruthlessly burned up. It was a nonstop stream of flashes and booms until finally, it all came to a stop.

The sounds, the lights settled down, but what was left in their wake was a miserable sight indeed. The schoolyard was filled with fissures and deep, wide craters of scorched, dark earth. It all spoke to the intensity of the explosions.

And in the center of all was a giant in tatters. The majority of his skin was burnt black, yet still, he persisted with ragged breath. Both knees and one hand had been planted on the ground, and he only managed to stay up by using his hammer as a cane.

But his fighting spirit had yet to fade. His eyes bloodshot, he glared at Liz with fearsome rage.

“I see... You’re tough. Yes, a demon general ought to be tough...” said Liz.

“You haven’t fallen after taking so many attacks. I see... You deserve some respect.”

Liz continued to speak as Andy slowly rose to his feet. Their positions had been completely reversed from where they had been moments before.

“You’re dead...” he huffed.

“Very well, then I’ll show you a little trick.”

“...?”

Liz clenched her fist. “Did you know that there’s an attack that you have absolutely no means of enduring?” Mana surged into her closed fist. Bit by bit, she took her time amassing sinister, high-density mana in her hand. “What I’m going to unleash is a single blow that is impossible to resist. If he took it head-on, even Sir Cain wouldn’t be able to endure it.”

“...”

“With this attack, I shall signal an end to our battle.”

Liz clenched her other fist too. Gradually, it too amassed a fearsome amount of mana.

“Don’t mock me!” Andy smacked his hammer into the ground. A beat later, spikes of earth manifested from the tattered soil to assault her.

“Hmph...”

But Liz wasn’t fazed. She smacked her fist into the ground, raising dirt spikes just like her foe. Each spike was met with one of hers; they mixed and clashed, but Liz’s spikes managed to pierce through Andy’s before going on to attack the giant himself.

“Grraaah!”

They stabbed into him, tearing through burnt flesh and drawing green blood.

“I won’t be careless. I will use everything I have to assure your defeat.”

“...!”

The mana hadn’t disappeared from her fists. That earth spell had nothing to do with whatever she was preparing—it was nothing more than a bonus.



Liz slowly walked towards him.

“Grr!”

“...”

“Grrrrr!”

He was feeling more pressure by the second. She looked like an ordinary girl, yet Andy—a demon general who was supposed to embody fear itself for all humans—could feel his own fear growing in his chest. He was sweating. Without realizing it, he was gritting his teeth. His entire body was stiff. Her fists were filled with an uncanny level of mana, its color deep and thick, and he couldn’t even imagine what sort of magic might come from them.

“Ghk... Grrr...!”

Step-by-step, the girl grew closer. Her very presence seemed to weigh down upon him.

“Curse you!”

And all of a sudden, Andy took off to escape her. He exposed his flank to Liz as he ran for dear life. To all who saw this, it looked like nothing more than an unsightly retreat. But that wasn’t what it was.

“Huh?”

A gasp came from Aina, who had been hidden in the shadow of a tree.

Andy hadn’t simply fled from Liz; he had run straight in the direction that Aina was. He raised his hammer high, pouring swathes of mana into it as he closed in on Aina.

“Hraaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“No... Nooooooo!”

Andy let out a ferocious war cry, while Aina shrieked in terror. His target had shifted to her. Once he was close enough, he immediately swung down the hammer. Naturally, Aina could only shriek and curl up into a ball.

“Think again!”

A mere instant before Aina was smashed flat, Liz stepped in, positioning

herself between them.

*You fell for it*, Andy thought with a grin. This was what he was hoping for.

If he targeted an academy student, he knew his enemy would cover them. And if she hurriedly slipped in to cover a friend, even this witch wouldn't have the time to put up proper defenses. In a practically unguarded state, she would need to take a blow he'd put his everything into. Then surely this defenseless witch would be crushed to death. That was what Andy thought.

The hammer was still closing in on Liz. Only split seconds to go. She'd be crushed—there was no time to cast magic. The situation was exactly what Andy had wished for. But Liz kept it short and simple. "It's pointless."

She raised her right hand, the back of her fist pointed upward. She'd simply raised it—that's all she did, as it clashed with Andy's hammer. There was a heavy, grating sound as though metal was rubbing against metal. The impact and shock wave raised a wind that rustled the leaves of the tree.

"What...?"

Andy felt something off about the feedback he felt in his hands. A moment later, the hammer crumbled to pieces, shattered by Liz's hand. The massive lump of metal had been converted to tiny fragments, its remnants scattering through the air.

Andy was stunned. He couldn't understand what had just happened.

"This is simple body-strengthening magic."

"..."

"Nothing unusual about it. It's basic magic."

Liz had managed to break the hammer simply by making her fist harder. She hadn't tried to block her foe's attack with defensive magic. She'd blocked just by strengthening her own body. Yet even when it was laid out to him, Andy couldn't comprehend it. He stared in blank amazement, overwhelmed by the fact that his weapon had just been busted by a fist.

"Rest at ease. That wasn't my trick either."

"..."

*“This is the fist that will end you.”*

In that instant, a fearsome force tore through Andy’s body. The mana from Liz’s fist had pierced deep within him, racing through him as an unimaginable jolt of pleasure.

Pleasure, joy, bliss, rapture, euphoria, jubilation, exaltation, rhapsody, satisfaction, transcendence, ecstasy, delight, eudaemonia... A force of pure happiness filled Andy’s body, taking over him in its entirety.

*“Succubus special...”* Liz cried out. *“Perfect ☆ Pleasure Punch!”*

*“Ngaaaaaaah...?!”*

Just as Liz proclaimed the move’s name, Andy’s body shuddered wildly. With a twitch, his massive frame lurched over, and just like that, his eyes rolled back into his head. His body no longer belonged to him. It was ruled by pleasure so great that no one could do a thing about it. His mind and body had been completely usurped. It was such a jolt of bliss that he couldn’t even maintain consciousness.

There was a loud thud as he hit the ground. He had managed to endure every attack thus far, but now, finally, his back had touched the earth.

*“...”*

*“...?”*

None of the students who were watching from the schoolhouse, or even Aina who was right there at the scene, knew what had just occurred.

But Andy was down, and Liz was up on her feet. That was clear for all to see.

Liz manifested magical chains to restrain Andy while he was unconscious. Then, she lifted one hand high to the heavens.

It was a complete and utter victory.

*“Hooraaaaaah!”*

*“Lady Lisalinde won! She really did it!”*

*“Hip hip hooray!”*

Cheers burst from all over the school. Everyone quivered with joy as they

were overcome with a sense of liberation—they were freed from the invasion of the demon lord's forces.

As the joy spread to every corner of the academy, Liz approached Aina, who still sat cowering on her behind. "It's over now, Aina. You did well to endure all of that."

Aina stared at her silently.

"Can you stand? Do you need a hand?"

Liz brushed aside her golden locks before extending a hand to Aina, but the girl was still in a daze. She couldn't process anything that had happened over the past half hour. The demon army had invaded, Lisalinde had transformed, and then the battle that unfolded was too high level—too fast for her to follow. Finally, what settled it...

Aina didn't know anything. She could only stare absently at Liz. Liz smiled softly at her.

"...!"

Suddenly, Aina's cheeks heated up. The battle was full of unknowns. But she understood one unshakable fact—the fact that she'd been saved by Liz.

"B..."

"Hmm...?"

Aina's eyes lit up. "Boss!" she cried out.

She took Liz's hand to stand, before wrapping herself around Liz's arm.

"Boss! Boss! You have my utmost gratitude for saving my life! I will never forget this debt for as long as I live!"

"You're making such a big deal out of it. This much is nothing."

"Boss!"

Liz accepted the girl clinging to her, gently patting her on the head.

Aina's face turned to an enraptured smile. "I'll follow you forever, boss!"

"Hee hee, you're adorable. Would you like to eat my handmade cookies

sometime?”

“Can I really?!”

Aina’s face sparkled with delight. *To think, I can have tea with my strong and cool boss! What bliss*, she thought. She didn’t even stop for a second to consider what could be inside of those handmade cookies.

“Boss, please forgive me for my countless transgressions against you! I’ll do anything! Just say the word!”

“Hmm? Did you say *anything*?”

“With pleasure! I’ll do anything in my power to atone!”

There seemed to be a rather large gap between what they both had in mind.

“Hee hee, good girl. Good girl.”

“Boss...!”

Liz stroked Aina’s head. She’d witnessed a battle far beyond her comprehension. She’d been saved. Aina’s heart was glued to Liz. She continued to send a heated look to her savior, and Liz wholeheartedly accepted her fervor.

“Liz!”

“Huh?”

But their time together was interrupted as a man cried out. It was a very familiar voice. Soon he and his comrades had closed in on her.

“Sir Cain... Welcome back...”

Cain, the hero, had returned to the academy.

“You’re early. I thought you’d take another two to three days.”

“Yeah, I realized it was a diversion. We solved the problem over there in an instant and rushed back.”

“Oh, so I didn’t have to exert myself, then.”

“Hmm? Wait, Liz, you...”

Cain could tell something was off about her; he peered deep into her eyes. Taking care not to get in the way of the conversation, Aina let go and backed off

a few steps.

“Huh...?! These symptoms... The Perfect ☆ Pleasure Punch?!”

“I-It can’t be!”

Melvy and Sylphie cried out in shock as they investigated Andy’s unconscious body. The enemy had been taken out with the Perfect ☆ Pleasure Punch. That could mean only one thing—Liz had retained her power.

“Liz...is your memory back?”

“Sir Cain. It’s been a year. Relinquish your underpants.”

“Dammit! You really do remember...!”

With just a few words, the hero and his party members had a clear grasp of Liz’s condition. This was a result of the stalwart bonds they had forged over their journey.

“Hey, Liz, do you—”

“Ah...”

“Huh?”

Despite his surprise, Cain was about to draw a few more answers out of her. However, Liz stumbled over nothing before he could, causing her to lean against his chest. Her body felt limp and she seemed like she’d keel over at any second.

“H-Hey! Liz?! Are you all right?!”

Cain caught her and gently propped her up. She seemed barely there; she was nodding off like a sleepy child.

“I’m sorry, Cain. I did come back... It was fine up to that point, but...”

“...”

“It took a bit of strength to take that guy down...” she spoke slowly with a feeble voice. “I feel like I might go to sleep again...”

“...”

“It seems like I’m not back at full strength yet...”

Liz had regained her powers and her memory, momentarily. But after exerting

herself, it seemed that what she regained was about to sink back down to the depths of her soul.

“I see...”

“I’m...sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just take it easy and rest. You’ve still got some sleeping to do,” Cain said as he patted her head.

“Once you’re awake... We can talk about it then.”

“All right. Until next time.”

“Good night.”

They shared a smile. This was different from how they had parted a year ago. It was a gentle goodbye.

“The next time I wake up... I want to try role-playing forbidden sex between star-crossed student lovers who could never be together due to a difference in status...”

“Go to sleep already, dumbass.”

“Youch! ≡ Harsh... ≡”

And just like that, Liz fell asleep in Cain’s arms. They had only managed to reunite for a few dozen seconds. Now Liz’s head was buried in Cain’s chest as she softly breathed a rhythmic sleeper’s breath.

His precious woman was asleep in his embrace. It was a tranquil moment that Cain wouldn’t have traded for anything in the world. No, it wasn’t just Cain. His comrades watching over the two of them thought much the same.

“Fwaaaah... H-Huh? Cain...”

And soon enough, Liz woke up. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she fretfully looked around, attempting to take in the situation.

“Wait! Th-That’s right! We’ve got trouble, Sir Cain! Big trouble! A demon general showed up at the academy, and...!”

“...”

“The teachers were no match! We’re in a huge pinch! Cain! Please, save everyone!” Liz shouted in a panic.

She’d completely forgotten that she had defeated the enemy.

Cain gave a bitter smile. “Liz... Hey, Liz.”

“Err...yes?”

“The enemy’s already down,” Cain calmly said to pacify her.

Shifting in Cain’s embrace, Liz slowly turned around and saw Andy’s fallen body.

“Huh...? Huh?! D-Did you do it?!”

“Not me.”

“What?! Then who... Wait, waaaaaaah! Why am I in your arms?!”

“Took you long enough.”

Liz’s face turned red and her eyes began to spin. She didn’t know what had happened and didn’t know why she was in such a choice position. Her entire body began to heat up from the embarrassment and the warm comfort.

“What even happened when I was asleep?!” Liz shouted in confusion.

Everything had gone back to how it was before. The sun shone brightly on a peaceful day.



## Chapter 27: Now—Terrifying Succubus-Style Healing

“Okay, next person please!”

Saint Melvy’s voice carried through the school gymnasium. On her orders, another injured patient came up to her. He seemed to have injured his leg, as he walked by borrowing the shoulder of his friend.

It hadn’t been long since a demon general had infiltrated the school and gone on a rampage. Luckily, no one died, but a portion of the schoolhouse was busted, and close to a hundred people were injured.

The injured had been gathered in the gym. Since Melvy was a powerful user of healing magic, she took on the arduous task of treating them. Of course, there were other healers as well—although once the work was divvied up, they were mainly entrusted only with the patients with the lighter injuries.

Of all the healers, there was one who had the gall to complain. “Why am I administering treatment? Shouldn’t it be the other way around?!”

Me.

Yes, me. This complaining girl was the same girl who had been thoroughly whipped around in the fight with the demon general.

“Liz! Please use healing magic on the one on the right!”

“No, isn’t there something wrong with this?! Aren’t I injured too?! Do I really have to help out without getting any treatment myself?!”

The monstrous general assaulted the academy, and though my memory cut out halfway through the battle, I definitely remembered taking serious damage. I recalled the aching pain all over my body.

So why was I the doctor rather than the patient?

“I mean, Liz. You’re not injured, are you?”

“Th-That’s something I don’t really understand myself...! This is strange. I thought those wounds were pretty serious!”

I'd lost consciousness in the middle of the battle. When I opened my eyes, I saw Cain, and I saw General Andy collapsed on the ground. And for some reason, my wounds had been completely healed.

"Isn't it because your auto-regen kicked in when you awakened?"

"No, seriously... I can't remember anything... Huh? Where did my wounds even go?"

"Ah ha ha," Melvy offered a troubled laugh.

In any case, I was somehow uninjured. Thus, I wasn't granted a second of rest, immediately roped in to be one of the healers.

*For some reason, I feel like I'm missing out on something!*

"Boss!"

That was when a girl raced up to me. Her body was wrapped in bandages, her pink hair swaying as she ran.

"Boss Liz, is there anything I can help with?"

"Aina..."

It was Aina. She nestled up to me, staring at me with the eyes of a faithful dog. Up until yesterday... No, until just earlier today, she had been hostile and had tried to avoid me at every turn... What happened to her?

"Err... Aina? You're injured, so I think you should just take it easy."

"Oh no! When the boss is working, how could I possibly be so shameless?! Boss! Please give me something to do... Gah!" She suddenly began hacking and coughing.

"Blood...!"

Aina had just coughed up blood. She was so bandaged up it was painful to look at. Back when the general's attack had partially destroyed the schoolhouse, Aina had been caught up in the attack.

*Don't worry about it. Just rest.*

"What...? Is the vixen trying to butter up Liz now?" Rachel muttered as she wearily watched us.

“I’m not buttering up anyone, Rachel!” Aina immediately replied. “The boss saved my life! The way she gallantly fought has been burned into my eyes, and I can no longer look away! I am going to repay this debt no matter what it takes! I’ll serve the boss to the day I die!”

“S-Sure...”

I winced at her enthusiasm. Based on what I’d heard from everyone, I was apparently the person who fought off General Andy. I didn’t remember any of it. Sure, everyone insisted that I cornered the general with tremendous magical prowess, but it all sounded like nonsense to me.

Hmm...? What exactly happened to me, you ask? How was I supposed to know? In fact, I was even a little suspicious that everyone was just lying to me.

“Boss! Isn’t there anything I can do?!”

“Err, umm...”

With that being the case, I did not feel like I’d done anything to deserve Aina’s sudden respect, and I felt a bit ticklish when she looked at me like that.

“Melvy... Liz is charming yet another woman.”

“That she is, Sylphie... That’s Liz for you. The greatest womanizer I know.”

“At this rate, it won’t be long before she takes her back to her place.”

“I can hear you, you know.”

I called out to Sylphie and Melvy who had brought their faces close to whisper. *Who are you calling a womanizer, huh?*

“Saint Melvy, we need help over here!”

“Oh, right away! Sorry, Liz, can I leave this area to you?”

“Yes, understood.”

Melvy was summoned elsewhere, and I took charge of her line of patients. The next group stepped forward.

“Wait... Satina, Luna, and Adeline?”

“Ah, it’s Liz!”

“Good work, Liz.”

“They’re really working you to the bone, huh.”

“You don’t have to put it like that.”

Next in line were my good friends, Satina, Luna, and Adeline. Luna and Adeline were lending their shoulders to Satina, who was dragging a leg as she walked.

“You were amazing back there, Liz! I never knew you were hiding so much power!”

“Ah ha ha... To be honest, Satina, I don’t really know what’s going on myself. I don’t remember anything that happened back there...”

“Have you lost your memory?” Luna gasped.

Satina burst out, “Oh, is it one of those things where another personality sleeping deep inside of you suddenly awakens?!”

Their eyes were both open wide.

“So, you’re still in your middle school cringe phase,” Adeline concluded.

“I’m not delusional, Adeline.”

*Please don’t group amnesiacs together with those people who go through adolescent delusions. Still, another personality... I see another personality. Perhaps when that other me was out and about, it could exhibit powers unknown to me while not leaving me with any memories of it.*

*Do I...have a split personality?*

“Another me...?”

“Wouldn’t that be the real her?”

“Yes, there’s no doubt that one’s the main personality.”

“And rather than it being a completely different personality...the only real difference is whether she’s opened her eyes to eros or not.”

“Melvy? Sylphie? Did you say something?”

“No, nothing.”

A short distance away, Melvy and Sylphie were whispering again. This time, they were too far for me to hear well, but there was one thing abundantly clear—they seemed to be mocking me.

“F-For now, how about I look at your injury, Satina?”

“I’m in your hands.”

And so, Satina sat in a chair and showed me the wound on her thigh.

“Wait, this is really deep! How are you so unfazed?!”

“You think so? It hurt a lot at first, but it’s not so bad anymore.”

“You’ve grown numb to it! I’m glad I got to it sooner rather than later...”

I concentrated as much healing magic as I could into my hand.

“This is going to take some strong healing... It will tickle a bit, but please don’t move.”

“G-Got it.”

Satina swallowed her breath as I began to formulate the spell. I pressed my hand near the wound.

“Yipes?! Ahn...!”

“...?”

Suddenly, a seductive moan escaped Satina’s lips. Her body shuddered.



“Ah, wait, give me a... Ahn! Liz, wait... Mff, aaah!”

“What’s wrong, Satina? It’s just healing magic.”

“No, this definitely isn’t normal... Aahhhhn...!”

Something was going on with Satina. I’d only cast healing magic on her, but she was fidgeting and making all sorts of sensual sounds.

“Please try calming down, Satina... Deep breaths, deep breaths!”

“I-I’m done for! A-Ahnh...! It’s over! I’m going crazy! N-Noooooo...!”

“Seriously, what’s happening?!”

For some reason, Satina was in a state of arousal. Her face was red and feverish, her eyes drooping and unfocused. My healing magic seemed to be chipping away at her sanity.

I carefully inspected the mana flowing out of my hands. It certainly felt...a little different from my usual healing magic. Yes, even I could tell that there was something...off. So subtle, perhaps I was just imagining it...

“Hey, looks like Liz remembered succubus-style healing.”

“It heals from the inside out. Powerful stuff. I’ve incorporated it into my own healing, you know.”

“It looks like her powers really are returning to normal.”

“You definitely said something, didn’t you?! Sylphie?! Melvy?!”

“No, nothing.”

Yet again, Sylphie and Melvy were whispering, even farther away now. I could hardly hear any of it, and that was the least of my worries.

“Liz!”

“Huh?!”

Satina suddenly shifted, her hands clasping around mine.

“Liz! Please marry me!”

“Huh?! Huuuuuh?!”

She cried out something crazy. Her cheeks were red and she was panting like crazy.

“You’ve already messed with my insides so much, so you’d better take some responsibility! At this point... Marriage is the only option!”

“What are you even saying?!” Luna exclaimed.

She had lost her marbles.

“Huh? What’s this? It’s kinda scary...” Adeline was blatantly shuffling back.

*That one hurts the most!*

“Ah, no fair, Satina! Please use that healing on me too, boss!”

“Hey! Not you too, Aina!”

“Liz! A trip to the hot springs, what do you say?! We can invite Luna and Adeline! Let’s all go to the hot springs together!”

“Eek! Stop! Snap back to it!”

Chaos begot more chaos.

“That’s Liz for you... The great womanizer...”

“By the look of it, it won’t be long before her memories and powers are back for good...”

“Hey! Sylphie! Melvy! You’re whispering about me again!”

“No, not at all.”

Far away, the two heroes were huddled together again.

“Liz! When can we have that trip?!”

“Boss! Boss! Please! Use it on me too!”

“This is hell. Scary...”

“Aaaaaah! For crying out loud!”

*Why does this have to happen to me?!*

I was such a prim and wholesome girl with no ulterior motives, so why did I have to be swung around by forces beyond my understanding?



The sun slowly set on another peaceful evening.

## Chapter 28: Then—Ten Portions Is Nothing

“I love you, Sir Cain.”

“.....Hm?”

“Huh?”

“I am in love with you.”

It hadn't been long since Sylphie and Melvy had joined the hero's party. Cain, Liz, Sylphie, and Melvy chatted late into the night in the inn's common room as they sipped the tea Liz had brewed for them. They were taking it nice and easy that evening.

Yet suddenly, without warning, Liz had confessed her love.

“L-Liz?”

“Err... What's gotten into you, all of a sudden?”

Sylphie and Melvy blinked and stared, while Cain looked a bit awkward, scratching roughly at his hair. It wasn't that the confession had caused his heart to stir; it was more that he was flustered by the sudden outburst.

Liz explained, “Yes, well, to be honest with you, we've been talking. Sylphie, Melvy, and I... Actually, they both came to me separately about the same thing.”

“Talking?” asked Cain.

“Yes, about love.”

The other two girls twitched at Liz's words.

“As your relationship with them has progressed, they've begun to feel guilty that they were only engaged to you for the convenience of the nation and the church... They're troubled by the fact that they can't find any reason or think of any fond memories that would have you fall in love with them, nor any basis for which they can say they truly love you...”

“L-Liz?!”

“That was supposed to be a secret!”

Sylphie and Melvy began to panic at Liz’s candid disclosure.

Many women thought fondly of the man known as Cain. It was no exaggeration to call him humanity’s greatest fighter, and many women did indeed owe their lives to him. His fan base had been expanding as of late. But despite his growing popularity, Sylphie and Melvy had been engaged to him for purely political reasons.

Was it really right for them to be wed to Cain? Was there a reason for Cain to choose them from among all the numerous women who were gunning for his hand? Could they truly say they loved him more than any other woman in the world? They hadn’t known Cain for long, and so they mulled over their lack of memories together. They thought and they thought, yet couldn’t find a reason—outside of politics—that it should be them over anyone else.

“I determined that this problem would best be resolved by telling you directly, so I now have taken the liberty of doing so.”

“How cruel...”

Liz had flat-out exposed their hidden woes. Both Sylphie and Melvy were red in the face.

“Yep. That is an absolutely pointless thing to worry about.”

“N-Not you too, Cain...”

Cain downed his tea before saying decisively, “Memories? Reasons? We can make as many as we want from here on out. I like you two just fine. We’ve already slept together too. Don’t pull away or try and run off over something so stupid—unless you’re tryin’ to piss me off.”

“Urgh...”

“...”

Sylphie and Melvy curled up into bashful balls. There was no arguing with Cain.

“It’s not as though you need a reason to fall in love with someone, anyway,” Liz chimed.

“Liz...”

She beamed. “Right, Cain?”

“Hmm?”

“I love you.”

Cain’s body stiffened a bit at her abrupt confession. The last time, it had happened so suddenly that he was more bewildered than anything else. But now, he could process the emotions behind the confession.

“I love you for no reason at all. I just love you. I love you without basis.”

“...”

“Yes, there was a reason it all began. You were the first person to accept the succubus powers within me, for which I was immensely grateful. But now, even if I lacked that *reason*, I love you. I simply love you, and that’s all there is to it.” Cain awkwardly averted his eyes from Liz. Meanwhile, Sylphie and Melvy stared at her wide-eyed. Liz was unapologetic as she expressed herself.

“I don’t need a reason,” she reiterated. “I’m happy when I’m with you.”

A beat.

“I love you.”

It takes courage to convey one’s affection to another. It is a difficult thing to expose one’s true self. Both women knew in that moment—their comrade was truly amazing.

“Now it’s your turn next!”

“Huh?!”

“What...?!”

Liz’s head turned and now she was staring at Sylphie and Melvy. They both looked as panicked as freshly recruited soldiers who’d suddenly been sent to the battlefield.

“Now, now, both of you confess your honest feelings to Sir Cain! You’ve probably never directly told him that you love him, right? Hop to it, then! Being straight and upfront is the key to these things!”

“E-Easy for you to say! My heart isn’t ready...”

“Aaah, err, umm... Th-This is pretty embarrassing...!”

“Hey, Liz! You sh-shouldn’t force this sort of thing on people!” Even Cain protested.

Sylphie and Melvy drew stiffly back, but Liz slickly repositioned herself behind them, wrapping her arms around their shoulders. They were captured; there was no escape.

“I already set the table for you. If you can’t convey your feelings now, you’re never going to confess to Cain.”

“Urgh...”

“Erk...”

They faltered. Her words stabbed deeply into their hearts.

“If you fail to get those feelings across, if you keep running in circles, then eventually those feelings will leave you... You wouldn’t want that to happen from your own lack of courage, do you?”

Neither Sylphie nor Melvy could make a sound. When it came to these heart-to-hearts, they were never a match for Liz.

“S-S-S-Sir Cain...”

“Y-Yeah...”

As soon as Liz let go, Sylphie took a step forward. A step closer to Cain. Both their faces were red.

“W-W-W-Well... You know how it is... W-We may be engaged for political reasons, but. W-W-W-W-Well... Umm...”

“...”

Their heart rates were soaring, higher and higher. The pounding in their chests practically echoed throughout the room. Sylphie couldn’t look Cain

straight in the eye. Her gaze averted, her mouth quivering, she barely managed to put her words together.

“O-O-Our bond was set in place by my kingdom... A-And... Perhaps it wasn’t so genuine at the onset, but...” She breathed.

“I-I love you...”

She had said it. Their faces turned even redder.

There was a long period of silence, and Sylphie silently covered her face with her hands.

“Okay! Next up is Melvy!”

“Huuuuuuuh...?!”

As Melvy kicked and flailed, Liz gave her a push on the back, forcefully sending her forward.

“Wah?!”

“Whoa there.”

Perhaps she’d pushed a bit too hard, as Melvy nearly crashed straight into Cain. He caught her, and as he held her up, Melvy gripped his shirt. She lifted her face, their eyes meeting. As Melvy was shorter, she was peering into his face from below.

“Umm, err, umm...”

“C-Calm down.”

“U-U-Umm...umm, umm...umm, I-I-I-I-I...”

She blushed and shuddered from head to toe in a violent burst of nervousness.

“Umm, umm...! Err, err! Umm! I-I-I-I... I-I-I! Err, umm, uuuuu...!”

“...”

“Urrrrgh...”

The power drained from her body. She’d gone past her limit. She tapped out, having hardly said a thing. Just like that, she collapsed forward. And, as a result,

her face was now buried in Cain's chest.

"...!"

For Melvy, this was her chance to hide her red face. If she could hide herself with Cain's body, then no one would be able to see just how red she had turned in her embarrassment. With a woman clinging to him, Cain grew even more nervous. But Melvy was a bit better off now.

"I...love you."

She said it in what was barely a mosquito's hum.

Cain's heart trembled and pounded so hard it almost burst.

"Mweh heh heh..." Liz grinned. "Hee hee hee! Nya ho ho ho ho..." She was laughing like a madman. "Mweh heh heh heh? Mwa hah hah hah? Mee hee hee hee?"

"You little...! You plotted all of this just so you could see us embarrassed!"

"Hee hee hee?" Liz smirked. "My word, just seeing all your blushing faces has sent my arousal level through the roof. I could scarf down ten servings of rice on this, easy!"

"Bitch! We're not your toys!"

"Gaaah...!"

Cain separated from Melvy, grabbed Liz, and got her in a joint lock.

"Ow-ow-ow-ow! Ah! But this pain is... Nice. ≡"

"She's invincible!"

"Can you do it harder? ≡"

She'd gotten to see everyone hot and bothered, and she'd even been rewarded as well. Liz was completely satisfied.

Sylphie and Melvy were still trapped in the afterglow of their confessions, frozen, steam practically rising from their heads.

"So how about it, Sir Cain?"

"Hmm?"

Liz posed the question while still being pinned down.

“What’s your reply?” Cain froze up. The eyes of all the women gathered on him. Sylphie and Melvy nervously gazed at him. Only Liz had not an ounce of concern. She was all smiles as she awaited what he had to say.

Cain averted his reddened face. “I’ll tell you after we’ve finished the journey,” he muttered.

“Ah! That’s no fair! You’re not being manly at all, Cain!”

“La la la la! Just shut it! Shut it, okay...! How can I say something so embarrassing straight up?!”

He turned his eyes away from the women, and Liz mercilessly jeered at him.

“Cheater! Cheater! Coward! Cain’s a sissy!”

“Shut it! Shut up...!”

Cain winced back, and Liz continued to tease him.

Though a hazy feeling persisted in their hearts, Sylphie and Melvy felt just a little relieved that his answer had been delayed.

“I’m going to bed!”

“Grow a spine, Cain! This is where you’re supposed to say, ‘I’ll accept you all at the same time. I’m going to bed, so come with me,’ isn’t it?!”

“How am I supposed to deal with three of you at once?!”

“Ah ha ha ha ha ha!”

Though it was a continuous stream of complaints, there were a few cackles and laughs mixed in. And Sylphie and Melvy began to unwind. All the tensions in their bodies gradually melted away and soon they were laughing along too.

The stars shone beautifully in the sky above.



# Epilogue

“Cheers to the defeat of a demon general!”

“Cheers!”

There was a deafening chorus of clinks as wine-filled glasses were struck against one another. Cain’s party had borrowed the dorm’s common room for a celebration. The table was crammed full of food, and the seats around it were occupied by the hero and his comrades. Cain, Sylphie, Melvy, Mitter, Rachel, Lalo... They had all assembled for a feast.

And for some reason, I—Lisalinde—was there too.

I felt like I was the only one out of place. My nerves were killing me.

“Hey, what’s wrong, Liz?! You’re barely eating! Eat more! Drink more! Gah ha ha hah!”

“R-Rachel...”

“She’s right. You’re the star today, Liz. Go on. Eat your fill.”

“Mr. Lalo...”

Yes, for some reason I was surrounded by famous heroes.

“Wah ha hah! Mr. Lalo, she says. I can never get used to Liz treating me like a teacher!”

“Huh? Wh-Why not?”

“Wah ha ha ha!”

Mr. Lalo played it off with a laugh. The seasoned sorcerer of the great laboratory, Lalo, was currently working as an academy teacher. He most certainly *was* a teacher. And yet, he would give a bitter smile every time I addressed him like one.

“That aside, Liz. What are you so nervous about? You’ve already gotten to know everyone pretty well, haven’t you?”

“Th-That may be so, Cain... But when your party’s all gathered together, it makes me feel like the odd one out... I mean, I’m an outsider here, right?”

“Bwa ha ha hah! An outsider, she says!”

“Ah ha ha ha hah! S-Sorry for laughing, Liz. But you, an outsider... Ah ha ha hah...!”

“Huh? Huh?! Huh...?!”

For some reason, my words earned me a good deal of laughter.

*But why? What does it mean...?*

“E-Everyone, you mustn’t tease Liz, pff... We’re celebrating her accomplishment today, pffft...”

“H-Hey, you’re laughing too, Melvy... Ah ha ha...!”

“I...guess I am. Sorry, Liz! Anyways, congratulations for taking down a demon general!”

*Their reactions are making me curious. Is this an in-joke? Am I being teased over something only they know about...?*

“On another note... Cain, you convinced the principal to keep this all under wraps, right? But if we do that, Liz’s accomplishment’s gonna go up in smoke,” noted Rachel.

“This would have usually been an accomplishment worthy of a medal from the nation! Wah ha hah!” Lalo chuckled.

“Well, what are we supposed to do? Liz’s powers are still unstable. If this incident is made public, she might become a target, and that’s no laughing matter,” Cain said with a shrug before glugging down some wine.

The incident was going to be kept confidential, the details kept from the public. They had to uphold the nation’s dignity, and they wanted to prevent fear from spreading, among other things. There were various reasons, and my instability was also one of the major factors.

“S-Sir Cain, I think your decision is the right one, and I’m grateful. Everyone keeps saying I defeated the general, but it doesn’t feel that way to me. I have

no idea how to use the power I used at the time...”

“What?”

“Enough of that,” Rachel cut in. “Liz, if you think you’re being fooled or led along, just say it. This guy lies with a straight face.”

“Th-Thank you, Rachel.”

“I’d never lie to Liz,” Cain said with a somber face.

*It’s all right. I’m aware of it. Cain may be rough around the edges, but he’s very kind...*

“I mean, if she finds out, there’s no telling what demands she’ll start making...”

“That’s definitely scary...”

“I would never make any strange demands of anyone!”

*Oh, I’m wrong. It looks like he’s just scared of my retribution if it happens. What exactly does everyone think I am?!*

“B-By the way, Liz. There’s something I need to tell you...”

“What is it?”

Cain stuck up his index finger and tried to change the subject.

“We’ve decided to provide our full assistance to your training.”

“Huh...?”

“The power you used to defeat the general... You need to train to be able to use it reliably, right? Well, we’re going to support you.”

I blinked, startled, a piece of roast beef still in my mouth.

“Up until now, we were split on what was best. Whether to stimulate your sleeping power from the outside or to let it rest. We couldn’t decide.”

“...”

“But with this incident, and with Melvy’s examination, we found out that outside stimulation is more effective. From now on, you’re going to take part in our training and forge the power sleeping within you.”

I quickly chewed and swallowed down the roast beef so I could speak.

“W-Wait a second! You’re making it sound like you all knew I had some power sleeping inside of me from the very start!”

“Hmm? Yeah, of course we knew.”

“H-How?!”

“Well, I’m not sure what to tell you.”

*Why does an apple fall from an apple tree?* It was like I had asked him a question so obvious that he was having a hard time breaking it down. He scratched his head.

“If that’s true, then that pervy examination Melvy gave me was to examine the power inside of me...”

I’d been examined by Melvy in the infirmary once before. After the demon general battle, she’d examined me again, just in case.

“I-It was not pervy! It was a proper examination to check your condition!”

“Huh...”

Melvy vehemently denied it, but every time she touched me with mana-filled hands, my body would throb from within. Her mana would infiltrate me, crawl around me. If that wasn’t a pervy exam, then what was it? It had been so intrusive that once again, I’d sworn to myself that I’d marry that girl.

“And if we want to get to the root of it, it all has to do with that healing magic I learned from you...”

“Huh? Did you say something, Melvy?”

“Nothing at all,” she replied with a prominent pout.

Though it did bother me, she was also quite cute when she did that.

“Liz, if your training goes well, we’re considering welcoming you in as a party member.”

“Huh? Sylphie...?”

My heart skipped a beat.

“Naturally. You defeated a general of the demon lord’s army on your own. If you can stabilize that power of yours, then we’d very much want you as a comrade. Wouldn’t you think so?”

“M-Me... A comrade of the hero...”

“Well, that’s a long way down the road. Just give it some thought, Liz.”

“...”

With that, Sylphie tilted her glass and took in a mouthful of wine. It was a small, subtle motion, but even these inconsequential gestures of hers conveyed an air of elegance. I was reminded that she was the kingdom’s princess.

My heart rate was rising.

*M-Me, as one of them...? Can I pull off such a major role?*

“Sylphie, what’s the use in bringing it up now?”

“Hmm? Well, I guess you’re right, Cain. It’s still a long way away. We can’t be sure yet.”

“That ain’t what I meant...” A weary look briefly crossed Cain’s face. “If her training goes well, this gal *is* going to be our comrade. There’s no point in thinking about it.”

“Huh...?”

Cain grinned.

I felt a sense of absolute confidence from him. I would become his comrade no matter what. There was no way I would ever turn down the invitation. He said it as though this was blatantly obvious.

“How can you be so sure...?”

“Well, Liz... I think you’ll know by the time the training is over.”

Cain smiled like a mischievous child—a smile without a care in the world.

“Hee hee, right. You’ve got me there.”

“Sylphie...”

“Umm, err, Liz! Let’s do our best in training! I’ll do whatever I can!”

“Melvy...”

“Hmph! You’d better not start whining before we’re done! Don’t disappoint me!”

“Rachel...”

They were all looking at me with great expectations. The eyes of these heroes made me feel so itchy and warm... And for some reason, I felt at ease.

“Now eat! Eat, Liz! You’re not gonna get better if you don’t eat!”

“Let me pour you some wine, Liz.”

“Oh, c’mon. What are we going to do if we feed her too much and fatten her up? You wouldn’t like it if Liz was fat, would you, Cain?”

“Ha ha ha! I can’t even imagine what she’d look like!”

“Yeah, she’s always had a good figure...”

I’d become the hot topic now; everyone seemed to have a good time talking about me.

“Why...?” I muttered.

“Hmm?”

“Why are you all so kind to me?”

“Hmm...?”

“I mean, I’ve only just met all of you... I don’t see any reason why you’d treat me so well...”

Everyone treated me with kindness. They even said they’d help me with my training.

It hadn’t been long since we first met. Our relationship didn’t go any further than school friends. We had no lasting memories or any special bonds. I couldn’t see any reason that we were already this close.

“...”

“.....”

“.....Pfft.”

Cain barely contained a laugh.

“Huh...”

“Bwa ha ha ha hah! I never thought I’d hear that from Liz! This is really something!”

“Huh? Huh...?”

“Y-You shouldn’t laugh at her, Sir Cain...! B-But... Ah ha hah! It’s...!”

“T-To think Liz would say that. You never know what might happen... Heh heh heh...”

“Huh? Huh?! Huh...?!”

For some reason, the room was filled with laughter.

*Huh? Did I say something strange...?*

“All right, Liz. Listen up.” Barely containing himself, Cain looked me in the eye. “There was a reason, yeah. It all started somewhere. But that’s got nothing to do with it now. Even without it, we all treasure you.”

“Wh-Why?”

“Because we all love you for no reason at all,” Cain said. Everyone laughed.

Their smiles were ones of acceptance.

“In the end, we all love you. Despite everything... It’s fun being around you.”

“...”

“So there’s no real reason we treasure you. Right?”

Cain tugged at my cheek, stretching it out. I spaced out a bit.

“Your cheeks are as soft as ever. How do you get them like this...?”

Cain gave a merry laugh.

I felt a heat growing in my chest.

“Now, now, enough of that nonsense. Drink! Eat!”

“Nah hah hah! Right! Liz! Our training isn’t going to be easy! You need to eat

and store up some strength!”

“Let me pour you some more wine, Liz.”

“Well... I guess Liz doesn’t look like the sort who gets fat. Liz, this fried chicken’s pretty good. Want some?”

Everyone loaded my plate with lots of food and filled my glass with lots of wine.

I felt warm.

Such a cheerful moment, but why...? It felt strangely nostalgic. It felt warm in my chest.

“I love you too...” I muttered.

“Huh...?”

“I love you all too—for no reason at all...”

I said it myself, yet I was growing embarrassed. I could feel the heat making its way to my cheeks. And their cheeks were tinted a faint red too.

It hadn’t been long since I first met everyone. But I could puff out my chest and say it with confidence. I loved them all. It didn’t have anything to do with how long we knew one another, and there didn’t have to be a reason. I loved everyone.

*That’s why I want to grow strong, to be able to aid them,* I thought.

“I’ll do my best with training!” I shouted as I stood from the sofa with gusto. “I’ll draw out this power sleeping inside of me, and I’ll do my utmost to grow strong! I want to be able to help everyone!”

“...”

“I’ll do my best, so...!” Their heated gazes gathered upon me. I felt encouraged. With strong emotion, I went on, “So let’s continue to get along in times to come...”

As the words left me, I could feel my soul quivering ever so slightly.

“Yeah... That goes without saying,” Cain relented, holding out his wine glass. “Glad to have you on board.”



“Of course!” I replied.

I clinked my glass against his. There was a high-pitched clink as ripples raced through the wine contained within. We all shared a laugh.

I could feel a quivering in the depths of my soul. It felt as if something—something that had been missing was being filled in. Emotions I had no memory of were crying out to be protected. Smiling, encouraging me to be with them.

I wouldn't be going anywhere. Not anymore. We would continue to walk down the same path forever.

Why was that?

My heart was filled with conviction.

“A’ight, to Liz making a comeb—becoming our new comrade!”

Cain grinned as he held up his glass. Everyone imitated him—me included. We readied ourselves.

“Cheers!”

“Cheers!”



From all around the table, we tapped our glasses together. *Clink, clink*, the shrill sounds filled the air. The banquet had only just begun. We still had a long way to go.

Then, something strange happened.

“...Hmm?”

I was still standing up, and suddenly something fell from the inside of my skirt.

“Hmm?”

“What?”

Everyone’s eyes gathered on whatever it was that had fallen.

*From my skirt...? Is that even possible?*

This unprecedented phenomenon had me a little bit flustered, but regardless, I retrieved this mystery item. I held it up and spread it out.

“Huh...?”

It was a pair of gym shorts. The shorts had even been labeled—making it clear that it wasn’t just any pair of gym shorts; it was specifically Cain’s pair of gym shorts.

*Huh...? What were Cain’s pants doing there...?*

“Hmm...? Are those mine?” Cain asked.

Everyone’s eyes gathered on the shorts before quickly shifting to me. Clearly, they were seeking some sort of explanation.

“...?”

I fell into a panic, the gym shorts in hand.

I remembered nothing. Absolutely nothing. I couldn’t remember any of the circumstances leading to Cain’s gym shorts being stuck up my skirt.

*No, but... Huh? Wait...? Maybe I remember a little bit...?*

It happened during the battle with the demon general. The shock wave from the enemy’s attack tore through the school’s fixtures and sent them flying through the air. It was around that time that Cain’s gym clothes rode the wind,

and I grabbed them as they fell.

That was where my memories cut off.

With gym shorts in hand, I became lost in thought.

*What happened after that?*

My memories were gone, but it wasn't like I'd fallen unconscious. Based on what I'd heard, that was when the powers within me awakened and I fought off the demon general Andy.

*Then...why are Cain's gym shorts coming out of my skirt?*

Did part of my forgotten memories include stuffing Cain's pants under my skirt? Is that why they fell out now?

"Hey now, Liz. Don't tell me you stuffed my shorts up your skirt?"

"O-Of course not!"

I immediately replied to Cain's weary question.

He'd said precisely what I'd deduced myself, and that made me deny it a bit more loudly than I should have.

"This is... This is some sort of mistake! There's no way I would ever stuff your shorts up my skirt, Sir Cain...!"

"Nah, I can see you doing it."

"Definitely not!"

*There's no way! No possible way! This has to be some sort of misunderstanding...!*

"You have it all wrong! I'm not that sort of pervert! I'm a prim and proper noble girl and...! And... It's not what it looks like! This is all some huge mistake!"

"Yeah, yeah, don't worry about it. It happens. We understand."

"You don't understand! You don't understand at all!"

*Please don't just accept the possibility that I'd do something so perverted!*

"Oh... So Liz's awakening came from Cain's gym shorts..." Sylphie suggested.

“Do you think she took a good whiff of them?” asked Melvy.

Then, it was Rachel’s turn. “So Liz awakens when she plays around with Cain’s shorts... How intriguing?”

“I do not!” I desperately denied it.

“You’re such a pervy succubus, Liz.”

“Wrong!”

*I could never be a succubus!*

“I would absolutely, positively, not enjoy playing around with Cain’s shorts! I’m not a pervert...!”

“It’s okay, Liz. We get it...”

“You’re wrong! I am not a lewd girl! I’m not...!”

“Just be honest with yourself, Liz...”

“You have it all wroooooooooonnnnnnggg...!”

I frantically denied it. I did, but that warm look in their eyes didn’t change. Such loving acceptance.

*She’s such a pervert... It’s a bit off-putting... But love it or hate it, that’s Liz for you... Not much we can do about that... It’s Liz, after all... It was written all over their faces.*

It was like we were comrades who’d traveled together for years. Like we could all understand one another just by the looks in our eyes.

“Waaaaaah, I can’t take it anymore!”

As a beautiful sea of stars carpeted the night sky, as I was surrounded by friends in the school dorm, I let out a scream. I screamed from the depths of my soul.

My days of suffering disaster and delight had only just begun.



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I Could Never Be a Succubus! Volume 2

by Nora Kohigashi Illustrations by Wasabi Translated by Roy Nukia Edited by Diana Taylor This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

私はサキュバスじゃありません 2

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